

Interrelation of the attitude to time, proactive coping behavior, and burnout syndrome among teachers of the higher school

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of interrelations of the attitude to time, proactive copying behavior and burnout syndrome among teachers of the higher school. Today, the system of the higher education in Russia is at the stage of intensive development and reformation. Professional activity of the higher school teachers belongs to the most psychologically tensed kinds of social activity, and is among occupations with the highest risk of the burnout syndrome. The results of this research have shown that professional burnout among teachers was expressed in a moderate degree. Their copying strategy of “avoidance” is associated with a negative attitude to the past. Proactive copying behavior and low level of burnout are connected with the positive assessment of the present and future time.

Keywords: professional burnout, proactive copying behavior, attitude to time, teachers of the higher school

1. Introduction

Today, the system of the higher education in Russia is at the stage of intensive development and reformation. The reform factors that increase the intensity of teaching activities include: transfer of modern higher school to the personality-oriented model of education, increasing demands from the society to the teachers personality and their role in the teaching process; cardinal changes in the system of evaluation of students, in evaluation of teachers by students; quality control in higher education, need in development of the new programs and teaching courses, transfer to the technologies and standards of teaching, etc.

Professional activity of the higher school teachers belongs to the most psychologically tensed kinds of social activity, and is in among occupations with a great number of stress factors. They include combining functions of teaching and researching; significant autonomy of this profession; specifics of motivating factors, which in many respects is connected with professional recognition of colleagues, able to evaluate intellectual efforts and scientific competence; misbalance between the intellectual and energy costs, and moral and material remuneration, and so on. Information overloads should be identified as a specific stress factor caused by the necessity to keep abreast of the constantly increasing quantity of scientific data, when time for their processing is permanently decreasing.

2. Problem Statement

The teachers' activity has a number of peculiarities that allow ranking it among professions with high professional burnout and deterioration of professional health. Psycho-energy exhaustion, irritability, low self-esteem, frustration in work, etc. are the indicators of the professional burnout. The professional burnout leads to the impoverishment of professional motivation, feeling of futility of the ongoing work efforts that as a whole make the process of the professional growth and self-realization of personality more difficult. In this regard, seeking resources and ways to overcome professional burnout that will help preserving working efficiency and professional health of teachers belong to the important tasks of the contemporary psychology.

The theory of proactive coping [5], [7], [11] is built on the basis of the cognitive-transactional theory of stress [9] and enriches them with temporal dimension postulating directed and long-term behavior, which begins before possible stress might have appeared. Proactive copying behavior, in contrast with the reactive behavior (aimed at compensation for losses or reduction of damage from the stress events that have already occurred) in the major degree is focused on the future and consists of the efforts aimed at formation and development of the general resources of a personality. Proactive behavior contributes to setting personally significant goals and can initiate constructive ways of actions creating opportunities for the self-development and bettering the quality of life. Since proactive copying behavior involves the goal-setting and planning of actions in order to achieve significant goals in the temporal perspective of the development of a personality, time can be considered as an important personal resource. Its awareness and active management would contribute to the growth of the stress resistance of a personality and prevent development of the burnout syndrome. Many researchers point out that the lost time reduces vital potential of an individual, leads to the loss of professionalism and disorganize the activity of a personality [2]. We believe that proactive copying is directly connected with the temporal regulation of a personality that is aimed at connecting psychological processes and statuses with the temporally-target activity center, at coordinating objective and subjective speeds in the working space. The ability to the organization of time and its utilization as a value for the self-development and self-improvement represents one of the most important vital abilities of a personality [1].

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is an analysis of interrelations of the attitude to time, proactive copying behavior and the burnout syndrome among teachers of the higher school.

The research has the following tasks: (1) to study a degree of manifestation of the professional burnout among teachers of the higher school; (2) to analyze peculiarities of the attitude to time (past, present and future) among teachers of the higher school; (3) to study peculiarities of the proactive copying behavior among teachers of the higher school; (4) To study interrelations between the attitude to time, proactive copying behavior and the burnout syndrome.

The participants of the research. 120 teachers of the St. Petersburg State University took part in the study, including 68 women and 52 men aged between 25 to 75 years old (the average is 48.23 years old).

4. Research Methods

The psychosemantic technique called the "Semantic differential of time" has been used for the assessment of the attitude to time. This methodology allows assessing attitude to the past, present and future on such parameters as activity of time, emotional coloring of time, quantity of time, structure of time, and sensuality of time. For measuring proactive copying behavior we used the methods of "Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI)" [7] adapted by E. S. Starchenkova. For the assessment of the professional burnout, a questionnaire "Professional burnout" (Vodopyanova and Starchenkova), developed on the basis of the burnout model by C. Maslach and S. Jackson (1986) has been used. The SPSS software has been utilized for the statistical processing of the empirical data [10].

5. Findings

5.1. Professional burnout

The results of this research have shown that the professional burnout among teachers was expressed in a moderate degree. The indicator of the emotional distortion has been at the level of 23.54, the indicator of depersonalization – 8.2, and the assessment of the professional achievements – 33.64. Based on the phase model [6], 27% of teachers have had a low level of burnout, 36% v medium and 37% have had a high level.

5.2. Copying behavior

We could not find any statistically meaningful difference in the frequency of utilization of the proactive copying behavior strategies among women and men, except for seeking emotional support. Female teachers have used this copying strategy more often than male teachers ($p<0.05$).

Traditionally social support is considered as an important resource of preventing of stresses and burnout, and it has been confirmed in our study. The correlation analysis has indicated that the professional burnout is negatively connected with seeking both the instrumental ($p<0.01$), and the emotional support ($p<0.01$). Therefore, the possibility and ability to address other people for information, advice, and emotional help diminishes perspectives of development of the burnout syndrome.

5.3. Interrelations of the attitude to time and proactive copying behavior

The results of the dispersive analysis have demonstrated that teachers with low level of proactive copying behavior to a greater extent experience symptoms of burnout. They have a greater expression of the emotional depletion ($p<0.01$) and lower self-esteem of professional successiveness ($p<0.05$) at a statistically significant level as compared with the teachers with high level of the proactive copying. Teachers, who are able to actively cope with difficulties on the work considering difficulties as a challenge to their abilities and utilizing resources of social support, to a lower extent suffer from the symptoms of the emotional depletion. It is possible to assume that such copying behavior contribute to their positive professional motivation and raising self-esteem of their own professional successes.

The results of the dispersive analysis have shown that teachers with high level of the proactive copying have more positive attitude to the perception of themselves in time, as opposed to their colleagues with low level of the proactive copying. Such people appreciate time, especially the present and the future, as a valuable resource and not as just an empty and meaningless phenomenon. The present time has been considered by the teachers with proactive copying behavior as active, tensed ($p<0.01$), filled with a variety of events ($p<0.5$) and emotionally positively colored ($p<0.05$), that speaks about their satisfaction with this time.

It is interesting to mention the fact that for such people time is more structured ($p<0.01$), meaning that it is filled with the planned events and is more defined and controlled. It indicates a higher motivational potential and behavioral activity.

The attitude to the future among the teachers with the proactive copying behavior can be characterized as active, optimistic, vivid, and interesting. We have received statistically significant differences on such factors of the attitude to time, as the activeness ($p<0.01$), positive emotional coloring ($p<0.01$), quantity ($p<0.05$), structuredness ($p<0.05$) and sensitiveness ($p<0.01$) of the future. The evaluation of the indicators of sensitiveness of time is the highest that means that time seems to be close and open, and this can speak about a feeling of realization of the personality in time. Subjectively, the future is seen as coming in a short term. It can be assumed that the future has a strong motivating potential at the present, where the activity is determined by the future events and important goals posed by a personality. It can be concluded that for a personality with the proactive style of the copying behavior, the future turns into actuality, thereby increasing his/ her time capabilities (resources).

With regards to the past time, no statistically significant differences among teachers with high and low level of the proactive behavior have been registered. It confirms a validity of enclosure of the temporal factor in the theoretical concept of the proactive behavior, first of all directed on the future.

The copying strategy of "avoiding" negatively correlates with the activeness ($p<0.05$), emotional color ($p<0.5$) and quantity ($p<0.01$) in the evaluation of the past by the respondents. The more people evaluated their past in a negative way, the more they were inclined to use avoidance. It is possible, that the experience of unsuccessful coping with the difficulties in the past leads to self-doubt and the use of passive strategies coping with stress.

The analysis of interrelations between the burnout syndrome and the attitude to time has shown that first of all the burnout is connected with the negative attitude to the present time. The teachers with low level of the burnout characterized time as empty and frozen ($p<0.01$), disturbing and pessimistic ($p<0.01$), unstructured ($p<0.05$), and its sensitiveness is also at the low level ($p<0.01$). It is worth mentioning that teachers with the high level of burnout are characterized with the negative attitude to their future. They see it as passive and empty ($p<0.05$), not filled with events ($p<0.05$), imperceptible and unmotivating ($p<0.1$). In particular, the feeling of the future time is reduced, as it seems far and unreal that can be characterized as a distortion of the temporal perspective.

6. Conclusion

The data received as a result of this study of how the future time is perceived, can serve as an additional differential diagnostic criteria for the evaluation of level of the burnout connected with disappointment referring to a sense of work and life, and the emergence of the emotional disorders. The temporal perspective depends on the criteria of "reality-unreality" in the perception of the psychological space by an adult person [3], [4]. This criterion is connected, at the first time, with the degree of differentiation of the life space and ability to clearly distinguish desires from the facts and hopes from expectations. Under the influence of the permanent professional stress and burnout, teachers of higher education can gradually develop "primitive" motivational needs, emotional and cognitive spheres, which, in turn, are associated with a decrease of the time perspective. Such people can project their own helplessness in the present into the future. The proactive coping behavior expands the time horizons of the future and thereby prevents development of the burnout syndrome among high school teachers.

The obtained data show that there are differences in relation to the time, depending on the peculiarities of the coping behavior and experience of the burnout syndrome. The copying strategy of avoiding is connected with the negative attitude to the past. The proactive copying and low level of the burnout are connected with the positive evaluation of the present and future times that confirms possibility to consider temporal resources of a personality as an important factor of the time regulation and decreasing negative consequences of the professional stresses. Data received in the course of the study can be used as a background for the programs aimed at preventing and correction of the professional burnout and strengthening professional health of teachers of higher education.

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