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Increased risk of burnout among psychologists after all waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. Prospective study.

Summary

Introduction: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the social and medical role of psychologists has become to help societies adapt to unexpected and sudden life changes. The need to switch from personal to remote contacts in the work environment, combining professional duties with private life and the growing number of psychopathological symptoms in patients became a source of overload, the level of which was compared in studies even to doctors treating COVID-19. The aim of the study was to show trends in changes in the reactions and working conditions of psychologists during the pandemic in the context of burnout risk factors.

Material and methods: Data was collected for 5 waves of the pandemic in Poland. The online questionnaire was placed on the website of the Polish Psychiatric Association, and the number of respondents was decreasing (I- 341, II- 123, III- 118, IV- 67, V- 61). On the basis of the obtained data, trends in subjective mental state were studied.

Results: A study in a group of psychologists showed a trend of increasing subjective stress, depressed mood and lowered energy levels after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, up to the highest levels in the third wave. Subsequently, the trend in these areas decreased. Stress and depressed mood accompanied the respondents at a disturbingly high level also in wave V. Deterioration of various aspects of sleep and an increase in the tendency to psychogenic overeating took place during the periods of greatest stress during successive waves with a clear tendency to withdraw after the third wave of SARS-CoV- 2.

Conclusions: The subjective mental state of psychologists was deteriorating depending on the increase in the number of SARS-CoV-2 infections in Poland until the third wave. Then it improved, although in the 5th wave, high percentages in the area of stress and depressed mood were still worrying. Everything that the subjects experienced and high level of subjectively experienced stress in the last wave may result in burnout. Further research and prevention of burnout are necessary.

Key words: psychologists, COVID-19 pandemic, mental state, burnout, lockdown