

HEADMASTERS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT

Hera Antonopoulou¹, Christos Ioannou¹, Zoe Karanikola¹ and Georgios Panagiotopoulos²

¹Technological Educational Institution of Western Greece

²Technological Institution of Western Greece

ABSTRACT: *This paper comes to investigate the level of professional burnout of the headmasters of secondary schools in the prefecture of Aitolokarnania. In particular, the levels of stress and professional exhaustion of the headmasters, the feelings they experience because of the demonstration of the syndrome, their attitudes in the workplace and their relations with other members of the school community are being investigated. The Maslach, Jackson & Schwab questionnaire (1996), a questionnaire structured for studying professional burnout (MBI - ES), was used for the collection of the data, while the statistical analysis was conducted with the SPSS18 package. From the data processing, it has emerged that headmasters are experiencing low levels of professional burnout in all three dimensions (emotional exhaustion, personal achievement, and depersonalization). The only demographic feature that showed a statistically significant correlation, and indeed negative, with the levels of emotional exhaustion was the service years of each participant in the position of the headmaster.*

KEYWORDS: Burnout Syndrome, School Unit Headmasters, Public Schools, Maslach Burnout Inventory.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Professional burnout: Conceptual Identification

The concept of professional burnout was initially linked to the health professions (Demir, Ulosoy, & Ulosoy, 2003; Iliopoulou, 2013). Thus, up to 1999, research in the health sector accounted for 34% of the total number of surveys conducted for this syndrome (Firth-Cozens & Payne, 1999; Polychronopoulos, 2008). The professional exhaustion of health professionals was mainly investigated by the social psychologist Ch. Maslach. According to the researcher, professional burnout is a psychosomatic syndrome associated with negative feelings and indifference (Maslach & Jackson 1976, 1978, 1982, 1986; Papastylianou; Kaila & Polychronopoulos 2009; Salman & Platsidou, 2011; Papadeli, 2017). In addition, it includes three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is a stage of psychosomatic fatigue that makes the person unable to respond to the demands of his or her work (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Depersonalization occurs as a mechanism of adjustment or defense against the preceding emotional exhaustion. In addition, at this stage, workers develop neutral or even negative feelings towards their colleagues and thereby feel removed and estranged from them (Cherniss, 1980; Kantas, 1995). Finally, at the stage of lack of personal achievement the person feels unsuccessful, unable to offer while his/her performance decreases (Leiter & Maslach, 2005). Evolutionarily, Maslach proceeded to formulate three general dimensions of the syndrome: exhaustion, feeling, physical and mental fatigue, cynicism, negative and excessive reaction to

work, and finally ineffectiveness, ie inadequacy and lack of productivity (Maslach & Leiter, 1999; Maslach, et al., 2001).

Professional exhaustion of school teachers and school managers

Education is a particularly stressful workplace and it is classified in so-called vulnerable business sectors (Blasé, 1986; Cooper, Cooper, & Eaker, 1988; Hodge, Jupp, & Taylor, 1994; Kantas, 1995; Mouzoura, 2005; Davrazos, 2015), given that teachers are involved in a network of human relationships (pupils, colleagues, local authorities, parents), face day-to-day challenges and they are often called to make serious decisions (Kantas, 1995, Savvidis, Stylianidis, & Tsiakkiros, 2002; Polychronopoulos, 2008). In particular, in the case of school managers, professional stress is particularly high because, among their work tasks, they are responsible for all students (Cherniss, 1980), for the proper functioning of the school unit and its human resources (Savery & Luks, 2001). According to international surveys, the percentage of teachers affected by professional burnout is close to 30% (Kyriacou, 1987; Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2006), although in Greece, in particular, these rates appear to be much lower (Kantas, 1996, Motti-Stephanidou, 2000; Pagoropoulou, Yavrimis, & Koumbias, 2001; Papastylianou & Polychronopoulos, 2007; Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2008). However, the effects of the syndrome do not concern only the teachers but also the pupils (Ioannidou, 2017).

Factors and causes of burnout

One of the major burnout factors is stress. In the field of education labor stress is driven by a number of factors. Teachers' sources of stress are considered to be the lack of incentives on the part of the students, discipline issues, time pressure, workload, management of reforms and educational changes, non-existent or poor communication, lack of respect and appreciation, assumption of additional (administrative, office) tasks, handling the ambiguity and conflict of roles, poor working conditions, poor school climate, bad organization of the school, (Carter, 1987; Kyriacou, 1987, 2001; Borg, 1990; Gold & Roth, 1993; Kantas, 1996, 2001; Travers & Cooper 1996; Papastylianou 1997; Dimitropoulos 1998; Kyriacou, 1998; Griffith et al., 1999; Koustellios & Koustelliou, 2001; Tsiplitaris, 2002; Papastylianou & Polychronopoulos, 2007).

However, stress is not the only source of professional burnout. Researchers have shown that a multitude of personal, demographic and organizational factors can trigger the syndrome. In particular, the category of personal factors includes worker's personality traits, which make him/her more prone to stressful situations and hence to professional burnout. Such features may be introversion (Laymen & Guyden, 1997), sensitivity, emotion, excessive enthusiasm, and even the tendency to idealize the work (Burke & Richardsen, 1996). In demographic factors, variables such as gender, age, marital status and experience are included (Jackson, 1993). The effect of gender on the occurrence of professional burnout is a matter of dispute between researchers. The reason is that gender is imprinted from the cultural environment and therefore its effect changes according to the cultural context (Hatzipemos, 2016). In addition, a number of surveys have shown the presence of higher burnout rates in younger age groups (Banks & Necco, 1990; Carlson & Thompson, 1995; Kantas & Vassiliaki, 1997), while several surveys have shown that work experience is associated with the likelihood of occurrence (Antoniou et al., 2000; Pagoropoulou et al., 2001; Kokkinos, 2005). In particular, as the working time increases, both levels of the syndrome increase (Goddard, O'Brien & Goddard, 2006). Work experience seems to have an effect on both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. In particular, teachers with a great teaching experience have higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization rates (Kokkinos, 2005), while their personal

achievement values appear to be diminished (Antoniou et al., 2000; Pagoropoulou et al., 2001). Family status is another factor in enhancing professional burnout. More specifically, surveys have shown that married workers are less prone to the syndrome than those who are single or divorced (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Kantas, 1996; Maslach et al., 2001; Nomikou, Roimba, & Mitalas, 2010).

In addition, organizational factors refer to structure, management system, working conditions and requirements, logistics, remuneration, evaluation and work environment (Kantas & Vassilaki, 1997; Griffith et al., 1999; Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999; Maslach et al., 2001). Research in Greece has shown that factors such as teachers' inadequacy, career development, ways of appointment, bureaucracy of the profession, even the inelastic curriculum or the building facilities of the school units are factors capable of provoking professional burnout (Kantas & Vassilaki, 1997; Motti-Stefanidou, 2000). In addition, important factors in the development of the syndrome are the lack of recognition and reward of the worker (Ayalon, 1989) and the conflict of roles (Koustelios & Kousteliou, 1998). Roles conflict can lead to unequal division of labor and to the conflict of responsibilities (Motti-Stefanidou, 2000). Finally, problems in relations between teachers and students and classroom management issues are factors of professional burnout (Antoniou et al., 2006). Working with a difficult population target, which consists of highly reactive students or pupils with low performance and little learning and cognitive progress, can also lead to exhaustion (Corey, 1996).

Bibliographic Review

Researches worth mentioning are those of Nhundu (1999) and Englezakis (2002), according to which a significant proportion of the research sample perceive their work as a very or extremely stressful one. In relation to the gender variable, Hoy & Feldman (1999) found that female directors experience higher burnout rates than their male counterparts. Regarding the factors contributing to the manifestation of burnout symptoms, Cooper and Kelly (1993), Day et al. (2000) jointly pointed out the increased workload under pressure of time, the management of a potentially ghastly human potential, the increased expectations from the education authorities and the reduced performance of educational staff.

Dunham (1992) recognizes as a source of exhaustion the augmented tasks of the headmasters, as well as the pressure from the mass media expectations (higher levels of student performance and teacher performance). Calderwood (1989), Trendall (1989) and Dean (1995) concluded that the increased expectations of the other stakeholders in the school community by the respective headmaster are comparatively the most anxious factor. On the contrary, in the Nhundu survey (1999), the three most important factors in the syndrome were the relationship with parents, the lack of educational materials and insufficient resources. Borg and Riding (1993) added the frequent interruptions from work. Finally, Ostell and Oakland (1995) and Day et al. (2000) highlighted the aggravating role of frequent educational reforms. In particular, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Evans (2000) focused on considering any change in the institutional educational context as a threat that causes fear, conflict and insecurity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Objective and Objectives

This present research comes to investigate the incidence of a series of burnout symptoms as experienced by Secondary Education Headmasters of the Prefecture of Aitolokarnania in their workplace. In particular, it seeks to investigate:

- The levels of the three dimensions of workout (emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of personal achievement, depersonalization) experienced and recorded by the headmasters themselves.
- The existence of a possible correlation between the three dimensions of the syndrome.
- The correlation of the labor exhaustion with the quantitative demographic characteristics of the members of the sample (age, number of parts of the school, years of service in public education, years of service in the position of responsibility).
- The correlation of the burnout with the categorical demographic characteristics of the members of the sample (gender, additional studies, marital status).
- The degree of intensity that is provoked by the constant modifications of the institutional framework for selecting education executives.
- The degree of impact of the economic crisis on the psychological state of the participants.
- The correlation of the psychological burden with the economic crisis (either as a dependent variable or an independent variable) with each of the three dimensions of the syndrome.

Research tool and research sample

This survey was based on a widely recognized questionnaire, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-ES) tailored to teachers. It was divided into three sub-sections: demographics, exploration of the burnout through the anonymous self-completion of the form containing 22 closed-ended questions in accordance with Maslach's standard questionnaire (1996) and two extra questions (23 and 24). The 23rd question is related to the tension or stress that headmasters face because of the constant changes of the institutional framework for the selection of education executives, while the 24th (open question) records whether the economic crisis has affected the psychological condition in the workplace. The sample of the survey originally consisted of 78 headmasters of the public schools of Secondary Education in the prefecture of Aitolokarnania. Out of the 78 questionnaire respondents three were rejected as inadequate. The questionnaire received its final form through the Google application form, was sent to the personal emails of the headmasters, while an informative file – letter was preceded.

Statistical analysis**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample (N = 75)**

		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	
SEX	<i>Male</i>	58	77,3	
	<i>Female</i>	17	22,7	
ADDITIONAL STUDIES	<i>Phd</i>	3	4,0	
	<i>Postgraduate degree</i>	35	46,7	
	<i>Second degree</i>	8	10,7	
	<i>Secondary Education Teacher Training School</i>	7	9,3	
	<i>None of the above</i>	22	29,3	
MARITAL STATUS	<i>Single</i>	7	9,3	
	<i>Married without children</i>	6	8,0	
	<i>Married with children</i>	61	81,3	
	<i>Divorced</i>	-	-	
	<i>Widower</i>	1	1,3	
SCHOOL AREA	<i>Urban</i>	48	64,0	
	<i>Rural/semi-urban</i>	27	36,0	
AGE	Minimum	Maximum	Average	S.D.
	43	63	54,49	5,116
NUMBER OF CLASSES IN EACH SCHOOL UNIT	Minimum	Maximum	Average	S.D.
	3	25	9,76	4,303
YEARS OF SERVICE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION	Minimum	Maximum	Average	S.D.
	12	35	25,89	6,119
YEARS OF SERVICE AS A HEADMASTER	Minimum	Maximum	Average	S.D.
	0	28	6,27	5,761

Professional extinction was investigated with the MBI-ES questionnaire with three study sub-scales. Emotional exhaustion is the first sub-scale, where the higher the respondents' score, the greater their emotional exhaustion in the workplace and the higher the burnout (Table 2).

Table 2. MBI Parameters - Emotional Exhaustion

S/N	MBI – Emotional Exhaustion	Minimum	Maximum	Average	S.D.
1	I feel mentally exhausted from my job as a headmaster.	0	6	2,53	1,671
2	I feel exhausted when I wake up in the morning and I have to face another day of work.	0	6	2,01	1,511
3	It's very tiring for me to work with people all day.	0	6	1,68	1,570
4	I feel exhausted from my job.	0	6	2,09	1,517
5	I feel disappointed with my work.	0	6	1,76	1,450
6	I feel very hard at school.	0	6	3,67	1,913
7	It makes me very stressful to work closely with teachers.	0	5	1,51	1,359
8	I feel that I am within the limits of my endurance.	0	5	1,49	1,309
9	I feel "empty" at the end of a school day.	0	5	1,37	1,333
TOTAL SCORE		1	48	18,12	10,772
Cronbach's Alpha			0,922		

Based on the Pearson correlation coefficient, the levels of emotional exhaustion are negatively related to years of service as headmaster (-0,288), ie headmasters with many years of service in their position are less professionally exhausted. Correlations with other quantitative demographic characteristics are statistically insignificant (Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3. Emotional Exhaustion Levels

		FREQUENC Y (N)	PERCENT AGE (%)
Emotional Exhaustion	<i>Low</i>	51	68,0
	<i>Moderate</i>	16	21,3
	<i>High</i>	8	10,7

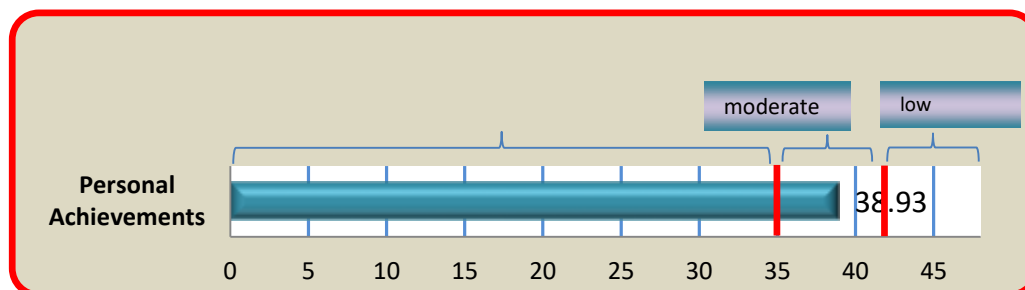
Table 4. Emotional exhaustion correlation with demographic characteristics

	Emotional Exhaustion
	R ¹
AGE	-0,040
NUMBER OF CLASSES IN EACH SCHOOL UNIT	-0,113
YEARS OF SERVICE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION	-0,082
YEARS OF SERVICE AS A HEADMASTER	-0,288*

1 Pearson Correlation Coefficient

* The correlation is significant at a level of 0.05

In addition, categorical demographic characteristics do not seem to affect levels of emotional exhaustion, since the Mann-Whitney statistical test does not indicate statistically significant differences. Personal achievements are the second sub-scale where the higher the score of the respondents, the greater their personal achievements and the lower their professional burnout (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. Personal Achievements

The mean total score of the sub-scale is 38.93 and indicates that the professional burnout of sample members, based on personal achievements, is moderate (Diagram 1). The reliability reached very satisfactory levels since Cronbach's Alpha = 0.862 > 0.7. Turning the score of personal achievements into a categorical variable, it is found that the dimension of the professional burnout is low (42.7%). However, a fairly significant percentage of respondents with high burnout (26.7%) is shown (Table 5).

Table 5. Personal Achievement Levels

		FREQUENC Y (N)	PERCENT AGE (%)
Personal Achievements	<i>Low</i>	32	42,7
	<i>Moderate</i>	23	30,7
	<i>High</i>	20	26,7

Based on the Pearson correlation coefficient, the levels of personal achievement are positively correlated with years of service as a headmaster (0.252), ie senior headmasters with many years of service experience show lower rates of professional burnout. Correlations with other quantitative demographic characteristics are statistically insignificant (Table 6).

Table 6. Relation of personal achievements with demographic characteristics

	<i>Personal Achievements</i>
	R ¹
AGE	0,118
NUMBER OF CLASSES IN EACH SCHOOL UNIT	0,057
YEARS OF SERVICE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION	0,215
YEARS OF SERVICE AS A HEADMASTER	0,252*

1Pearson Correlation Coefficient

* The correlation is significant at a level of 0.05

Besides, the demographic characteristics do not seem to affect personal achievement levels, since the Mann-Whitney statistical test does not indicate statistically significant differences (Table 7).

Table 7. Level of personal achievements per demographic feature

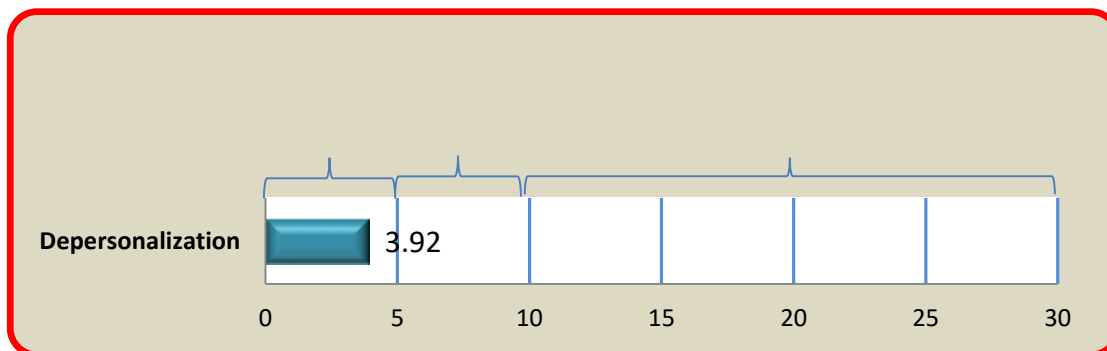
		Personal Achievements	S.D.	Test	P-value
SEX	<i>MAN</i>	39,21	6,232	Mann- Whitne y	0,879
	<i>WOMAN</i>	38,00	8,529		
ADDITIONA L STUDIES	<i>YES</i>	38,53	6,632	Mann- Whitne y	0,283
	<i>NO</i>	39,91	7,171		
MARITAL STATUS	<i>MARRIED WITH KIDS</i>	39,05	6,869		0,723

	<i>OTHER</i>	38,43	6,572	Mann-Whitney	
SCHOOL AREA	<i>URBAN</i>	38,77	6,975	Whitney	0,795
	<i>RURAL AREA</i>	39,22	6,524		

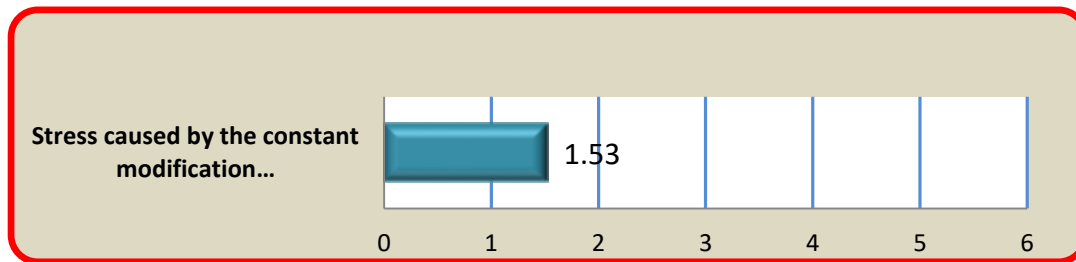
* The difference in resources is statistically significant at the level of 0.05

Depersonalization is the third sub-scale, where the higher the score of the respondents, the greater their depersonalization and the higher the professional exhaustion. The mean total score of the sub-scale is 3.92, indicating that the representation of the members of the sample is low. The reliability reached very satisfactory levels since Cronbach's Alpha = 0.779 > 0.7 (Diagram 2).

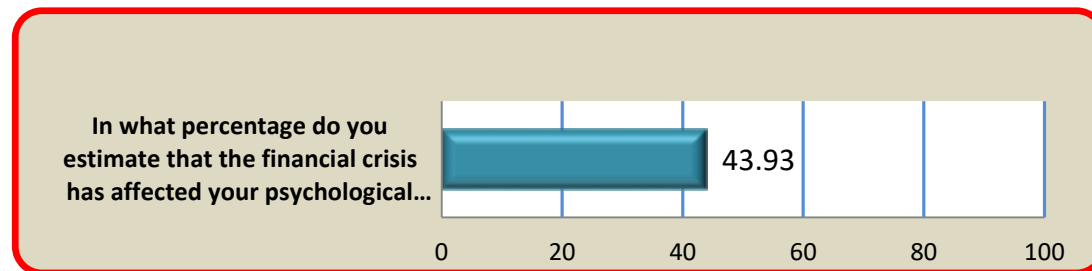
Diagram 2. Depersonalization



Converting the score of depersonalization into a categorical variable, it is found that in the vast majority of the sample, this dimension of professional burnout is low (82.7%). On the contrary, high depersonalization shows only 6.7% of the sample. Based on the Pearson correlation coefficient, it is noted that depersonalization levels are not related to the quantitative demographic characteristics under consideration. Finally, the Pearson linear correlation coefficient was used to investigate the existence of a possible correlation between the three dimensions of the professional exhaustion. It seems that depersonalization is positively related to emotional exhaustion, while personal achievements are negatively related to emotional exhaustion. These correlations are statistically significant at a level of $\alpha = 0.01$. On the contrary, personal achievements and depersonalization do not have a statistically significant relationship. In addition to the MBI professional exposure scale questions, a further question (question 23) was presented to the headmasters about the level of stress caused by the constant modification of the institutional framework for the selection of education executives. It is clear that the stress caused by this factor is below average, on a scale from 0 to 6 (1.53) (Diagram 3). Categorical demographic characteristics do not affect the level of this stress.

Diagram 3. Stress from the constant change of the institutional framework

Regarding the question 24, the interviewed headmasters quantified the influence of the economic crisis on their psychological condition using a scale of 0 to 100. It seems that the impact of the economic crisis on the psychological state of the respondents is below average (43.93%) (Diagram 4).

Diagram 4. Average of the influence of the economic crisis on the psychological situation...

The potential relationships of the studied factor with the three dimensions of professional exhaustion were examined with the Pearson linear correlation coefficient and it was found that the psychological burden of economic crisis is positively related to emotional exhaustion (0.374), negative to personal achievements (-0.300) and positive to depersonalization (0.332). All the aforementioned correlations are statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.01$. It is noted that in all three regressions the p-value of the coefficient of the independent variable is less than 0.05 and is therefore statistically significant. Therefore, in conjunction with the sign of the coefficient b of each regression, it seems that the psychological burden from the economic crisis is positively influenced by emotional exhaustion ($p = 0.001$), negatively from personal achievements ($p = 0.009$) and positively from de-representation ($p = 0.004$).

Alternatively, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to confirm the possible effects of the professional exhaustion. And in this case it is noticed that the higher the professional exhaustion (because of emotional exhaustion and personal achievements), the higher the psychological burden. However, the influence of depersonalization on the studied factor is not confirmed since differences in the mean are not statistically significant ($p = 0.133$). Based on the statistically significant correlations between the control factor and the three dimensions of professional burnout, the potential impact of the psychological burden from the economic crisis on emotional exhaustion, personal achievements and depersonalization was also investigated. Three simple linear regressions with dependent variable were used for each professional burnout dimension and independent variable for the studied factor. Since the p-value of the coefficient of the independent variable is less than 0.05 in each regression, based on the b

coefficient, it appears that the psychological burden from the economic crisis positively affects emotional exhaustion ($p = 0.001$) and depersonalization ($p = 0.004$).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the research show that the burnout syndrome of the respondents is low, thus confirming the Kantas & Vassilaki (1997) survey. With regard to the first study sub-scale, it is found that the majority of respondents experience low emotional exhaustion and has a low level of burnout in this dimension (68.0%). The only demographic feature that displayed a statistically significant correlation, and indeed negative, with levels of emotional exhaustion was the years of service of each participant in his or her position as a headmaster. In relation to the second study sub-scale, it becomes clear that the dimension of reduced personal achievement is moderate, following the self-assessment of the headmasters. It is worth pointing out that only this parameter accounts for 26.7% of the participants questioned. Positive and statistically significant correlation is found only between levels of reduced assessment of personal achievements and years of service as a headmaster (either as quantitative or as a categorical variable).

With regard to the third sub-scale of study, participants in the survey experienced depersonalization at low rates (82.7%). Moreover, it has been shown that the levels of depersonalization are not related to any of the quantitative or categorical demographic features under consideration, since no statistically significant differences were found. The survey revealed the statistical relevance of professional burnout with the independent variable of service in a position of responsibility as it became clear that experienced headmasters handle more efficiently the factors those responsible for professional burnout. In this respect, the research carried out by Cherniss (1980) and Maslach (1982) is confirmed. Regarding the correlation between the three dimensions of professional exhaustion it is found that depersonalization is statistically positively related to emotional exhaustion, while personal achievements are negatively related to emotional exhaustion and finally personal achievements and depersonalization have no statistically significant relationship.

The replies of the directors to the question of the stress caused by the constant change in the institutional framework for the selection of education executives reveal that the relative percentages are below the average and that there is no correlation with any of the demographic categories in question. Finally, a percentage of respondents below average (43.93%) recognized that the economic crisis has an impact on the psychological situation of the participants in the survey. In relation to the individual dimensions of professional burnout, statistics have also shown that professional burnout (because of emotional exhaustion and personal achievements) is directly proportional to the psychological burden of the economic crisis. Accordingly, the psychological burden affects emotionally exhaustion and depersonalization.

Research constraints and extension proposals

Despite the credibility of the tools and the validity of the research process and analysis, the generalization of the aforementioned conclusions is insecure and prohibitive for the following reasons. At first, the size of the sample was limited to 75 members, while the geographical region was limited to that of the prefecture of Aitolokarnania. In addition, data collection took place at a time when the workload of headmasters was increased compared to other periods.

This research could, though, initiate relevant studies with more representative and larger samples. Similarly, they should be extended not only to public education but to private as well. It is also of major importance for the researchers to put more emphasis on investigating the burnout of headmasters, as until now the majority of relevant researches have as a target population the teachers. The investigation of the existing differences between permanent and deputy teachers is of great importance as well. In addition, qualitative surveys should also be conducted. Interviews with headmasters could confirm or dispel the symptoms in the behavior or feelings experienced by those suffering from the burnout syndrome. Finally, the ultimate aim is to make use of the findings of these surveys by the competent bodies especially in the field of education management in order to take the most appropriate institutional measures for the early prevention and effective treatment of professional burnout by recognizing the symptoms.

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