

## Incidence of Work Stress in Physical Education Teachers in Times of Pandemic

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**Abstract:** The educational system in Ecuador has undergone changes that have urgently transformed the face-to-face modality to the virtual one. This paper presents a study of three educational units in the city of Quito - Ecuador, the objective of this research is to detect the occupational stress suffered by physical education teachers in times of pandemic, an exploratory and descriptive study was conducted. The participants in the study included in the study were 175 teachers from three educational units, 57 teachers from the first UE, 76 teachers from the second UE and 42 teachers from the third UE (Educational Unit), of which there were 114 men and 61 women, to detect the levels of stress the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) questionnaire was applied, which consists of 22 items in the form of statements, about the feelings and attitudes of teachers in their work and towards students, for which its function is to measure professional burnout. It also aims to measure the frequency and intensity with which the teacher suffers Burnout.

**Key words:** Occupational stress, physical education, pandemic

### 1. Introduction

This research determines the impact caused by stress to teachers of three educational institutions in the city of Quito generated in times of pandemic, to know how is the lifestyle of the teacher in their working hours and their free time, as well as to know the state of mind in which they are in times of confinement at the time of exercising their duties.

In the year 2020, life changed completely in all aspects of our daily lives, going from a social life where one could share with others without fear to a life immersed in virtuality. Thus, personal, family, work and educational relationships took an unexpected turn and consequently forced to adapt to a new reality. The pandemic in the educational field did not go unnoticed, since teachers and students had to take on a new challenge and adapt their classes through a computer.

But this new reality also brought with it new problems ranging from depression, anxiety, sedentary lifestyle, illnesses that have had a negative influence not only on children, older adults but also on students and teachers.

The teaching function is one of the professions with the greatest impact on human development. They are in charge of the dynamics and practice of the transmission of knowledge, and in this process not only the different contents of each specialty are communicated, since they are mediated by the human being, "bio-psycho-social entity, in the teaching function", which implies that diverse psycho-social and cultural elements are manifested in the educational process and in the teacher-student interaction (Gutierrez, 2016). There is no doubt that all that has been experienced and continues to be experienced in the world, the stress produced by a global pandemic and that many teachers may have been affected in their work is educational.

Nowadays, stress has become a health problem that affects employees in all areas of the workplace. In this context, the World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that stress is one of the most serious health problems in the

world (OMS, 2019), and sets out relevant principles, objectives and strategies to promote mental health through the Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health (2008-2017) and the Mental Health Action Plan (2013-2020). Currently, there is evidence of a considerable number of teachers who show discomfort towards the educational units in which they work for various reasons, among which are the working conditions on virtuality, which is the most shocking for this group of teachers and the pressure to which they are exposed daily. This condition results in stress, psychological crises and lack of motivation, a problem that has a direct impact on the quality of education, since virtuality, in addition to causing stress in the teacher, also causes the desire to teach classes well, and for this reason there is less interest in the students and negative attitudes towards their co-workers. All this hinders the proper functioning of the educational units in which they work (OMS, 2009).

Within the educational context in the city of Quito - Ecuador, there has been no research on the suffering of work stress in physical education teachers at primary level, in any educational institution of the city, being part of this circuit, research was conducted in 3 educational units of fiscal support, where there is a heavy workload, excessive use of the computer, a high administrative demand, through the preparation of reports, applications, meetings, attention to parents, among other activities which subject the teacher to be vulnerable to suffer work stress.

Based on the above considerations, the objective of this research is to detect the work-related stress suffered by physical education teachers in three educational units in the city of Quito.

It is of utmost importance for the researchers to be able to study the stress levels of the teaching staff of the Educational Units, which are detected by the Maslach questionnaire, which will serve to socialize with all the teachers surveyed, and thus be able to avoid this disease that plagues the population studied because of confinement.

Faced with this problem, this research is supported and justified by the following bases of the (Ministry of Education, 2017), Physical Education, as part of the educational system in Ecuador, assumes the mission of: "Incorporating culturally significant physical activity in the integral formation of the citizen, so that its regular, healthy and responsible practice contributes to their individual and collective realization in the framework of good living". And through Art. 89.- Recreation. - Recreation shall include all physical and recreational activities that use free time in a planned manner, seeking a biological and social balance in the achievement of better health and quality of life. These activities include those organized and executed by neighborhood and parochial, urban and rural sports.

## **2. Work Stress**

(Marente, 2016) states that Job stress has a different manifestation in each person, however, in teachers it has an impact on physical and mental health. The teacher who suffers work stress may show symptoms such as fatigue, depression, difficulty in concentrating and making decisions, difficulty in sleeping, irritability, anguish, moodiness and hypersensitivity to criticism; as a consequence, he/she may stop enjoying his/her work and decrease his/her commitment to it, thus affecting his/her work performance.

Teacher stress can be defined as the experience of negative and unpleasant emotions, such as anger, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness, resulting from some aspect of the teacher's job and accompanied by physiological and biochemical changes. (Sánchez Mendías, 2007).

Job stress is the reaction an individual may have to job demands and pressures that are not commensurate with his or her knowledge and abilities, and that test his or her ability to cope. Although stress can occur in a wide variety of work situations, it is often aggravated when the employee feels that he or she does not receive sufficient support from supervisors and colleagues, and when he or she has limited control over his or her work or the way in which he or she can cope with work demands and pressures (Leka, Griffiths, & Cox, 2004).

However, (Guitart, 2012) stress is a disease that disturbs people worldwide. In Ecuador, studies have been carried out on the effects it can have on work performance, discovering that a stressed worker's productivity decreases, presenting symptoms such as irritability, tiredness, fatigue, lack of concentration, among others; in the teaching work environment, the effects are not only physical but also psychological, generating consequences such as loss of productivity and effects on family and work interactions.

Teacher stress can be defined as the experience of negative and unpleasant emotions, such as anger, frustration, anxiety, depression, and nervousness, resulting from some aspect of the teacher's job (Kyriyaku, 2003).

Many studies on work stress and its consequences date back to (Silverio, 2018) and (Gamarra, 2019) whose sole purpose was to determine whether there was a significant relationship between quality of work life and work stress in a group of teachers from educational institutions.

## **3. The Burnout Syndrome**

The term burnout was defined by (Freudenberger, 1974). According to the author, it is related to exhaustion and burnout caused by an excess of force and/or increasing demands of energy; this situation happens with a professional, who "burns out" (exhausts) and fails in his attempt to achieve his work goals. (Maslach C. y., 1977) define burnout syndrome as a state of physical and emotional exhaustion that implies a loss of interest in work, negative attitudes towards colleagues and clients and low self-esteem. For (Maslach C. J., 1996), burnout syndrome occurs with individuals who are employed by other people; this relationship generates tension.

According to (Edelwich, 1980), it is a progressive loss of energy and desire to achieve objectives, hindered by working conditions.

The Burnout syndrome in teachers is presented by the suffering of stress in such a way that (Kyriyaku, 2003) says that stress represents completely unpleasant experiences and the only occasional negative results in the work part, Kyriyaku himself states that burnout in teachers is the syndrome resulting from the prolonged suffering of teacher stress, characterized mainly by physical, emotional and attitudinal fatigue. Many researchers say that in order to eliminate stress, many physical or recreational activities should be performed in order to eliminate percentages of exhaustion and fatigue at the time of work.

From a psychosocial perspective, (Maslach C. J., 1996) consider it an inadequate response to stress that manifests itself in three aspects: physical and psychological exhaustion, cold and depersonalized attitude in dealing with others and a feeling of inadequacy in the tasks to be performed. They developed the Maslach burnout inventory test (1996), composed of three dimensions: 1) Personal realization at work, which appears as an inclination to evaluate oneself negatively in relation to oneself and one's work; 2) Emotional exhaustion, a dimension that refers to a depletion of energy and personal emotional resources as a consequence of daily contact with students; and, 3) The Depersonalization Dimension, which refers to all negative attitudes and feelings towards others, such as mistreatment or inhuman treatment.

Therefore (Rodríguez Ramírez, Guevara Araiza, & Viramontes Anaya, 2017) burnout syndrome is a response to work stress; it is an experience composed of negative cognitions, emotions and attitudes towards work and people related to their work. This disease has been detected as a risk for professions related to working with individuals, such as education, health and human resources. Teaching is recognized as a job prone to develop this phenomenon, since it involves performing various activities inside and outside the classroom, ranging from interacting with colleagues and students, to develop curricular planning, evaluations and participate in organizational activities. By combining the aforementioned factors with poor working conditions, such as the overload of students in the virtual classroom, which generates learning problems, all these factors or components generate a labor surplus, one of the main causes of burnout syndrome, which manifests itself in physical, psychological and social problems for the teacher with chronic fatigue (professional burnout).

#### **4. Virtual Education in times of Pandemic**

In December 2019, a clinical picture composed of severe progressive respiratory disturbance, fevers, myalgias, and fatigue that will later be named COVID-19, caused by a new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), was first reported in Wuhan, China, and has rapidly spread to all continents (Li Q, 2020) & (Xiao, 2020). It has generated the world's largest outbreak of atypical pneumonia. For (Hawryluck L, 2004), this was the worldwide cause of confinement and that people's lives in all fields of work change drastically, subjecting themselves to confinement and working from home virtually.

The education system is going through a momentous time. In most parts of the world, schools and universities are closed. According to a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020), some 185 countries suspended classes throughout their territory plus others that suspended partially. In total, more than 1.5 billion students were affected. That figure represents 90% of the global student population (UNESCO, 2020). School closures are justified as an effective non-clinical measure against pandemics that slows down their progress, as their spread in children is greater than in adults (COTEC, 2020).

This is a time when it is necessary to make an analysis of the ways to carry out online education processes in the COVID-19 era. Many higher education institutions are working hard to try to sustain learning processes by applying approaches based on the virtualization of some of their activities, in most cases applying remote learning based on videoconferencing (Hodges, 2020).

It is also necessary to mention that online education has caused very negative impacts to all teachers who have never adapted to technology, not only to classroom teachers but also to teachers who teach physical education, that is why (García Peñalvo & Seoane Pardo, 2020) define and clarify the concepts related to online education and virtuality, since the "emergency education" that is being carried out does not always represent the modality, also producing a "perfect storm" as far as online evaluation is concerned.

It is important to mention that the beginning of the virtualization of teaching-learning processes does not begin with this problem of COVID-19. Nowadays people talk about situations called "Education in emergency", "Pregnancy blackout" (Llorens Faraón, 2020), which have involved a new task in the teaching work, where elements of virtuality have begun to be used with the aim of not slowing down the teaching-learning processes (Llorens, 2020). This new situation of pandemic and health emergency has led many governments (IESALC, 2020) and educational institutions in particular (i.e., University of Granada, University of Salamanca, among others) to define contingency plans, in order to try to mitigate the negative consequences of non-presence in educational centers (Llorens, 2020).

Millions of teachers in this country and the world have opted for virtual education, which has had its advantages and disadvantages in young and adult teachers, showing high rates of stress during and after their work. To this end, (Cavanaugh, 2000) mentions that work stress is a type of stress associated with the work environment that can be punctual or chronic, although most cases respond to the second type mentioned above.

Throughout history, education has undergone several variations of projects, programs and pedagogical tools in the search for improving educational quality, where teachers have had to adapt to each of these changes in favor of the goals set for the benefit of students (Cuenca and Carrillo, 2017) assuming this new challenge of virtual education, which is developed in all educational platforms in the country.

According to (OMS, 2019), mental health in the workplace is beneficial, yet more than 264 million people worldwide suffer from depression, a disorder that is the leading cause of disability. Furthermore, depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy US\$ 1 trillion annually in lost productivity. On the other hand, it is well known that unemployment is a risk factor for mental health problems, while getting a job or returning to work has protective effects.

Work, for everyone, must satisfy the need to feel useful. When valuable tasks are performed, recognized and highly valued by society, the worker's self-esteem is strengthened. There must be harmony between the subject's expectations, his internalized professional ideal and the reality of what he does, which comes to him through his own cognitive evaluations and social recognition. When harmony is broken by an alteration of any of these factors, expectations are not fulfilled, the ideal is not achieved, self-esteem is damaged and feelings of frustration tinge the result (Oramas Viera, Almirall Hernandez, & Fernández, 2007).

### 5. Methodology

In order to know the stress indexes presented by the teachers in our research, an exploratory and descriptive study was carried out. The people included in the study were: 175 teachers from three educational units, 57 teachers from the first UE, 76 teachers from the second UE and 42 teachers from the third UE (Educational Unit), of which 114 were men and 61 were women.

The research project was developed through a qualitative approach, due to the need to analyze specific and in-depth information of a case that would help explain what happens with their teaching practice and additional professional activities (Guzmán Arredondo & Alvarado Cabral, 2009)

The exclusion criteria were refusal to take the survey and to participate in the study or failure to submit the completed survey. Two types of variables were studied: dependent variables and independent variables.

*Dependent variable:* It is the presence of Burnout Syndrome, which is broken down into three dimensions: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and personal fulfillment. Other dependent variables used were: presence of Burnout Syndrome, tendency to suffer Burnout Syndrome and absence of Burnout Syndrome.

*Independent variable:* The physical education teachers of the three educational Units.

The variables were obtained using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) questionnaire (Table 3). A translated and validated version of the original was used, which has already been used in several studies, especially in Spain. The research consisted of three educational units in the city of Quito, as follows:

Table 1. Number of teachers surveyed

Institutions	Men	Women	Total
Educational Unit 1	39	18	57
Educational Unit 2	51	25	76
Educational Unit 3	24	18	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>175</b>

Source: Katherine Aguilar M.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) questionnaire consists of 22 items in the form of statements on the feelings and attitudes of the professional in their work and towards students and its function is to measure professional burnout. This test aims to measure the frequency and intensity with which Burnout is suffered.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory questionnaire measures 3 aspects of the syndrome:

1. *Exhaustion or emotional exhaustion subscale.* It assesses the experience of being emotionally exhausted by the demands of work. It consists of 9 questions (1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, 20.) Maximum score 54.
2. *Depersonalization subscale.* It assesses the degree to which each person recognizes attitudes of coldness and aloofness It consists of 5 items (5, 10, 11, 15, 22.) Maximum score 30
3. *Self-fulfillment subscale.* Evaluates feelings of self-efficacy and self-fulfillment at work. It consists of 8 items (4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, 21.) Maximum score 48.

*Scale Measurement Ranges*

- 0 = Never.
- 1 = Few times a year or less.
- 2 = Once a month or less.
- 3 = A few times a month.
- 4 = Once a week.
- 5 = A few times a week.
- 6 = Every day.

Table 2. Calculation of scores

Aspect evaluated	Questions to evaluate	Total value obtained	Signs of Burnout
Emotional fatigue	1-2-3-6-8-13-14-16-20		More than 26
Depersonalization	5-10-11-15-22		More than 9
Personal realization	4-7-9-12-17-18-19-21		Less than 34

Source: Maslach Burnout Questionnaire

### Rating Scores

High scores on the first two subscales and low scores on the third define Burnout Syndrome. It is necessary to analyze in detail the different aspects to determine the degree of Burnout Syndrome, which can be more or less severe depending on whether the signs appear in one, two or three areas; and on the greater or lesser difference of the results with respect to the reference values that mark the signs of the syndrome. This analysis of aspects and items can provide guidance on the strengths and weaknesses of each individual in his or her teaching work.

Table 3. Burnout Questionnaire Questions

- 0 = Never
- 1 = Few times a year
- 2 = Once a month or less
- 3 = A few times a month
- 4 = Once a week
- 5 = A few times a week
- 6 = Every day

1	I feel emotionally drained by my work.
2	I feel tired at the end of the workday.
3	When I get up in the morning and face another workday, I feel fatigued.
4	I have a good understanding of how my students feel.
5	I feel that I am treating some students as if they were impersonal objects.
6	I feel that working with students all day long is very demanding and tires me out.
7	I feel that I deal very effectively with my students' problems.
8	I feel that my job is wearing me out. I feel burned out by my work.
9	I feel that I am positively influencing my students' lives through my work.
10	I have become more insensitive to people since I have been in the teaching profession.
11	I think this job is hardening me emotionally.
12	I feel very energetic in my work.
13	I feel frustrated in my work.
14	I think I work too much.
15	I don't really care what happens to some of my students.
16	Working directly with students causes me stress.
17	I feel that I can easily create a pleasant atmosphere with my students.
18	I feel motivated after working in contact with students.
19	I feel that I get a lot of valuable things out of this job.
20	I feel finished in my job, at the limit of my possibilities.
21	In my job I deal with emotional problems very calmly.
22	I think the students blame me for some of their problems.

Source: Maslach Burnout Questionnaire

Given the great complexity of the syndrome, concepts such as boredom (Pines, 1998) depression (Iacovides, 2003) job stress (Maslach, 2001) and job dissatisfaction (Leiter, 2001), among other possible responses to stress (tension, anxiety, conflict, fatigue, pressure, nervousness, boredom, physical and psychological exhaustion, alienation,

fatigue, existential neurosis, helplessness, disenchantment, etc.) have often been linked to it, either directly or in an overlapping manner.

**6. Results and Discussion**

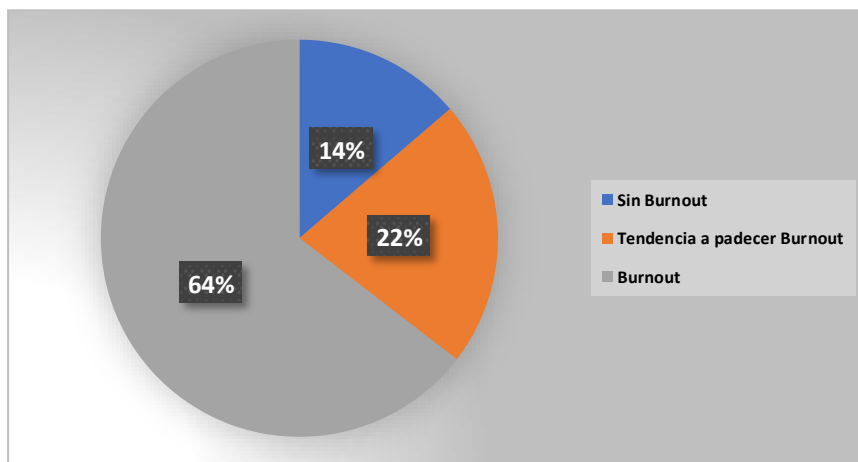
The results show that many teachers suffered from Burnout Syndrome, which evidenced that (64%) of 113 teachers had a very high level of burnout, (22%) with 38 teachers who presented a medium level and 24 teachers with a low level representing (14%) and who did not suffer from Burnout.

Table 4. Distribution according to Burnout Stage

Details	N	%
Without Burnout	24	14%
Tendency to Burnout	38	22%
Burnout	113	64%

Author: Katherine Aguilar

Graph 1. Distribution according to Burnout Stage



Author: Katherine Aguilar

As for the subscales, the most affected was Emotional Fatigue with 64%, followed by Depersonalization with 53%. Therefore, the least affected dimension was Personal Accomplishment, with 13% (23 persons) as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Scales scores

Aspect Evaluated	Low		Mean		High	
Emotional Fatigue	24	14%	38	22%	113	64%
Depersonalization	42	24%	40	23%	92	53%
Personal Realization	88	50%	64	37%	23	13%

Author: Katherine Aguilar

The results obtained in this research show that the most affected dimension was Emotional Fatigue (EF). Some studies consulted reflect that the dimension affected in most cases is Emotional Fatigue, with a minimal difference to the dimension of Depersonalization (D) and in this case Personal Fulfillment (PR) had a very low impact and therefore yields minimal values.

Regarding the presence of burnout among physical education teachers in three elementary school units, results similar to those reported by (Aldrete, 2003) in the city of Guadalajara found that 80% of teachers had high and medium levels of burnout. In our research, carried out in the city of Quito, it was possible to confirm the presence of the syndrome in the majority of the population (64% and 53%) at high levels. Regarding the dimensions that constitute burnout, personal fatigue and depersonalization, while personal fulfillment had low indexes.

Apparently, the fact that a teacher suffers from burnout does not have an impact on school learning, but it does have an impact on his or her participation in activities organized by the school and on his or her attendance to refresher courses. The Emotional Fatigue dimension correlated highly (64%) with teacher participation in school activities.

When observing the scores achieved by teachers in the three dimensions of burnout, it is worth noting that 53% of the teaching staff presents high levels in the item of Depersonalization, a dimension that indicates negative, distant and cold attitudes, feelings and responses towards the students in their charge. This condition deserves special attention because the negative attitudes of teachers towards students could negatively affect their motivation towards the Educational Unit and towards learning.

It can also be said that depersonalization is the only element that correlates negatively with low student achievement (Rionda Arjona & Mares Cárdenas, 2002). This could be derived from the distant and cold attitudes that teachers have towards their students, which implies a lack of interest of teachers in the learning of schoolchildren.

## 7. Conclusions

In general, the results obtained in this research were significant in terms of the presence of burnout in teachers, but this does not directly affect the students, since these are symptoms that can be corrected with the passing of time, through corrective actions taken by the directors of the three educational units.

Knowing that burnout is not a current issue but it is a very broad approach in educational units where this questionnaire is applied or educational institutions where it can be performed, it is a very fast and effective way to detect in time this problem in teachers and thus provide corrective actions in them.

Virtual education or online education requires that teachers know the technological tools effectively, but it is not enough to master them, but also to rethink and redesign teaching-learning strategies, especially in physical education teachers, although in this environment there is a large percentage of students who can connect to the class, but there is also a minimum percentage who cannot attend their virtual classes, all which generates that the teacher cannot perform his class 100%, and these are the reasons that also generate burnout in the researched population.

In populations of teachers with these characteristics, it is necessary to direct efforts towards the development of intervention programs that help to reduce the high levels of burnout shown by teachers, especially working with teachers who show medium and high degrees of depersonalization.

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