

Burnout syndrome in the light of the executive secretarial professional

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to seek and describe the discernment of Executive Secretariat professionals about the burnout syndrome. The study is relevant because this profession often involves high levels of stress due to the nature of the tasks and the expectations that fall on these professionals. A descriptive research was carried out using a mixed methods approach: quantitative and qualitative. The research applied questionnaires to a representative sample of Executive Secretariat professionals in different sectors, ages and regions of Brazil. The study revealed that a significant proportion of the Executive Secretariat professionals surveyed had limited or inadequate knowledge about burnout syndrome. Many fail to correctly identify the symptoms of the condition or understand its main risk factors. In addition, most were not aware of burnout prevention and management strategies. The results highlight the importance of providing additional training and education to executive secretarial professionals on burnout in order to improve their perceptual capacity, how to prevent and cope with this condition. Not only can this benefit mental health, but it can also contribute to a healthier and more productive work environment in the eyes of these professionals.

Keywords: Burnout Syndrome, Executive Secretariat, Mental health.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1936 film *Modern Times*, Charlie Chaplin plays a factory worker. The scenes in the work illustrate the exhausting repetition of work, the pressure from the boss, and the employee's frustration at not being able to complete all the tasks of the day. In the year of the film's production, scholars still did not have a terminology to describe the disorder faced by the character. It was only in the 1970s that the German psychoanalyst Herbert Freudenberger used the term "Burnout Syndrome" for the first time to describe mental illness, which in his epistemology means: burning completely until it disappears.

Burnout syndrome (BS), also known as burnout syndrome, is a psychological disorder that affects individuals exposed to high levels of stress and pressure in the workplace. The main symptoms include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (skepticism and emotional detachment from others), and reduced personal fulfillment at work. (Brazil, 2001). The origin of the term burnout dates back to the early 1970s, when the German psychoanalyst Herbert Freudenberger used it to describe an experience of physical and emotional exhaustion associated with health professionals. Subsequently, the concept was broadened to include other professions that also face high levels of stress. Christina Maslach (1976) proposed a

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theoretical model to characterize BS, defining it as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors at work that presents itself in three interdependent dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal fulfillment (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

In addition, in Brazil, as well as in other countries, BS is an increasingly recognized and considered problem. It is believed that several factors contribute to the increase of this syndrome in Brazilian workers, such as: workload, long working hours, unachievable goals and constant pressure to provide can lead to physical and mental exhaustion. In this context, Ortega (2011, p. 14) states: "The individual who presents this syndrome is in a state of total exhaustion due to excessive and continuous effort".

The executive secretary is required to understand the performance of the company in which he is inserted, as well as its objectives and goals, in addition to the need to perceive the relationship between his competencies and the environment. (Carvalho et al. 1998).

In this vein, the executive secretary has a history going back centuries, but its evolution into the modern form of the profession that we know today has occurred recently. Its growth in the market is related to the need for administrative assistance and support for leaders and executives in their activities.

Therefore, when analyzing the theories and studies about the evolution of the profession, it can be understood that the burnout syndrome occurs due to the connection of negative factors within an organization, and that the PSE with its multiple interpersonal skills corroborates being a facilitating agent of quality of life within the organization.

According to Maerker (2007, p. 34), "[...] Emotionally intelligent professionals are better able to deal with problems." Therefore, it is essential that the PSE knows their emotions and knows how to deal with

They then distinguish symptoms that are harmful to mental health. In addition, it is important that he develops empathy so that it is possible to put himself in the other's shoes and understand the emotions of that individual, as well as a respect.

Burnout syndrome has left several sectors of society on alert, specifically in the organizational sector. Occupational exhaustion is noticeable in many workers from different areas, and the Executive Secretariat Professional (PSE), in their work activities is not an exception. Based on the idea that such professionals, in their routine work activities, are susceptible to experiencing beneficial and harmful feelings and emotions, it is necessary to know and understand each emotion, particularly the identification of harmful emotions, which arise when the work environment is hostile or rigorous. The PSE, with its broad curriculum and role as a facilitating agent, is very likely to cross and significantly recognize the propensity factors that unleash this syndrome. That said, in this problematic, the understanding of the PSE about the burnout syndrome was investigated, with the objective of this research to point out through



studies and researches what is the bias of perception of the executive secretariat professional about the burnout syndrome? According to the hypotheses presented: (1) The executive secretarial professional would be an agent that facilitates organizational well-being; (2) The secretarial professional would have empirical knowledge to identify burnout syndrome.

OBJECTIVE

Thus, the general objective of the research is to investigate the understanding of the PSE about the burnout syndrome. On the other hand, the specific objectives are: to search for evidence in data, answered by PSE; scientific evidence in the study of the organizational environment and the Executive Secretariat about the perceptions of these professionals in relation to their empirical and academic knowledge related to BS. In addition, in addition to the relevance of the theme, the choice of this research is justified by the need to investigate the well-being of the individual within the organization and the PSE with its broad view of discernment. In addition to fostering future research that may contribute to interventions in BS in the secretarial sphere.

METHODOLOGY

The nature of this research is applied, with a qualitative and quantitative approach and exploratory content that consists of understanding a phenomenon in depth. Straus and Corbin (1990) consider it to be

Qualitative is any type of research in which data are not obtained through statistical procedures. Denzin and Lincoln (2006) state that quantitative research consists of investigating through numbers.

Exploratory research is focused on the analysis of characteristics within a specific theme, and for Gil (2006, p. 43) it is important especially when the chosen subject is little examined, making it difficult to formulate precise theories and practices. Furthermore, as presented by Bertucci (2009) the research aims to open new perspectives, identify research questions and raise questions that guide further investigations related to the same theme.

This study seeks to identify the degree of understanding of burnout syndrome on the part of the Executive Secretariat professional in all regions of Brazil. The method used was exploratory and the procedure adopted was through a questionnaire in an online form through the Google Forms application made available by the company Google. The form containing 10 questions, closed and 1 open, was made available to the professionals of the Executive Secretariat. This form was shared through a link generated by Google Forms, via WhatsApp, email, LinkedIn and Instagram, from August 13 to 21, 2023. The results achieved were examined through a statistical report made available by the Google Forms application. Through this analysis, progress has been made in achieving the objectives established in this study.



DEVELOPMENT

ORGANIZATIONAL WELL-BEING AND BURNOUT SYNDROME

Health and well-being are central issues on the agenda of the United Nations (UN). The UN has a number of agencies and programs dedicated to promoting and improving global health around the world. Among the main objectives and initiatives related to health and well-being, Mental Health can be highlighted. The organization has been increasingly dedicated to addressing issues of mental health and emotional well-being, recognizing its importance for sustainable development and people's quality of life, corroborating the idea of the WHO (2020) that mental health refers to a well-being in which the individual develops their personal skills, can deal with the stresses of life, He works productively and is able to make his contribution to his community.

This point is favorable to what Robbins believed to be the organizational climate conducive to the well-being of the individual. Organizational culture refers to the set of principles and values that guide the company. According to Robbins (2006), "Organizational culture refers to a value system shared by members that differentiates the organization from others." Organizational well-being is an important factor for not triggering the burnout syndrome, considering that: The organizational climate constitutes the internal environment of an organization, the psychological and characteristic atmosphere that exists in each organization this environment is the human environment within which the people of an organization perform their work. Climate can refer to the environment within a department, a factory, or an entire company. The weather cannot be touched or visualized, but it can be perceived psychologically. (Chiavenato, 2006, p.273).

In this way, Ortega (2011) says that both the secretarial professional, as well as any other professional, carry and demonstrate their emotions in the work environment. After all, emotions are integral parts of human nature, and it's a big mistake to ignore the elements. According to Maslow's theory, human needs are evidenced according to his Human Motivational Theory. According to this theoretical basis, the needs are physiological, security, social, esteem, and self-actualization (Chiavenato, 2013). PSEs may be at risk of burnout due to the demanding and multitasking nature of their job. They frequently have to deal with tight deadlines, management pressures, and the need to maintain effective communication. This can lead to emotional burnout, depersonalization, and low personal fulfillment. The relationship between Maslow (1943) and the burnout syndrome, in the perception of the executive secretary, can be understood that if the needs of esteem are not met, such as the lack of recognition for their hard work, secretarial professionals can feel devalued and emotionally exhausted. Still in theory, if self-actualization needs are compromised due to an excessive workload, lack of development opportunities, or limitations on career progression, it can contribute to feelings of discouragement and low



personal fulfillment. In line with what Ortega (2013, p.122) thinks, the PSE needs to understand its importance and the entire business context, so it develops behavioral and perceptual actions.

THE BURNOUT SYNDROME IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT PROFESSIONAL

According to Jackson and Maslach (1981), burnout syndrome is defined as a response to chronic emotional tension resulting from direct and prolonged contact with other individuals. Burnout is a feeling of discouragement and apathy. This problem mainly affects workers who have too much contact with other individuals. This happens when professionals with great responsibilities in their work activities get emotionally involved, wear out, can't stand it and go into burnout (Codo; Vasques, 1999).

The concept model developed by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) understands BS as involved in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion (short emotional resources, chronic fatigue and tiredness), depersonalization (emotional distancing from one's peers) and low professional fulfillment (reduction of productivity, as well as an unfavorable evaluation of the work done). In turn, Bueno (2017) points out that burnout presents itself in four ways:

- Physical: with constant fatigue, sleep disturbance, muscle aches, and lack of appetite.
- Psychic: when analyzed lack of attention, memory changes, anxiety and frustration;
- Behavioral: when there is negligence at work, with occasional or instant irritability, altered concentration, increased conflicts with colleagues, non-compliance with working hours;
- Defensive: low performance at work.

In this context, factors and characteristics favor the perception of PSEs about burnout syndrome, it may vary, but many can identify and understand the symptoms associated with this condition due to their direct experience with the pressures and challenges of the work environment. They may notice symptoms such as constant fatigue, irritability, social isolation, lack of motivation, and depersonalization in relation to work. Additionally, they may recognize the importance of taking care of their mental and emotional health to avoid burnout. Affirming Netto (2013) in the context that the executive secretariat professional is recognized as the strategic professional capable of transiting and interacting with all sectors of the organization, having great power of influence and recognition.

Executive secretarial professionals may realize that burnout syndrome affects personal well-being, and can also impair effectiveness at work. This can lead them to seek ways to cope with stress, such as setting clear boundaries, practicing self-reflection, seeking support from peers and supervisors, and even seeking professional guidance if necessary. One of the main points for the occurrence of burnout



syndrome in institutions is the lack of quality in interpersonal interactions, frequency of conflicts, lack of support and difficulties in group work (Maslach; Leiter, 2008).

In addition, it is pointed out that some PSEs may perceive that the organizational culture and the expectations of the work can contribute to the development of BS. They can be advocates for change in work environments by promoting policies that value work-life balance and encourage healthy stress management. Referencing Nascimento (2011) who believes in organizational performance and motivation as a way of contributing to human motivation.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In view of the research carried out, it was possible to draw relevant conclusions about the perceptions of the interviewees regarding BS. Understanding of burnout syndrome is high among respondents. This highlights the importance of knowledge about mental health issues in the workplace. The PSE correctly associated BS with its symptoms, demonstrating awareness of the condition. The data also pointed to the identification of BS by sector, different levels of perception. The production and human resources sectors had the highest percentages of SB identification, while the marketing sector did not report any identification. This suggests variations in sensitivity and comprehension

of the syndrome between the different organizational sectors in the interpretation of the interviewed professionals.

The research reveals that 87.1% of the respondents demonstrate a previous understanding of BS, which makes the PSE a perceptual facilitator inside and outside the organizational environment, with its broad vision. Based on data analyzed in the literature, it can be considered that burnout syndrome is an occupational phenomenon characterized by exhaustion, which results from chronic stress, in the workplace and in activities carried out competently. (Kirby, et al., 2020).

In the open question, it was deduced from the analyses that the most frequent words, such as "Professional", "Work" and "Emotional", suggest that they recognize the inherent connection between the professional, emotional and work dimensions. In addition, the mention of "Burnout", "Mental", "Stress" and "Burnout" indicates that the PSE respondents are aware of the existence and impact of BS in their work context. The observation that the words "Health", "Symptoms" and "Energy" were less emphasized suggests that, although professionals recognize BS, they may not be prioritizing the discussion about its physical effects or specific symptoms. This may indicate that they are more focused on the emotional and psychological implications of the syndrome. Thus, in the perception of the PSE, it is understood that they have a solid understanding of BS and its implications in the work context, recognizing the importance of addressing emotional and psychological issues related to professional burnout and that this illness can cause damage to the organization and especially to the individual.



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