

A review of the literature on occupational burnout in Slovenia

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INTRODUCTION:

Occupational burnout has gained lately an increased attention among professionals and researchers, not only because of its negative impact on job performance and productivity (Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004) but also by the growing recognition that mood disorders are highly prevalent at the workplace (Kessler et al., 2006). Namely, several studies confirmed a close relationship between burnout and depressive / anxiety disorders (review in Ahola, 2007; Shirom et al. 2005).

AIM:

The aim of our study was to analyse Slovenian research and professional publications focused on occupational burnout, main stressors which contribute to burnout and the availability of therapeutic interventions for burnout management in Slovenia.

METHOD:

A literature review was performed on Co-operative Online Bibliographic System and Services (Cobiss) from 2004 to 2010 with the following keywords: burnout, stress management, stress risk factors, job satisfaction, mobbing, staff turnover, absenteeism, presenteeism.

RESULTS:

From initial 1416 publications, 143 publications concerned with occupational burnout were identified. The number of Slovenian publications addressing burnout gradually increased from 2004, reaching its maximum in 2009, and slightly decreased in 2010. Out of initial search, 85 empirical publications were analysed in detail - The majority of them (75%) were college degrees, relatively small proportion (25%) were scientific publications. In less than half of studies (41%) burnout was assessed with a valid, standardized measure – in the most cases with self-rating Maslach Burnout Inventory. Burnout has been the most thoroughly investigated in human service occupations (teachers – 19%, social workers – 15%, health care – 12%), service occupations – 19%, army and police – 7%. Stress factors (41%) and stress prevention strategies (21%) were the topics most often investigated in association with burnout (Figure 1). Burnout symptoms were mainly associated with the work environment and individual characteristics (health, personality, performance motivation, life satisfaction) (Figure 2).

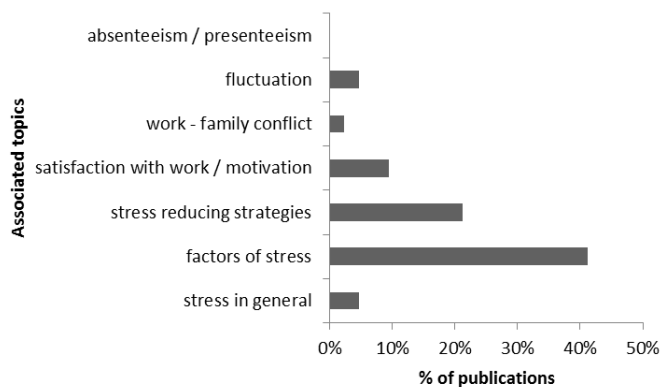


Figure 1. % of analysed empirical publications from 2004-2010 that address burnout in association with similar topics.

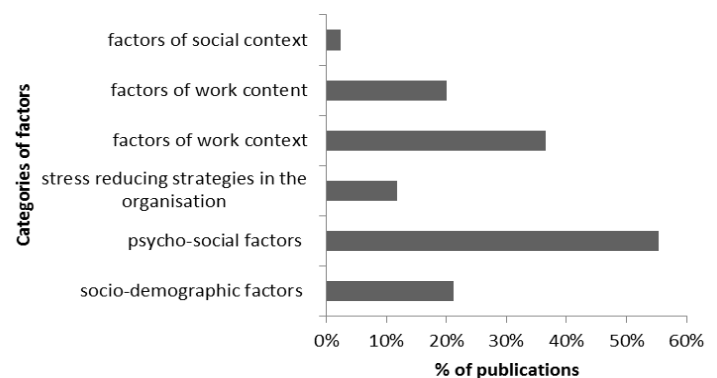


Figure 2. % of analysed empirical publications from 2004-2010 that address burnout in association with categories of stress-related factors.

As suggested, prevention strategies prevailed individual-oriented i.e. relaxation, physical exercise, cognitive strategies, social activities (Figure 3). Organisational stress reducing strategies were investigated less frequently (Figure 4).

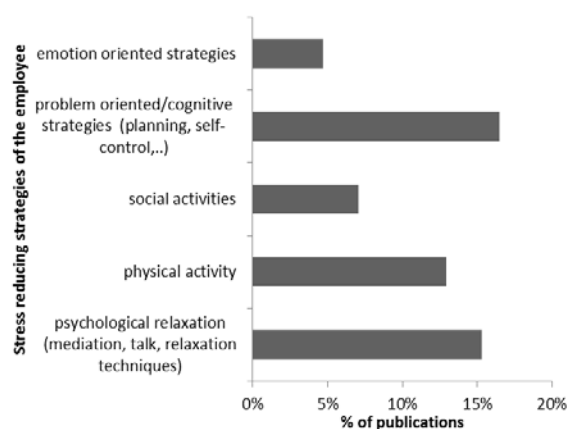


Figure 3. % of analysed empirical publications from 2004-2010 that address burnout in association with stress reducing strategies of the employee.



Figure 4. % of analysed empirical publications from 2004-2010 that address burnout in association with stress reducing strategies in the organisation.

29% of publications addressed the problem of psycho-physical health of employees, mainly physical and psychological symptoms of stress - feeling of tiredness, frequent headaches, back pain, muscle aches, change in appetite and sleep habits, lowered immunity, irritability, depressed mood ... The problem of mental disorders and its association with burnout has not been addressed in Slovenian research publications yet.

CONCLUSIONS:

An increased awareness of the importance of mental well-being at work has been found also in Slovenia. The number of studies on occupational burnout increased over the past 6 years, with the main focus on stress factors arising from work environment and individual characteristic of employee. Prevention strategies on individual and organisational level also received some research attention, while the association of burnout with mental disorders at the workplace has not been addressed yet. The content analysis of Slovene research publications shows that burnout has been recognised as a problem in work organisations, but the emphasis is being put on individual self-care burnout coping strategies rather than on the organisational ones. Moreover, a lack of professional help available to employees experiencing burnout has been recognised.

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