

Influence of the Pandemic Caused by Covid-19 to the Teaching Staff of the Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract. Burnout syndrome is phenomenon, which gained huge attention in academic studies at the mid of 20th century, and is still on the agenda nowadays. Results of the recent research confirm that people are working under high pressure and in stressful environment, and teachers in the Higher Education Institutions are not an exception. Pandemic, caused by the virus Covid-19 extremely changed environment of the Higher Education Institution and study process itself. Daily working life changed drastically after the start of the pandemic, starting with the implementation of the online studies, continuing with adaptation of the new study techniques and using new technologies. Aim of this study is to analyse different scientific publications related to the burnout in the higher education institutions all around the globe with possibility to concentrate and relate the result to the Baltic countries. Research methods: scientific publications and previous conducted research studies and suggestions of empirical methods: expert survey, survey of teaching staff in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Burnout, higher educations, pandemic, teaching staff

1. Introduction

Job burnout emerged as crucial concept in the business world in 1970s, as disease related to the stress people are experiencing at workplace. After more than 35 years of the research this topic is still extremely actual in the terms of the vibrant modern business world.

Teaching is one of the professions associated with high level of stress in the workplace. University lecturers are the one, who are responsible for the acquisition of knowledge of the future professionals. Knowledge should be delivered with the responsibility, ethics and competence (Teles, et al., 2020). Chronic stress among teachers is increasing in the influence of many factors - social and organisational. Factors like appreciation of the work of the teachers by the institution, importance to satisfy the needs of the students, as well to be aware of their needs. Length of the workday is one of the factors, as well as the emotional load, what brings negative effect on the teachers personal life, as time for it is reduced (Alvaro & Bretones, 2018; Davidaviciene, et al, 2019; Raudeliūnienė, et al, 2021; Raudeliūnienė, et al, 2019; Tang, & Cheung, 2010). In higher education, teachers work not only with delivering their lectures, but also are involved in different administrative and academic activities, participation in the conferences, research and projects what gives additional pressure (Pereira, et al., 2021; Tang, et al, 2016; Rupeika-Apoga, et al, 2019).

The SARS-CoV-2 virus, called Covid-19, caused worst global health crisis in recent years, as World Health Organisation was forced to declare pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2021). The pandemic influenced higher education drastically. Lectures were delivered online via different learning platforms, what forced teaching staff to integrate virtual tools in the study process (Rashid, 2020). However, return to the offline studies in the classrooms after the pandemic lockdowns was challenging for many teachers. Environment was changed during the online studies, as well as there was a need for the alternative teaching methods and approaches. Digital skills and working with the new software was necessary to continue working and providing study process (Pressley, 2021). Those aspects are becoming more and more important.

2. Burnout syndrome

Burnout syndrome emerged in the end of the 20th Century as a work - related stress disorder. Job burnout can be explained as psychological process, which consists of personal reactions, related to professional and personal experiences which was developed later also by other researchers (Schwaab, et al, 1986; Irandoost, et al, 2021).

Cristina Maslach is one of the main researchers who defined as syndrome, what is characterised by three symptoms: exhaustion, cynicism and reduced professional efficacy. Maslach focused her research on the six key domains of work-life -

workload, control, rewards, community, fairness and values - those are predictive elements of burnout. (Maslach & Jackson, 1997). High load, concerns about prestige and relationship are leading teaching staff to the burnout, as are one of the environmental factors of the company influencing burnout (Kremer-Havon & Kurtz, 1985).

Cristina Maslach has stated that focusing on building engagement and utilising organisational assessments are the tools how burnout can be prevented. Paying more attention to the social and organisational environment in which individual works, what should be focused on the problematic relationship between the person and the environment where this person works, what can be described as imbalance. If the job exceed the capacity of the individual to cope effectively, or persons efforts haven't met the expected rewards.

There are three principles of the intervention in order to prevent burnout:

Firstly, preventing the burnout is a better strategy than development of the strategy how to treat burnout and deal with it. Still, the use of treatment for staff who already experienced burnout cannot be cancelled if disease had already accrued. But it is more rational even in terms of financial perspective of the company to prevent the burnout and reduce it like-hood, than to deal with it when it already here.

Secondly, it is proved, that people, who are engaged with their work in the company are better getting through challenges they have and are more likely to recover from stress, what makes building engagement the best approach to preventing burnout.

Thirdly, organisational intervention can be more productive that individual intervention because people are usually working in the groups and are interacting one with each other. If it is possible to improve working conditions of many people, it will lead to the larger effect of those interventions (Maslach, 2017).

Burnout definitely can lead people to leave the job they are doing. But those, who decided to stay at the work and are having burnout, are experiencing lack of productivity and effectiveness at the workplace. As burnout is associated with the decreased job satisfaction, leads to the decreased commitment to the company.

One more crucial aspect of the burnout is relationships between the colleagues. If person is experiencing burnout, it can have negative impact on the colleagues, causing personal conflicts, what would lead to the less productivity by disrupting tasks they are doing at the moment (Maslach & Leiter, 2000). Ability to use the social resource (success-full co-regulation) correlates negatively with such a burnout components like exhaustion, cynicism towards colleagues and adequacy of the interaction between teachers and pupils (Pietarinen, et al., 2013).

Eurostat's latest published information about burnout was on 2010 (Eurostat, 2010), and it is recommended to prepare research in the situation of the pandemic caused by Covid-19.

3. Covid-19 and it's influence on education

Coronavirus disease hit the world unexpectedly in the end of the 2019. Covid-19 is a infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Despite the fact, that the most people, who get infercted by the Covid-19 experience mild to moderate symptoms, and are recovering without special treatment, some of them still may become seriously ill and require medical attention like older people, and those who have certain medical conditions, like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illness (WHO, 2020). Official Statistics Portal of Republic of Latvia informs that Provisional data of the Income and Living Conditions 2021 carried out by the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) show that more than a half (52.8 %) of Latvian residents aged 16 years and more consider that Covid-19 crisis has negatively affected their mental health. 46.3 % of population consider that it has left no impact, but 0.9 % of population was affected by Covid-19 crisis positively (OSP, 2021).

Females are subjected to the impact of Covid-19 crisis more than males – 55.1 % of females and 49.5 % of males claimed that they experienced negative impact on their mental health during the last 12 months (OSP, 2021).

As the age of persons surveyed increased, the negative impact of Covid-19 on mental health reduced: 59.1 % of youth aged 16 to 24 years have experienced negative impact, in turn, among 25-49 years old population negative impact of the pandemic was indicated by 56.3 %. Among population approaching retirement age (50–64 years) negative impact was experienced by 54.1 %, but among seniors (65 years and more) – 47.2 % (OSP, 2021).

Subjective assessment of persons aged 16 years and more regarding the question: “How Covid-19 crisis has affected Your mental health during the last 12 months?”, in 2021 (as per cent) is available on Official Statistics portal and data processing take place on EU-SILC survey where additional questions are asked related to aspects of health conditions, on remote studies and work (OSP, 2021)

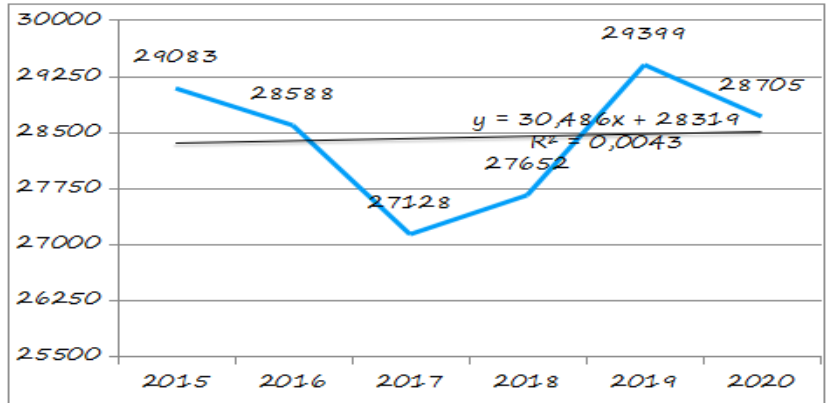
Since the Pandemic of the Covid-19 arised, universities all over the world faced major changes in organisation of the study process. More than 220 million tertiary students were disrupted by closure of the offline studies in the Higher Education Institutions in 2020. UNESCO Covid-19 Education Response states that in 2021 universities all around the world are working on the preparation of the safety measures to provide safe and effective learning in the terms of pandemic (UNESCO, 2021). Research made by the World Bank shows that at least 24 million children, from preprimary to tertiary level education, might never return to schools (World Bank, 2020).

In the developing countries distance learning is a quite challenging solution during the pandemic, because of the lack of infrastructure, computers, radio and television. In the poor and digitally-illiterate families children have poor learning motivation, what is causing inequality (Mekonnen & Muluye, 2020). Affordability

and accessibility for all the learners of varied economic background is a challenge as Covid-19 has created huge disruption in the education system (Porkel & Chhetri, 2021). Regarding to the nursing education in the development countries, online studies came as an solution, but still there is no access online to the clinical practicum Virtual simulations and high-fidelity simulation equipment isn't available everywhere in the medical universities of the development countries, what brings extra inequality. Society can't be sure when will pandemic end, so health policymakers and other regulatory bodies in developing countries should develop and implement the policies, what will provide the opportunity to recover quickly (Chinwendu, et. al., 2021). Studies had shown that the highest barriers to the online studies were unstable internet connection, inadequate technical equipment, lack of technical equipment (like computers and laptops) at all, and other technical problems (Zalat, et.al., 2021).

Recent studies had showed that high percentage of teachers suffered from following symptoms like anxiety, stress and depression after the opening of the schools and universities. Nevertheless, those symptoms were recognised with the teachers during online studies also. These symptoms were recognised to arise more in older people and in teachers of infant and primary education. Mostly suffered those people who have felt job instability. Findings prove that taking care about the mental health of the teaching staff ensure well-being of students and high quality teaching (Ozamiz-Etxebarria, et.al., 2021). Furthermore, those teachers, who have not received sufficient education and skills, are more likely to have less confidence and are more vulnerable to have burnout (Hulltell, et al., 2013). From the other hand, teaching staff who receive academic freedom are more satisfied with their jobs, the same connection can be seen when teaching staff in involved in the decision making process (Samson, 2021). However, the effect of the online studies cannot be fully realised yet, as the pandemic is not over. The effect on the mental health of this period of the students and teaching staff should be analysed and studied in future, as the effect in stress and potential burnout needs to be closely monitored to access the result and develop and implement effective policies (Vijayan, 2021) which are discussed by several institutions in many countries and international organisations.

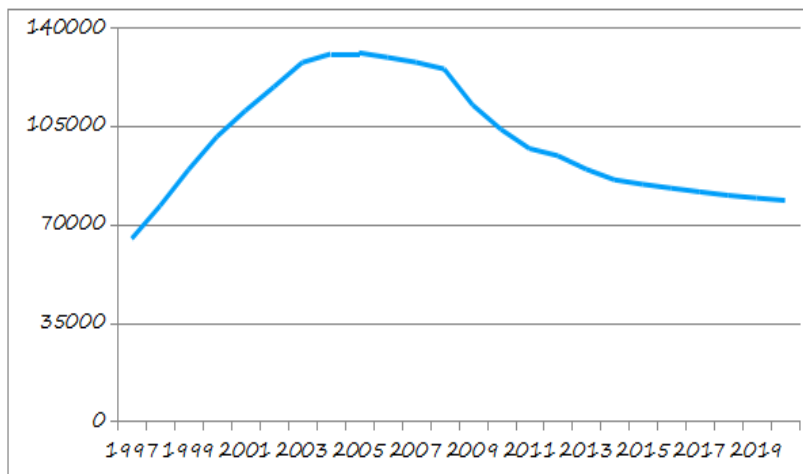
Pandemic has influenced also enrollment of new students at higher education institutions in Republic of Latvia as it is reflected in figure 1.



Source: Authors construction based on data of Official Statistics portal of Republic of Latvia, IGA080

Fig. 1: New entrants at higher education institutions in Republic of Latvia in 2015-2020.

It is important to analyse also tendencies in number of students at higher education institutions and colleagues.



Source: Authors construction based on data of Official Statistics portal of Republic of Latvia, IGP020

Fig. 2: Enrolment (at the beginning of the school year) in higher education institutions and colleges in 1997 – 2020 in Republic of Latvia.

Data reflected in figure 2 indicate that number of students in higher education is reducing since 2008 with many vacancies for specialists with higher education in information technologies, medicine and some other important branches.

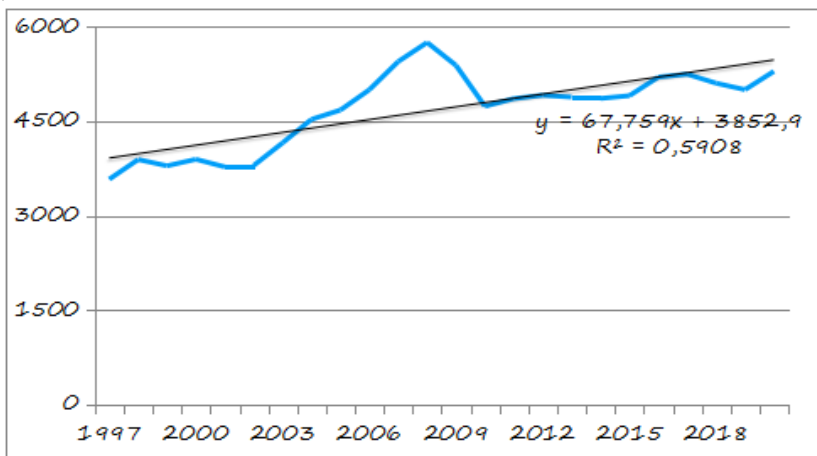
Some time ago the situation when teaching staff was involved in several higher institutions was common, but in recent decades the legislation for higher education has been developed to ensure permanent employment of member of academic staff in one higher education establishment where member of academic staff is elected and has to be involved also in research activities – these are the requirements for

being accepted (elected) as academic staff in higher education institution. The data of development of numbers of academic staff in higher education establishments in Republic of Latvia are reflected in figure 3.

Data reflected in figure 3 indicate that number of academic staff in higher education establishments is increasing with tendency in 1997-2020 by growing in average by 68 members of academic staff in higher education institutions and colleges in Republic of Latvia.

4. Conclusions

It can be stated that teachers are one of the groups mostly affected by the burnout because of the different factors like high work load, long working hours, student and organisation pressure and high degrees of occupational stresses. All factors mentioned above could be considered as the one of the main factors leading to the burnout.



Source: Authors construction based on data of Official Statistics portal of Republic of Latvia, IGP020
 Fig. 3: Number of academic staff in higher education institutions and colleges in 1997 – 2020 in Republic of Latvia.

In higher education teaching staff is not only delivering the lectures, but also is involved in research and realisation of different administrative and academic activities, which give extra pressure what as a result can be one of the factor of the burnout.

Pandemic caused by the Covid-19 influenced teaching process drastically. Universities were forced to organise online studies, and teachers had to implement different tools and techniques to provide qualitative study process online.

Covid-19 crucially influenced study process in the development countries causing even more inequality, as huge amount of the students were not able to continue their studies then study process wen online because of the lack of the infrastructure, poor internet connection, unavailability of the technical equipment etc.

High percentage of the education staff suffered from the symptoms like anxiety, stress and depression after the opening of the schools and universities during the pandemic. It should be mentioned that these symptoms were recognised already during the online studies. So it can be concluded that online studies and return to the classrooms after the pandemic can be the cause of the arise of the symptoms of the burnout.

Those teachers, who have not received sufficient education and skills, are more likely to have less confidence and are more vulnerable to have burnout. From the other hand, teaching staff who receive academic freedom are more satisfied with their jobs, the same connection can be seen when teaching staff in involved in the decision making process.

The impact of the pandemic and online studies on the study process and the burnout of the teaching staff should be studied in future in order to get data from the broader period of time, as pandemic is not ended yet and it may come with a new force bringing new challenged and difficulties.

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