Features of emotional burnout syndrome in government employees

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Abstract. The problem of the onset, formation, and development of the phenomenon of emotional burnout is relevant in the study of any profession and is an important component for the professional activity of government employees in the Russian Federation. To explore the features of emotional burnout syndrome development in government employees and develop psychological recommendations for its prevention. Psychological testing of government employees and comparative analysis of the obtained results by groups; statistical processing of the obtained results. The study uses the method for diagnosing the emotional burnout level by V.V. Boyko. The experimental groups in the study are formed by 35 government employees who used to hold managerial positions (over 10 years of experience in civil service). The results of the study broaden the understanding of the place of emotional burnout syndrome in the professional activity of government employees. The features and mechanisms lying at the basis of the emergence and development of emotional burnout syndrome in civil servants are described. Ensuring government employees' effectiveness in their duties calls for conducting a set of measures to reduce emotional burnout: optimization of the organization of activities, a favorable social and psychological climate in the team, and organized work of the psychological service. In the process of selection and training of government employees, it appears reasonable to pay attention to the individual characteristics preventing professional deformation and promote the development of the personal ability to withstand stressors (self-efficacy, confidence in the level of one's professionalism, developed success goals; tolerance for difficulties and unpredictable situations; self-respect, an adequate level of self-esteem; resilience, the ability to manage professional affairs; the development of individual strategies for coping with stress, etc.).

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1 Introduction

In modern Russia, close attention is paid to the professional activities of government employees who are required to implement their professional competencies regardless of the body, organization, and service. In this regard, every public servant seeks to improve their professional level and professional competencies serving as a basis for career advancement. It is important to note that the current high requirements for professional competence, performance, and even personal characteristics of civil servants do not allow everyone to achieve the desired results. Government employees typically find themselves in a constant atmosphere of other people's negative emotions while showing participation in other people's problems or, on the contrary, being the target of complaints, irritation, and aggression. At the same time, the degree to which a public servant is affected by other people's negative emotions depends, among other things, on their own personality. Like any other person, a government employee is unable to stay indifferent to the emotions of those around them and thus ends up being "soaked" in them.

Moreover, a government worker who is driven by a high level of responsibility sometimes takes on an excessive and exorbitant number of responsibilities not expressly provided for in the job description and develops distrust in other employees around them, as well as the desire to keep everything under their control thus causing irreparable damage to their own psycho-emotional state. In this regard, civil servants have to constantly battle a variety of professional stressors.

2 Methods

To study emotional burnout among civil servants of other types, as well as to reveal the relationship between the occurrence and development of emotional burnout syndrome, the study uses V.V. Boyko's method for the diagnostics of emotional burnout [1]. V.V. Boyko's method for the diagnostics of emotional burnout level reveals the leading symptoms of "burnout" and allows to identify the phase of stress formation to which the predominant symptoms refer and in which phase they are most prevalent.

The experimental group of the study includes 35 civil servants who previously held managerial positions (more than 10 years of civil service experience).

3 Results

The study conducted using V.V. Boyko's method for the diagnostics of the emotional burnout level in the experimental group composed of 35 government employees with over 10 years of experience in civil service reveals the following trends.

In 8 out of 35 (22.8%) subjects, emotional burnout is in the formation stage while in 8 (22.8%) it is fully formed. Only 45.6% of the group of employees who took part in the study are subjected to emotional burnout (Figure 1).

Fig. 1. The number of respondents subjected to emotional burnout syndrome

Out of 16 respondents found to be subjected to emotional burnout, the “Overpressure” phase is formed in 2 (12.5%) subjects and is in the forming stage in 3 (18.7%) subjects. The “Resistance” phase is formed in 7 (43.7%) subjects and is in the formative stage in 7 (43.7%) subjects, as well. The “Exhaustion” phase is formed in 2 (12.5%) subjects and is in the forming stage in 7 (43.7%) (Figure 2, Table 1).

Fig. 2. The degree of formation of burnout stages in the respondents

Diagnostics of the development of symptoms in 16 respondents subjected to emotional burnout syndrome show the following results (Figure 3, Tables 2 and 3). The “Experiencing psychologically traumatic circumstances” symptom is developed by 4 subjects, developing in 3, and predominant in 2 individuals. The “Dissatisfaction with oneself” symptom is developed in 3 respondents, developing in 2, and predominant in 2. The “Being stuck in a

“cage” symptom is developed by 1 subject, developing in 3, and not predominant in any of the respondents. The “Anxiety and depression” symptom is developed in 2 subjects, developing in 3, and predominant in 1. The “Inadequate emotional responses” symptom is developed by 12 respondents, developing in 2, and predominant in 7. The “Emotional and moral disorientation” symptom is developed in 6 respondents, developing in 3, and predominant in 4. The symptom of the “Expanding sphere of emotional thriftiness” is developed by 2 subjects, developing in 1, and predominant in 1. The “Reduction of professional responsibilities” symptom is developed by 8 respondents, developing in 7, and predominant in 5. The “Emotional deficit” symptom is developed in 3 respondents, developing in 5, and predominant in 1. The “Emotional detachment” symptom is developed by 3 respondents, developing in 7, and not predominant in any of the subjects. The “Personal detachment (depersonalization)” is developed in 3 subjects, developing in 5, and predominant in 1 person. Finally, the symptom of “Psychosomatic and psycho-vegetative disorders” is developed by 3 respondents and does not show the stage of development in any of the subjects but is found predominant in 2 people.

Table 1. The results of the study of the experimental group using V.V. Boyko’s method of emotional burnout level diagnostics

EP/S	O	R	E
1	6	33	10
2	24	7	8
3	3	54	44
4	59	78	62
5	28	20	44
6	5	65	38
7	5	18	20
8	36	36	19
9	3	16	5
10	36	20	15
11	5	2	3
12	58	80	43
13	18	43	31
14	15	51	19
15	64	69	29
16	0	20	10
17	3	54	15
18	68	27	66
19	0	18	10
20	7	17	6
21	5	22	6
22	5	33	25
23	12	24	31
24	0	20	3
25	8	15	6
26	5	65	38
27	3	10	7

28	22	25	20
29	10	27	15
30	2	45	13
31	12	53	21
32	59	50	45
33	35	61	27
34	21	70	39
35	5	22	8
Mean	18.48	36.28	22.88

Note:

S – subject;

EP – exhaustion phase;

O – overpressure;

R – resistance;

E – exhaustion;

Mean – mean value.

36 points or less – phase not formed.

37-60 points – forming phase (in green).

61 points or more – phase formed (in red).

Table 2. The formed syndrome

Phases	N	Symptoms	Subject's questionnaire number							
			4	6	12	15	18	26	33	34
Overpressure	1	Experiencing psychologically traumatic circumstances	10	0	24	27	11	0	17	2
	2	Dissatisfaction with oneself	24	5	8	13	20	5	11	6
	3	“Being stuck in a cage”	18	0	8	13	15	0	7	8
	4	Anxiety and depression	7	0	18	11	22	0	0	5
Resistance	1	Inadequate emotional responses	22	18	24	22	2	18	17	20
	2	Emotional and moral disorientation	17	28	10	4	10	28	22	22
	3	Expanding sphere of emotional thriftiness	9	7	18	27	5	7	5	3
	4	Reduction of professional responsibilities	30	12	28	16	10	12	17	25
Exhaustion	1	Emotional deficit	10	13	8	5	10	13	5	3
	2	Emotional detachment	7	15	6	8	19	15	15	18
	3	Personal detachment (depersonalization)	25	10	10	8	17	10	5	18
	4	Psychosomatic and psycho-vegetative disorders	20	0	19	8	20	0	2	0

Note:

9 points or less – the symptom is not developed,

10-15 points (in green) – the symptom is developing,

16 points or more (in red) – the symptom is developed.

20 points or more (in blue) – the symptom predominant at the given stage or throughout the burnout syndrome

Table 3. The forming syndrome

Phases	№	Symptoms	Subject's questionnaire number							
			3	5	13	14	17	30	31	32
Overpressure	1	Experiencing psychologically traumatic circumstances	0	10	4	3	3	2	2	19
	2	Dissatisfaction with oneself	0	8	0	5	0	0	0	17
	3	“Being stuck in a cage”	0	10	6	0	0	0	0	8
	4	Anxiety and depression	3	0	8	7	0	0	10	15
Resistance	1	Inadequate emotional responses	20	3	20	22	22	15	12	18
	2	Emotional and moral disorientation	9	8	9	9	10	5	19	7
	3	Expanding sphere of emotional thriftiness	7	7	2	5	10	0	7	3
	4	Reduction of professional responsibilities	18	2	12	15	12	25	15	22
Exhaustion	1	Emotional deficit	18	17	13	3	5	0	0	22
	2	Emotional detachment	18	12	13	13	8	2	13	6
	3	Personal detachment (depersonalization)	5	10	5	3	0	8	8	10
	4	Psychosomatic and psycho-vegetative disorders	3	5	0	0	2	3	0	7

Note:

9 points or less – the symptom is not developed,

10-15 points (in green) – the symptom is developing,

16 points or more (in red) – the symptom is developed.

20 points or more (in blue) – the symptom predominant at the given stage or throughout the burnout syndrome

Fig. 3. The degree of burnout symptoms development

The symptoms found to be most common among the respondents subjected to emotional burnout are the ones attributed by V.V. Boyko to the “Resistance” phase, specifically “Inadequate emotional responses” (developed in 75% of the subjects; predominant in 43.75%; developing in 12.5%), “Reduction of professional responsibilities” (developed in 50% of the subjects; predominant in 31.25%; developing in 43.75%), and “Emotional and moral disorientation” (developed in 37.5% of the subjects; predominant in 25%; developing in 18.75%).

4 Discussion

The conducted study demonstrates that government employees occupying managerial posts in public service are subject to the emotional burnout syndrome the formation of which

predominantly takes the form of the “Resistance” phase of the syndrome shaped, in turn, by the development of such symptoms as “Inadequate emotional responses”, “Reduction of professional responsibilities”, and “Emotional and moral disorientation”.

The content of the professional burnout syndrome is explored in the studies of such foreign scientists as E. Aronson, W.B. Schaufeli, D. Dierendonck, A.M. Garden, C. Maslach, S.E. Jackson, A. Längle, K. Kondo, H.J. Freudenberger, L. Morrow, R.M. Yerkes, J.D. Dodson, G.H. Frith, A. Mims, E.F. Iwanicki, R.L. Schwab, B. Perlman, E.A. Hartman, and others [2–7], as well as in the works of Russian scientists V.V. Boyko, N.E. Vodopianova, N.V. Grishina, G.A. Zaripova, L.A. Kitaev-Smyk, O.V. Krapivina, V.E. Orel, A.A. Rukavishnikov, A.L. Stepanov, T.V. Formaniuk, T.S. Iatsenko, and others [8–15].

Ensuring government employees’ effectiveness in their duties calls for conducting a set of measures to reduce emotional burnout.

This set consists of several lines of action:

- optimization of the organization of activities – rational activity management plays an important role in reducing the impact of professional stressors on the personality of a public servant;
- favorable social and psychological climate in the team – the formation of an employee team as a single group of people who can support each other in stressful situations;
- organized work of the psychological service – reduction of the level of negative personal and professional factors, development of creativity, improvement of stress resistance, the formation of skills in self-regulation and control over one’s psychophysical state.

In the process of selection and training of government employees, it appears reasonable to pay attention not only to the generally accepted characteristics but also the individual ones preventing professional deformation and promote the development of the personal ability to withstand stressors. Such characteristics may well include:

- self-efficacy, confidence in the level of one’s professionalism, coherent and developed success goals;
- tolerance for difficulties and unpredictable situations;
- self-respect, an adequate level of self-esteem;
- resilience, the ability to manage professional affairs;
- the development of individual strategies for coping with stress, etc.

5 Conclusion

Preservation of the psychological and physical health of civil servants, especially those occupying various managerial positions, is relevant due to the importance of the results of government employees’ professional activity for individual citizens and society as a whole. The phenomenon of emotional burnout, i. e. regulation of the emotional, physical, and intellectual state of civil servants, is one of the vital psychological and pedagogical problems that call for immediate resolution. Burnout syndrome, which can be a characteristic feature of an individual government employee and a professional team as a whole, is an important obstacle in the way of improvement and innovative and technological changes in the public service of the Russian Federation.

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