



zagoriy
foundation

Professional burnout
of employees working
in the charity sector

The Zagoriy Foundation in cooperation with Socioinform conducted a survey aimed at researching the emotional conditions and determining the current situation with the burnout of employees engaged in the charity sector.

The survey consisted of quantitative and qualitative part. Employees from local and all-Ukrainian organizations participated in the survey as respondents. The quantitative part was carried out based on the analysis of 400 forms filled out by the respondents. The qualitative part was conducted based on 20 in-depth interviews with representatives of charitable organizations from various fields.

The survey was carried out from December 2022 to February 2023.

The method of identifying the level of emotional burnout, which was developed by the professor Viktor Boyko, formed the basis of the survey.

The quantitative part

General **burnout condition** in the sector

Professional burnout was observed in more than a third of employees engaged in the charity sector (36%). Another third of employees (35%) are developing relevant symptoms. A bit less than one third of the respondents (29%) do not suffer from burnout.



Symptoms of professional burnout are mostly observed in:

- × Women.
- × Residents of towns and townships in contrast to residents of oblast centers.
- × Employees of medium-sized and localized charitable/public organizations.
- × Employees of organizations that changed their area of activities.
- × Those working part-time (as opposed to those working full-time or volunteers).
- × Those receiving payment only for specific projects (in contrast to those receiving regular salary or volunteers).
- × Those working online.
- × Senior managers or those completing managerial or coordination tasks.
- × Those working in the charity sector for over a year.



Stages of professional burnout

According to Boyko, the syndrome of professional burnout can be divided into stages:

Nervous tension — it is caused by destabilizing chronic psychoemotional environment or atmosphere, hyper-responsibility, complexity of contingent. Nervous tension is a harbinger and a trigger of the developing emotional burnout.




Resistance – an employee attempts to protect themselves from unpleasant emotions with some degree of success.

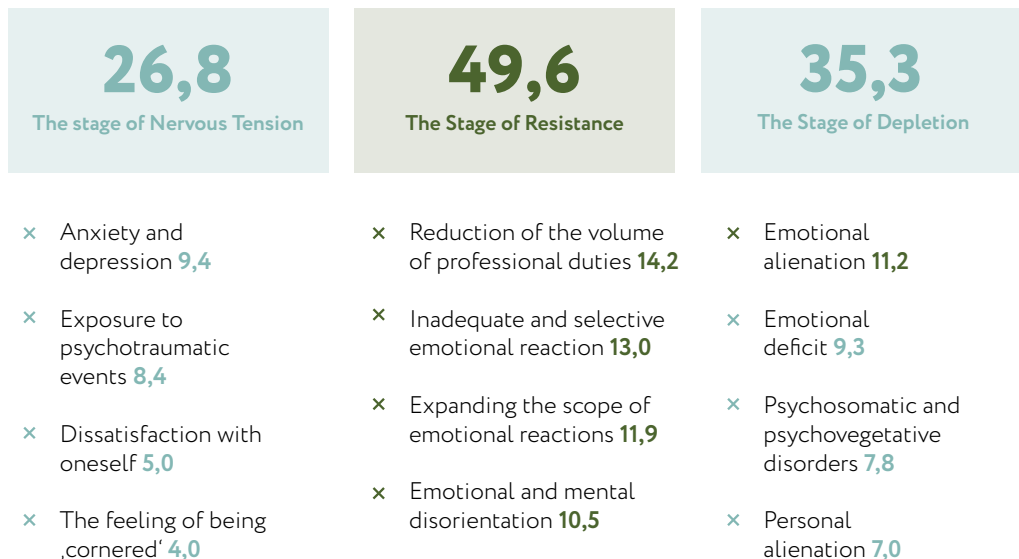
Depletion in physiological resources, decrease in emotional tone brought on by ineffective resistance. This stage implies more or less pronounced decrease in the general energy tone and a weakened nervous system.



Employees from the charity sector are on the verge of suffering from emotional burnout. Although the community of professionals has not fully reached any of the stages, the stage of Resistance is looming. The stage of Depletion is less pronounced, however, it is more common for the community of professionals than that of Nervous tension.

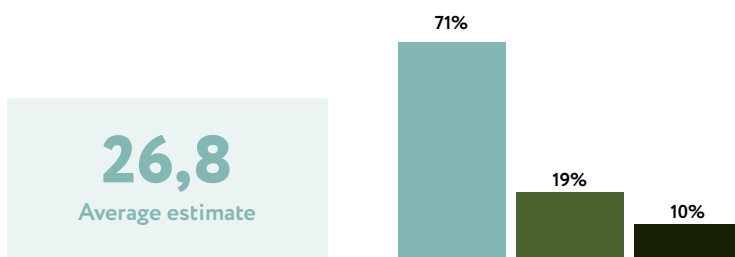
Mostly respondents develop the following symptoms of burnout: reduction of professional duties, inadequate selective emotional reaction, extension of the range of the economy of emotions. Less pronounced symptoms are: emotional alienation, emotional and mental disorientation. All symptoms are in their formative stage.

-  No signs of professional burnout
-  Professional burnout in its formative stage
-  Professional burnout fully formed



Stage ,Nervous tension‘

Employees of the charity sector suffer from this stage the least. Only 10% of the employees develop relevant symptoms. As a rule, employees develop mild symptoms, complaining of overreacting to events (anxiety, traumatic experience, dissatisfaction with oneself). However, potentially such a state may evolve into a more dangerous ailment.



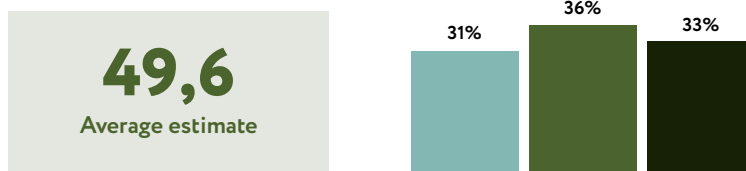
- 36 points and less — the stage is not formed
- 37–60 points — the stage is forming
- over 61 points — the stage is formed



Stage ,Resistance'

This stage is especially pronounced in emotional burnout suffered by employees from the charity sector. It manifests itself in their minds resisting to negative events. As a result, their mental resources are exhausted. This leads to their lack of interest in professional activities, decreasing the need for communication and interaction, irritability and anxiety, as well as significant decrease in internal energy.

A third of employees have developed the symptoms of the stage, while those of another third are in their formative stage.

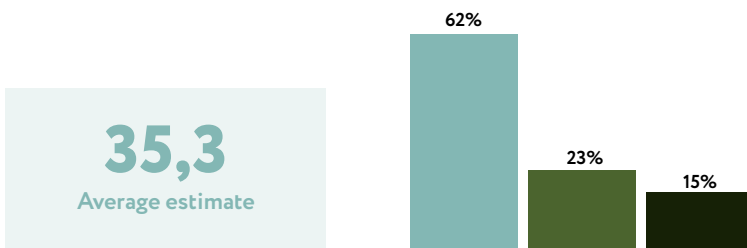


- 36 points and less — the stage is not formed
- 37–60 points — the stage is forming
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Stage ,Depletion'

This stage has so far not affected wide circles of charity sector employees. However, 15% of the respondents have already reached the stage, with another 23% of them are in the process of doing so. Depletion is normally accompanied by sleep disorders, decreased attention and memory, breathing disorders when under pressure, exacerbated emotions, lethargy and sluggishness. Employees at this stage are also affected by indifference to everything, depression, irritability and rage, unreasonable anxiety, fear. Sometimes these symptoms are accompanied by physiological problems.



- 36 points and less – the stage is not formed
- 37–60 points – the stage is forming
- over 61 points – the stage is formed



Qualitative stage

Motivation of employees

The main driving force behind the work in the charity sector is an opportunity to do good, or altruism in other words. This, in turn, gives employees the feeling of being useful and self-respect, fills them with sense of life and goals to pursue.

,I really love my job that proves useful for other people. The most precious thing that you can have in life is help other people. If you help people, it means that it is worth waking up every morning for'.

Other goals (also common for the representatives of other professions) are also pursued:

- × an opportunity for self-realization and for mastering one's skills;
- × interest in the working process.

There are also other goals, which are less common and quite diverse:

- × remuneration;
- × a usual and well-functioning personnel, support offered by colleagues;
- × patriotism, striving to bring victory one step closer;
- × religious sentiment;
- × christian values;
- × new acquaintances and impressions;
- × sense of duty.



Demotivating factors

There are 5 main demotivating factors and factors that may lead to burnout:



The necessity to refuse help/conduct excessive checks of beneficiaries.



Ingratitude of beneficiaries, aggression and accusations on their part.



Toxic management: senior managers devaluing the work done by employees, lack of support/or clear instructions, goals set incorrectly, too much pressure, total control.



Corruption and abuse (both inside a charitable organization/foundations and on the part of beneficiaries).



No tangible results (fruitless work).

„Every organization works according to the preplanned activities for which funds are allocated. People turn to us with different issues. We cannot help everyone. This is difficult, since responsibility places a strain on you, and you are helpless‘.

Stimuli to boost motivation

Motivation of the employees of charitable foundations can be supported or boosted through practical and mental stimuli.

- × **Practical stimuli:** material or non-material that offer practical benefits: resources, knowledge and impressions. The most effective practical stimulus is remuneration/bonuses, while less effective stimuli are free time spent together, office parties, travels, studying and personal growth.
- × **Mental stimuli** consist of events aimed at nurturing the staff's conviction of usefulness of their work: visibility of their work, acknowledgement of their achievements by senior management, gratitude expressed by beneficiaries, opportunities for freedom of action while completing tasks.

All of the aforementioned stimuli can pave the way for the prevention of professional burnout.



Perceptions of professional burnout



Professional burnout is perceived by the employees of the charitable organizations/foundations as the reluctance to work or lack of interest in work (apathy), accompanied by great weariness or exhaustion and emotional disorders (irritability, callousness, depressions).

Most participants of the research believe that professional burnout is more common within the charity sector than in any other sector. The main reasons for this being significant emotional pressure, low material motivation, too heavy a burden due to the sense of responsibility and the inability to reject beneficiaries' requests for help.

Despite the exhaustive list of symptoms, many respondents think of this condition as a banal tiredness, believing that they could get rid of it after a 2-3-day rest.

In spite of their having already experienced professional burnout, the employees of the charity sector are not always aware of the fact that they might be heading towards this condition. For example, according to the test worked out by Boyko, professional burnout was revealed in 5 persons, while another 12 employees are developing its symptoms. Instead, through the procedure of self-diagnostics only one out of 5 employees managed to detect professional burnout. Two out of 12 employees revealed the signs of the condition setting in through the same procedure.



Burnout factors

Professional burnout of the employees that participated in the survey was mainly caused by working or emotional overload. In most cases professional burnout set in due to the lack of rest and recovery, negative emotions in relationships with colleagues or senior management, work on emotionally difficult cases.

„Devalued attitude shown by the senior management towards volunteers. You’ve got ideas and they don’t hear you out‘.

At the same time, the respondents spoke about a wider range of additional causes of burnout at the personal, organizational and all-Ukrainian level.

Personal causes are predominant, in particular, subjective ones, namely, the ability to feel oneself and one’s needs, save one’s inner resources and emotional conditions, find motivation again.

Fewer respondents spoke about the role of inner and organizational causes. However, it was these causes that served as catalyzers of burnout. These are - atmosphere between colleagues, quality of management/coordination of processes at the organization. Less important causes are work ing conditions (in particular, remuneration and work format).

All-Ukrainian causes were referred to as the most significant. They rather serve as a background of stress and dissatisfaction felt across the country, exacerbated by organizational problems or personal problems.

The following categories of people are more susceptible to burnout:

- × Youths: they become disappointed should quick results not come to pass, being too much concerned about themselves.
- × People with low income forced to work on the side, who fail to seek medical help in time.
- × Employees with poor knowledge of symptoms of burnout and the ways to avert it.
- × Too emotional and sympathetic people, who live through the problems of the others, moulding themselves into their problems.
- × Too active and charismatic people who do not tend to save resources and become too weary.
- × Pessimists who become disappointed too quickly, lose the sense of work easily, taking a grim look at things.
- × People working in different areas: managers, employees communicating actively with people and beneficiaries; fundraising experts.

Turnover of staff as an indicator of burnout

Burnout affects not only the employees, but also the working process. Due to burnout, productivity and quality of labor drops, well-established working process deteriorate with turnover of staff becoming ever more frequent.

If such phenomena as migration, draft into army and health conditions are not taken into consideration, one can notice that turnover of staff decreases in those organizations that consist of fellow-thinkers sharing the same values, goals and effective management principles.

Increasing turnover hits those organizations that fail to pay salaries, offer interesting projects or growth prospects, or that are beset by negative sentiment in view of professional or personal issues. It also can be explained by excessive duties or exclusively pragmatic approach pursued by the employees. The highest turnover affects volunteers and communication experts. When it comes to the types of charitable organizations/foundations, this goes for regional ones that lack resources.



Diagnosing, preventing and countering professional burnout

Diagnostics and prevention measures aimed to avert burnout are to be taken both at individual and organizational levels.

At the personal level timely diagnostics depend on awareness of the staff about the symptoms of burnout and their being capable of self-reflection.

All the experts that participated in the survey believe that the majority of the employees from the charity sector are not able to detect burnout for two reasons:

- × They do not notice the symptoms due to their lack of knowledge/habits of self-analysis.
- × They consciously ignore the symptoms until they begin to suffer from physiological disorder

*Those employees from the charity sector are good at detecting burnout who participate in trainings on psychological burnout or who work with a therapist.

An organization working with people requires psychological trainings. Practical cases are to be studied: how to control yourself and know the ways to calm a person down and help them.'

At the organizational level the most effective measures aimed at preventing burnout are: motivational stimuli (practical and mental), support groups, psychological trainings, access to individual therapy.

The feasibility of conducting psychological trainings and organizing support groups lies in the following:

- ✗ Trainings will play a role of an educator, introducing the phenomenon and symptoms of burnout. They will draw the participants' attention to mental health.
- ✗ A specialist will help diagnose the syndrome and provide practical advice on how to overcome it.
- ✗ Joint physiological groups debunk the stereotypes and fears related to the issue of seeing therapists, while also encouraging the employees of the charity sector to turn to therapists/psychologists in the future.
- ✗ Participants will share their emotions/feelings, which will contribute to the cohesion of the team.

Following events held by an organization would also be required:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ✗ Recreational and entertainment events. | ✗ Creative events (master classes, theatrical art master classes). |
| ✗ Inspiring events that would inform about the results of work (output, success stories shared by beneficiaries, presenting achievements of employees). | ✗ Holding personal meetings with the staff members. |
| ✗ Communication of a manager with the staff to discuss current challenges. Reflecting on the working process. | ✗ Excursions out in the nature (mountains, woods, a trip to the sea). |
| | ✗ Trips abroad. |
| | ✗ Mentoring one's personal development. |

Most employees would like to fully delegate the process of the organization of such events to senior management. They expect their managers to keep track of psychological conditions of the employees while offering optimal changes of the working process, volume of work, duration of leaves (from 7 to 24 days), as well as taking care of visits to a therapist.

Most organizations do not have a clearly defined mechanism in place to fight burnout. However, a **desired mechanism** can be suggested:

1

Senior managers take care of psycho-emotional conditions of the employees, establishing an atmosphere full of trust, in which problems and issues would be discussed. The personnel would be informed about the symptoms of burnout, being also offered a chance to ask for help.

2

A manager can hold a conversation with an employee (on their own or with the participation of a therapist) to ascertain the cause of lower productivity and emotional exhaustion. A manager expresses support and shares information about present opportunities to handle burnout.

3

In the event of a burnout syndrome confirmed, an employee receives psychological help and extra days off. In case of a more complicated case, longer leave is offered.

4

The management of an organization revises the division of responsibilities, whilst analyzing the communication within the personnel (respect for one another, mutual understanding, support).

5

If possible, a manager offers an employee to switch to other tasks within the scope of organization's/project's activities that would seem more appealing to the latter.

6

Senior management organizes events aimed at prevention for the whole personnel.





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