

BURDEN AND RESILIENCE IN HELPING PROFESSIONS

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ABSTRACT

The burden and resilience in helping professions have a significant impact on workers in this field. The study analyzes these concepts in detail, examines different forms of burden and their impacts on individuals. Particular emphasis was placed on stress and burnout as possible consequences of challenging working conditions. Factors influencing resilience are identified and options are suggested to improve the well-being of workers in these professions. The main objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive view of the issue of stress and resilience in helping professions and to propose measures to improve the mental and physical health of workers.

Key words

Ballast. Resistance. Helping professions. Stress. Burnout.

Load

Human life is full of various challenges and events that require overcoming traumas, resolving conflicts and enduring frustration, anxiety and stress. In addition, humans are constantly exposed to the social environment, interpersonal relationships and communications, as well as reactions to social influences and events. Draganova et al. (2006, p. 20) also characterizes interpersonal relationships as "the richness of a person, but they can also be likened to things that can spoil not only the day, but also the mood." In social settings, relationships can be based on factors such as temporal and spatial proximity, shared interests, likes or dislikes, social role, and membership in the same social groups. (Ibid.) The working environment is a set of spatial, material, physical, chemical, microclimatic, physiological, psychological, social and other conditions in which the production or work process is carried out and which influence the results of production or work, motivation, performance, psyche, safety and health of employees (Act No. 542/2007 Coll, § 2). Working in the helping professions urgently requires social interaction. Everyday practice is based on mutual cooperation, interaction and communication between individuals or groups, whether verbal, non-verbal or through action. In carrying out

professional activities in the helping professions, the practitioner comes into contact with clients, their families, colleagues in facilities, health care personnel, and others. His/her work is focused on supporting the client and representing his/her interests. If he or she does not master communication skills and interpersonal relationship building, situations of serious stress can arise (Křišková, 2010). "Communication as a process of mutual understanding plays a huge role in all aspects of life - private life, work environment, interpersonal relationships" (Planka, 2024, p. 119). Individuals often encounter situations that test their adaptability and require them to be mentally resilient and physically fit. These situations where the individual must overcome obstacles on the way to achieving a goal are called challenging life situations or stressful situations. The situations arise due to various external or internal stimuli from the physical, biological and social environment (Šramková, 2019).

Generally, stress situations are such situations:

- in which an individual must adapt to a new lifestyle, new demands and new responsibilities,
- for which the individual does not have sufficient experience to deal with,
- is a situation that threatens the individual and triggers deeply ingrained instinctive mechanisms that are part of the individual's genetic makeup and which manifest themselves externally in the form of an attack or flight response,
- if the individual is unable to deal with the situation, this leads to psychological and physiological changes,
- are erratic, unpredictable and uncontrollable (Šramková, 2019).

Mátel, Schavel et al. identify the helping professions as. (2013, p. 24), those "professional professions whose primary aim and scope of activities is to approach and act towards another person or group of people, providing them with some assistance in a given situation." Examples of helping professions include social work, education, psychotherapy, psychology, medicine, nursing, as well as spiritual professions. From our perspective, those working in the helping professions often face increased psychological strain. Their daily work requires exceptional effort and increased activation of psychological resources. An important aspect we must mention is indifference to one's own person. This indifference can lead to a failure to cope with the stressful situation, followed by exhaustion and even burnout. The ever-increasing demands on the creation and maintenance of certain psychological reserves require regular replenishment, the replenishment of which depends on the psycho-hygienic standard of each

worker working in these professions. It is true that a man may often overestimate his abilities and constantly demand more of his energy and fitness.

Often he does not want to realise his limitations and prefers to overestimate his possibilities. In psychology there is often talk of accessible and reserve energy, which is normally available to the individual and a considerable amount of which is used by him in critical and difficult situations. However, drawing on this reserve energy can upset the energy balance and lead to mental exhaustion, excessive energy loss and fatigue. Although the common notion of exhaustion or overwork may be exaggerated, exhaustion neurosis is a real risk (Kondas, 1981).

Paulík et al. (2012) defines stress as a state when a person is exposed to demands with which he/she has to cope with some effort in the adaptation period. This state is characterized by the fact that the individual - employee - professional is aware of the conflict between the demands placed on his person or his job position and at the same time between his performance or ability to deliver the expected performance. In a similar vein is the definition of Kriskova (2010, p. 88), who states that "psychological load is a factor that exerts a burden on the organism and requires psychological activity, mental processing and coping with the demands and influences of the environment." Stress, according to Prevedas (2017, p. 187), is "the discrepancy between the demands and demands of the external environment and the individual's readiness to cope with them. The resolution of the burden does not depend on the pressure of demands, but on how we subjectively evaluate the situation, what meaning we attach to these demands." Focusing on a more precise definition of psychological workload in the context of our topic, Act No. 542/2007 Coll., § 2 provides a specific definition of this term as follows: "Psychological workload is a factor that represents the totality of all assessable effects of work, working conditions and working environment acting on the cognitive, sensory and emotional processes of a person, which affect him and induce states of increased psychological tension and strain on psychophysiological functions."

It also precisely defines the concept of psychological overload as "a psychological condition in which an employee is aware of a conflict between the demands placed on his person or job and his performance or ability to perform." (Ibid)

We recognize physical and psychological strain. Psychology systematically examines and describes the sources and degrees of strain as well as its manifestations in emotional experience and impact on cognitive processes. Medicine focuses on the association of stress with

psychosomatic illnesses and psychiatric disorders, which are increasing in prevalence in the population.

There are four levels of psychological distress (Bratská, 1992):

Stage 1 - normal stress is manageable without excessive effort. The demands and demands are predictable and often consist of routine tasks that have been successfully managed in the past. The psyche remains balanced and the body is adapted to the demands, both physically and mentally.

Stage 2 - Increased stress is manifested in work and personal situations where the usual ways of coping, acting and reacting are no longer sufficient. Often these are situations that the individual is encountering for the first time and therefore require more effort to cope with. Through the process of adaptation, new skills are learned and new knowledge is acquired. The individual is able to cope with the increased stress without negative health consequences.

Stage 3 - the threshold load already poses a significant risk to humans. At this stage, there is a significant mismatch between personal abilities and the demands of the environment. Coping with this situation requires extra effort. The number of adverse effects on the individual's psyche and health is increasing.

Stage 4 - extreme stress, which creates a large discrepancy between the demands of the environment and the resources available to cope with them. In such a situation, the individual faces intense pressure, resulting in a deterioration of his physical and psychological state. With prolonged extreme stress, lasting negative health consequences may result. The body reacts to the stress by alerting and mobilising energy, but this is rapidly depleted, which can lead to serious damage to health or even death.

Loads may increase as a result of prolonged exposure to a certain level of load or a disproportionate increase in the number of load situations in a short period of time. Determining the degree of loading provides information that allows us to predict health effects and to take measures to prevent adverse effects. Stress is a subjective psychological state that can vary between individuals even under the same external conditions and can manifest itself in different forms and degrees. Different degrees of strain require different levels of psychological resilience and preparedness from the individual to respond appropriately in such situations (Šramková, 2019).

The response of the organism to the load is manifested by the reactions of physiological and psychological functions, while the measurement of the organism's response to the load represents the quantification of the measured parameters of physiological functions and the evaluation of psychological parameters expresses the performance in the respective psychological task (Act No. 542/2007 Coll., § 2). There are many events, situations and obstacles that can be sources of load. Strong stressors are events that are often caused by external environmental conditions, such as earthquakes, floods. They can also be certain life events such as death, divorce, birth of a child, changes in the environment (change of housing) or employment. Rapidly changing stimuli and information overload can also contribute to the burden.

The law divides measures that can eliminate or reduce psychological workload into three categories, for example technical measures (ergonomic workplace design, limitation of sensory load, quality of the working environment), organizational measures (work organization - streamlining of employees' activities, alternation of activities during monotonous work, rotation of employees, elimination of distracting factors, clear formulation of tasks, but also work and rest regimes, alternation of work shifts, inclusion of breaks. Other measures - for example, the management system and the way it is implemented, taking into account the protection of employees, positive motivation of employees to carry out work tasks to the extent and in a manner appropriate to their abilities, skills, experience and aptitudes, a system for selecting employees, taking into account resistance to psychological stress, personality and qualification prerequisites, carrying out medical preventive examinations in relation to work (Act No 542/2007 Coll., § 7).

Resilience

How an individual perceives events, situations and stimuli as stressful depends on how they perceive demands and opportunities. The way in which a person copes with stress is not only a matter of his or her personality, but also of the context and environment in which he or she finds him or herself. It is clear that the same event can have a different meaning and different subjective emotional consequences or evaluation for each individual (Šramková, 2019). Nowadays, it is crucial for success and stability not to perceive burdens as the enemy. The world is characterized by competitiveness and enormous pressure on individual performance. A person's ability to effectively cope with the challenges of the environment in which they find themselves can be referred to as resilience or resiliency (Prevedárová et al., 2017). Resilience is conceptualized by Gajdosova (2009, p. 109) as "the ability to work and cope with clients'

problems without being personally harmed by them. Resilience, characterised as resistance, indomitability and resilience, represents the ability to withstand adverse conditions. It encompasses the personal qualities of the individual, but also skills that can be developed through education and life experiences, says Komárik (2010).

Resilience can be seen as a tool by which the human mind faces challenges, much like the spiritual immune system. This "tool" draws from a natural base and is strengthened through exercise, loading and learning. Its limits are set by personal values, beliefs and character. Resilience is almost imperceptible in ordinary situations, but in times of crisis it mobilizes all the body's capacities - whether innate, acquired, personal, familial, social, spiritual, or religious. In these moments it comes into play and fights to preserve the value of the individual. It is impossible to predict which capacities will be used for defence and which for attack at any given moment. Therefore, resilience cannot be directly taught, but it is possible to develop its capacities through education, nurturing, support and burdening so that the mind can deploy its capabilities in times of crisis (Komárik, 2010).

Vulnerability is the opposite of resilience and refers to a state of psychological vulnerability. Helus (2011) states that vulnerability can either be the result of adverse genetic predispositions or can develop as a result of negative experiences, unresolved conflicts and feelings of helplessness. Some people tend to underestimate themselves and their abilities. In stressful situations, therefore, they often predict that they will not be able to handle them, regardless of the circumstances.

To improve psychological resilience, as stated by Prevedárová (2017), it is essential:

- to record and reinforce successful experiences,
- have self-confidence, trust yourself and others, and believe in your abilities,
- after failure, to analyse the causes thoroughly, but without feeling guilty,
- not to punish oneself for mistakes, to allow oneself the freedom to experiment and learn from negative experiences,
- be able to bring joy to oneself and others and foster mutual support and solidarity,
- to be able to accept the past, not to deny unpleasant experiences but to see them as valuable lessons,
- to set their sights on the future as a space of opportunity,

- to be able to make decisions autonomously and not let others make decisions for us.
- to find meaning in one's own life, to understand and master what situations mean, what their significance is,
- to strengthen our autonomy and independence from external influences.

Increasing mental resilience is crucial for staff in the helping professions as it enables them to manage stress and challenging situations effectively, maintain their mental and emotional health and provide better care to their clients or patients. This process involves consolidating experience, self-esteem, confidence in one's own abilities, as well as the ability to critically analyse and learn from setbacks and negative experiences. The result is not only improved personal well-being, but also more effective and higher quality work in the helping professions. Because, as Planka (2024, p. 123) states, "the social worker assists the client with personal, family, and community problems, particularly in relation to appropriate social functioning and meeting needs, but especially in addressing social problems."

Stress

Stress affects the mind and body of employees working in the helping professions. A moderate amount of stress can be beneficial and can help manage everyday tasks. However, too much stress can lead to physical and mental health problems and affect their performance. Ultimately, it can also have a negative impact on their quality of work, and on their clients. Learning how to manage stress effectively can help employees feel less overwhelmed and support their overall mental and physical well-being. "Stress is a state of an individual induced by a stressful situation, which is characterized by an initial mobilization of the body's psychophysical reserves to cope with the stress and, if unsuccessful, continued attempts to cope with the stressful situation or its consequences, which may result in various psychological disorders and psychosomatic illness" (Nakonečný, 2003, p. 468).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) defines stress as "a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to deal with challenges and threats in our lives." Shramkova (2019, p. 25) defines stress as "a state of excessive psychological distress that arises from the action of some disturbing factor on a person during the satisfaction of a need or the achievement of a goal."

Different types of stress are distinguished according to how the individual perceives the event. Hypostress - when stress is low, a person may experience boredom, be hypoactive or apathetic, especially if they have a lower resistance to a boring situation.

Eustress - as the intensity of stress increases, which varies individually, boredom and apathy subside, and the person becomes more active and animated. He or she begins to feel pleasant and seeks activity that is associated with this pleasant stress, such as travel, risky sports, and the like.

Hyperstress, distress - the escalating intensity and duration of stress reaches a level that is uncomfortable for the individual and begins to draw on their energy reserves. Yet his performance does not yet decline. However, when the pressure increases further, when the person exhausts most of his reserves, his performance drops sharply (Macková, 2009).

In stressful situations, a person uses various defense mechanisms to cope with the condition. Some of these strategies can help him to overcome difficult periods, such as in childhood or during illness. The problem arises when people continue to use these defence mechanisms later on, even when they are no longer effective. Often they are not aware that they are resorting to them. For example:

- Aggression - offensive strategy

People may respond to stress by attacking external objects (external aggression) or themselves (internal aggression). These reactions can be overt and direct, where the person attacks physically or verbally, or covert and indirect, for example by ignoring, silencing, or slandering. People may, as a result of momentary affect or anger, attack the object they perceive as the cause of their stress (aggression caused by uncontrolled affect). In some cases, a person feels compelled to attack as a defense (fear-induced aggression). At other times, a person may rationalize his or her anger or hatred toward an object or toward himself or herself, leading to hostile aggression with the intent to harm the object or to retaliate.

- Suppression, displacement, denial - escape strategies

The common feature is that emotions are consciously or unconsciously repressed. Repression is a conscious decision to control one's emotions and not express them outwardly in the moment. Crowding out involves memories associated with emotions that could harm an individual's self-esteem, and these memories are pushed out of conscious awareness. Denial refers to the denial

of a fact, whereby the individual is either unaware of the event or only superficially aware of it.

- Projection and Introjection

Projection is a mechanism that operates on the basis of projecting one's own unconscious emotional content onto another person, giving the impression that these emotions are coming from them. Introjection, in contrast, involves perceiving oneself according to the values and characteristics that are assigned to other people.

- Rationalisation, intellectualisation

Rationalization and intellectualization involve using thought to explain one's own emotional experiences. Rationalization is a defense mechanism by which an individual explains unpleasant or undesirable behaviors, thoughts, or feelings in the form of logical but often unsubstantiated arguments. It is a way of justifying or mitigating unacceptable behaviors or thoughts. Intellectualizing allows you to gain distance from your emotions (Mack, 2009).

One needs to learn to manage their repressed, displaced and denied experiences and accept them as part of their life. It is important to acknowledge one's emotions, including anger, and find ways to express them constructively. Instead of reactions based on anger or fear, it is appropriate to cultivate acceptance, joy and love. Reason should not be used to justify emotional experience because emotions may not always have a rational basis. This process of helping oneself and others is often gradual and requires patience and self-knowledge, explains Mack (2009).

Everyone experiences stress to some degree. However, the way we react to stress has a big impact on our overall well-being. Stress makes relaxation more difficult and can be accompanied by a variety of emotions, including anxiety and irritability. In stressful situations, we often find it difficult to concentrate and may experience physical discomforts such as headaches, upset stomach or difficulty sleeping. We often lose our appetite or overeat. Chronic stress can exacerbate existing health problems and encourage the use of alcohol, tobacco and other substances. Stressful situations can also trigger or worsen mental health problems, especially anxiety and depression, which require medical attention. When we deal with mental illness, it may be because our stress symptoms have become permanent and affect our ability to function in daily life, including work or school (WHO, 2023). Three approaches to clarifying and defining stress have been selected.

The first approach focused on the environment and characterized stress as a stimulus or stimulus originating from the environment, which is referred to as a stressor. Researchers with this orientation have studied the impact of various stressors such as natural disasters, major life events, chronic environmental conditions such as living in a polluted or noisy environment, and so on.

The second approach examines stress as a human response to stressors. This response can be divided into psychological, physiological or manifested by changes in the individual's behaviour.

The third approach describes stress as a process that encompasses both the first and second approaches. It emphasizes the mutual interaction between the person and his environment (Gajdosova, 2009).

From our perspective in the context of the helping professions, the second approach, which focuses on the human response to stressors, is interesting. Dědina and Odcházal (2007, p. 44) list specific work-related stressors as "inadequate work environment, improper work design, poor management style, poor workplace relationships, uncertain future, and conflicting interests of the organization and the individual."

Stressogenic situations are, for example:

- time-related stress,
- stress from a large number of tasks,
- stress from a variety of tasks,
- stress from chaos in the organization of tasks,
- stress caused by meaningless and boring work,
- stress from problems in interpersonal relationships,
- stress from unfavourable climatic and sensory conditions when performing an activity.

Typical stress for helping professions can be emotional stress resulting from challenging interpersonal interactions, empathy with clients in difficult situations, or the inability to help in certain situations. We suggest prevention in the university setting, during social worker training, as a possible solution. Specifically on the emphasis in linking theory and practice, practicing social skills. As Planka (2023, p. 27) states, "Due to its interdisciplinarity, social work as an

independent scientific discipline contains a strong theoretical and methodological basis for its educational as well as professional practice. Linking these two activities is crucial for social work in terms of effectiveness and quality of service delivery."

Burnout syndrome

Working in the helping professions can be very rewarding and fulfilling. However, when a worker neglects their psychological hygiene and work-life balance, it can lead to burnout syndrome. This condition, manifested as chronic fatigue, reduced motivation and emotional exhaustion, often results from overwork, lack of coping mechanisms and constant exposure to traumatic situations. Burnout syndrome is distinct from other negative emotional states such as stress, depression and fatigue, although there is a link between the two. The main difference between stress and burnout is that stress can affect any individual, whereas burnout often occurs in people who are intensely dedicated to work, have high goals, expectations and motivation. Another difference is that stress can occur in a variety of situations, whereas burnout syndrome usually occurs when working with other people with whom one comes into personal contact. Prolonged exposure to chronic stress can lead to burnout, but not all stressful situations end in burnout syndrome (Šramková, 2019). One of the most common definitions describes burnout syndrome as "a loss of enthusiasm, energy, idealism, perspective, and goals. It can be understood as a state of mental, physical and spiritual exhaustion caused by continuous stress" (Minirth et al. 2011, p. 11).

Helping professions are particularly prone to burnout. These occupations are classified as high-stress occupations. They are put in emotionally challenging situations on a daily basis. They listen to the stories of their clients or patients and need to be able to emotionally connect with and support them, which can drain their own emotional resources. Helping professionals have a great responsibility for the health, safety, and well-being of their clients or patients. This responsibility can be difficult and stressful. They are trying to help other people with their most intimate and difficult problems. Often, helping staff feel that their work is not valued enough or that they are not achieving enough results in helping their clients.

Lack of positive feedback can lead to feelings of frustration and hopelessness. In many cases, helping professionals work in environments with a lack of resources or support. Lack of financial and human resources and lack of time can add to their workload. All of these factors can lead to the chronic stress and exhaustion that are characteristic of burnout syndrome. It is

important that these professionals have access to support, supervision and self-reflection to avoid burnout and maintain their ability to provide quality help to others.

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