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Original research article

BURNOUT IN SECONDARY SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHING

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Michael Spittle¹, Peter Kremer², Steven Sullivan³

¹College of Sport and Exercise Science, Victoria University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia ²School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, Australia ³Chritian College, Geelong, Victoria, Australia

Abstract. This study examined the levels of burnout among secondary school physical education teachers. Specifically, it tested whether levels of burnout differed for teachers according to their age and gender. A cross-sectional survey of 49 (41% male) physical education teachers, aged 25 to 63 (M = 37.0, SD = 8.7 yrs), was used to collect personal and school specific information and reported levels of burnout on dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and personal accomplishment using the Maslach Burnout Inventor. The results indicated that overall, physical education teachers reported moderate, low and low-moderate levels of burnout on emotional exhaustion (M 21.0), depersonalisation (M = 4.7), and personal accomplishment (M = 38.6) dimensions respectively. Burnout scores did not differ for gender and only scores on the personal accomplishment dimension differed for age, with younger teachers reporting lower levels of accomplishment, indicative of higher burnout. No significant Gender x Age Group interactions were observed for either the emotional exhaustion or personal accomplishment dimensions but the effect was significant for the depersonalisation dimension; younger male teachers reported higher scores (moderate level) for depersonalisation than older male teachers (low level), while both younger and older female teachers reported equally low scores (low levels). The findings indicate that younger physical education teachers experience moderate levels of burnout and this seems to be particularly true for young male teachers. The training of physical education teachers should consider how to best prepare teachers to cope with the demands they face as they move into teaching.

Key words: burnout, physical education, teaching, education, exhaustion.

Corresponding author: Michael Spittle

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College of Sport and Exercise Science, Victoria University, PO Box 14428 Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 8001 Phone: 03 9919 9512 • E-mail: michael.spittle@vu.edu.a

INTRODUCTION

Burnout is broadly defined as a chronic state of exhaustion due to long-term interpersonal stress (Schwarzer, Schmitz & Tang, 2000) and is present in many helping professions (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Human service, or helping, professions refer to occupations that involve regular contact with people in a helping relationship. Studies have reported moderate to high levels of burnout among human service professions including clinical psychologists (e.g., Ackerley, Burnell, Holder, & Kurdek, 1988; Skorupa & Agresti 1993), school counsellors (e.g., Butler & Constantine, 2005), nurses (e.g., Duquette, Kerouac, Sandhu & Beauder, 1994; Sadovich, 2005), care providers (e.g., Maslanka, 1996), athletic trainers (e.g., Walter, Van Lunen, Walker, Ismaeli, & Onate, 2009), and sport coaches (e.g., Kelley, Eklund & Ritter-Taylor, 1999; Kelley & Gill, 1993). The effects of burnout are also felt within the teaching profession (e.g., Hock, 1988; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996; Schwarzer et al., 2000). Teaching is another human service profession where staff have regular interpersonal interactions with students and colleagues. Furthermore, society has placed increased pressure on teachers to expand their roles beyond teaching, and to include other functions such as counselling students, providing additional activities such as tutoring at lunch time, and meeting the individual needs of students with a wide range of abilities making teachers susceptible to burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

Maslach & Jackson (1986) have distinguished three specific components of burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and personal accomplishment, and developed an instrument to measure and classify scores on these components. Emotional exhaustion is often referred to as the stress component of burnout and involves feelings of being emotionally over-extended and depleted, including feelings of depleted emotional resources, fatigue, depletion, loss of energy, and generally being worn out (Schwab, 2001). Depersonalisation is the over-evaluation component. It is described as cynicism, irritability, loss of idealism, negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people (e.g., colleagues and students). Personal accomplishment is the self-evaluative component and refers to feelings of reduced self-efficacy, reduced productivity or capability, low morale, and an inability to cope with job demands. It represents a decline in one's feelings of competence and achievement at work (Schwarzer et al., 2000).

Physical education forms a fundamental component of the secondary school curriculum. Since the environment in which physical education classes are conducted can be unpredictable (e.g., classes involving potentially dangerous activities such as gymnastics and contact sports), physical education teachers may be exposed to stressors idiosyncratic to their work. Thus, physical education teachers experience a different working environment to other teaching disciplines (Tsigilis, Zournatzi & Koustelios, 2011). Further, in Australia physical education teachers are expected to coach school sporting teams and supervise outdoor education activities, which may also increase levels of stress and precipitate feelings of burnout. In addition, at some schools they may be required to organise and coordinate weekend sport. Although burnout is a potential issue for physical education teachers, and although there is an extensive literature that focuses on burnout among teachers, the issue of burnout among secondary school physical education teachers has received little attention (Brouwers, Tomic, & Boluijt, 2011; Tsigilis et al., 2011). Little is known of the factors that may moderate burnout experiences among these specialist teachers.

There is some research with primary school physical education teachers. For example, Fejgin, Talmor & Erlich (2005) investigated levels of burnout among elementary school

physical education teachers in Israel and reported that burnout levels were generally low. Burnout was related to gender, but not with other personal variables such as age, marital status, number of children, education, seniority, grades taught, or additional roles in school. Tsigilis et al. (2011) compared level of burnout among primary and secondary physical education teachers in Greece. They found that primary physical education teachers reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion than secondary physical education teachers.

In the secondary school setting, Brudnik (2005) found differences in burnout between teaching disciplines in secondary teachers in Poland, with distinct differences for physical education teachers from other disciplines, suggesting that there may be unique characteristics for this discipline area. Physical education teachers had the highest percentage of non-burned out (48.4%), but also burned out (17.1%) teachers when compared with other disciplines. They were less likely to be partially burned out (high on one or two dimensions of burnout). Brudnik (2010) re-analysed the same data and suggested that physical education teachers developed burnout in a manner that is different to teachers in other disciplines. For example, female physical education teachers tended to react to discipline issues with reduced personal accomplishment and to aggressive behaviour with emotional exhaustion. Male physical education teachers tended to experience depersonalisation towards difficult students.

Brouwers, Tomic, and Boluijt (2011) reported moderate levels of emotional exhaustion, low levels of depersonalisation, and high levels of personal accomplishment among secondary school physical education teachers in the Netherlands. Other studies among secondary school physical education teachers have reported moderate levels of burnout. For example, moderate levels of burnout have been reported among secondary school physical education teachers in Israel (Fejgin, Epharty & Ben-Sira, 1995) and in Singapore (Smith & Leng, 2003). Findings from a study of secondary school physical education teachers in Greece indicated burnout levels in the low range (Koustelious & Tsigillis, 2005). Similarly other studies among secondary level teacher-coaches in Canada (Quigley, Slack & Smith, 1987) and the US (Sisley, Capel & Desertrain, 1987) have also reported low levels of burnout. Few studies have explored burnout among secondary school physical education teachers in Australia.

It is conceivable that for physical education teaching, more experienced or older teachers may exhibit burnout in different ways than the younger, less experienced teachers. Whipp, Tan & Yeo (2007) described that experienced physical education teachers cited a lack of opportunity to participate in decision-making, limited professional respect, untenable workloads, intensity of demands, lack of intellectual challenge and direction, and politicking as reasons for leaving the profession. This is in contrast to the stresses often mentioned by beginner physical education teachers such as discipline and student management and day-today lesson planning (Whipp et al., 2007), meaning that the experience of burnout may be different for more and less experienced physical education teachers. It may also be that gender influences burnout in secondary school physical education teachers. In primary school physical education teachers, Feigin et al. (2005) found that gender was the only demographic variable that influenced burnout, with men reporting more feelings of lack of fulfilment and depersonalisation. Although age and gender may be variables associated with burnout, there is a dearth of research on personal characteristics associated with burnout in physical education teachers. Findings from a recent study, however, revealed no relationship between age, gender, or years teaching with level of burnout among secondary school physical education teachers in Singapore (Smith & Leng, 2003).

Physical education teachers, especially, seem to face unique challenges in their discipline (Whipp et al., 2007), including the perceived low status of physical education in schools,

M. SPITTLE, P. KREMER, S. SULLIVAN

physical isolation within a school, personal and professional scrutiny, reduced support from administrators and school staff, and a lack of resources or specialist teaching spaces (MacDonald, 1993, 1995; MacDonald & Kirk, 1996; Schempp & Graber, 1992; Smyth, 1995; Whipp, et al., 2007). There is a perceived shortage of personnel, esteem, equipment, and educational material (Kougioumtzis, Patriksson & Strahlman, 2011). Physical education teaching places high mental and physical demands on physical education teachers, with high levels of effort and energy required (Whipp et al., 2007). This may be draining after longer periods of time, meaning that physical education teachers may have a "use-by-date" (Whipp et al., 2007). There are high attrition rates in physical education teaching in Australia (MacDonald, Hutchins & Madden, 1994), and burnout may be one of a number of contributing factors. Teachers experiencing symptoms of burnout may leave the profession (Hock, 1998), or become distanced from their work (Schwarzer et al., 2000), demoralised, or not invested in the teaching role (Capel, 1993).

Burnout is a significant problem within the teaching profession. Most of the existing teacher burnout research has focused on generalist teachers rather than physical education teachers and few studies have come from Australia. The purpose of this study was to investigate burnout among secondary school physical education teachers. Specifically, it aimed to determine whether reported levels of burnout were consistent with those previously reported for secondary school physical education teachers, and to examine whether levels of burnout differ for personal variables such as age and gender.

THE METHOD

Participants

Surveys were distributed to 250 physical education teachers, with 49 responses, representing a response rate of 19.6%. Participants were 20 male and 29 female, physical education teachers aged between 25 and 63 years (M = 37 yrs, SD = 8.7). Just over half (51%) of the participants were employed at regional schools and most of them (61%) were non coeducational schools, with student numbers ranging from 50 - 1500 (M = 965.5, SD = 54.9). Participants reported that they had been teaching from 1 - 40 years (M = 14.5 yrs, SD = 8.9), were spending between 3 and 45 hours each week doing face-to-face teaching (M = 21.5 hrs/week, SD = 9.3) and all reported that they had extracurricular involvement at the school where they worked.

Measures

A questionnaire survey was used to capture demographic information and experiences of burnout. Demographic information was obtained for personal information (e.g., age, gender) including work experience (e.g., years teaching, time spent teaching each week), and workplace (e.g., type of school, size and location of school) factors. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson 1981) was used to measure teacher burnout. The MBI has three subscales and comprises 22 items, rated using a 7-point Likert scale (0 = never, 6 = every day) (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). The emotional exhaustion subscale consists of 9 items (range: 0 - 54) such as "I feel emotionally drained from my work"; the depersonalisation subscale consists of 5 items (range: 0 - 30) such as "I have become more callous toward people since I took this job"; and the personal accomplishment subscale consists of 8 items

(range: 0 - 48) such as "I deal very effectively with the problems of my students. Maslach et al. (1996) have reported that the MBI has good convergent and discriminant validity and others have reported test-retest reliability to be moderately high (Lee & Ashforth, 1993). Each subscale has good internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha: .emotional exhaustion = .90; depersonalisation = .79; personal accomplishment = .71; Maslach et al., 1996) and similar Alpha coefficients were obtained for the current study (emotional exhaustion .89; depersonalisation .76; personal accomplishment .76). Norms that can be used to classify scores (low, moderate, high) on each subscale are also available (Maslach et al., 1996).

Procedure

Ethics approval was provided by a University Human Research Ethics Committee and the Catholic Education Office Archdiocese of Melbourne. Individual schools also consented to participate in the study. Participating schools received a survey bundle that included the instructions, copies of the questionnaire, and envelopes for survey return. The principals distributed the surveys to physical education teachers within their school. Individual teachers read the information sheet and then chose whether or not to participate. All of the surveys were anonymous and could not be linked to an individual or a school.

Design and data analysis

The study was a cross-sectional survey design. The dependent variables were the total scores on the three MBI subscales (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, personal accomplishment) and the independent variables were the age and gender of the respondents. The total scores for each subscale were computed by summing scores on the corresponding items. Higher scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation subscales represented higher levels of burnout while higher scores on the personal accomplishment subscale represented higher levels of accomplishment and lower levels of burnout. Individual scores on the three subscales were then also categorised (low, moderate, high) using the cut-off values reported by Maslach et al. (1996). Descriptive statistics (means, proportions) were computed for the demographic measures. Means were computed for the three MBI subscales for the total sample and for age and gender subgroups. The multivariate ANOVA was used to test for age and gender differences on the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment subscale scores. For these analyses, age was categorized as ≤ 35 or > 35. The size of effects was evaluated using Cohen's d statistic. All of the analyses were performed using SPSS (version 17) with significance set at p < .05 for all the effects.

RESULTS

The mean scores for the emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and personal accomplishment subscales for the sample and for gender by age subgroups are presented in Table 1. The proportion of participants categorised as low, moderate or high is shown in Figure 1. Over half of the participants reported moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion, and most reported low levels of depersonalisation, although approximately 10% reported high levels of depersonalisation. A majority of participants reported low to moderate levels of personal accomplishment, indicative of moderate to high levels of burnout.

M. SPITTLE, P. KREMER, S. SULLIVAN

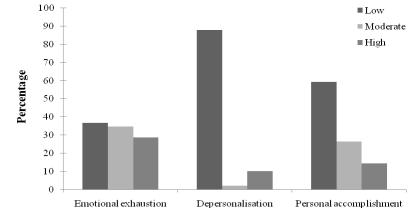


Fig. 1 The proportion of the sample indicated as low, moderate, high on the emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment MBI subscales.

The MANOVA indicated no multivariate effect for Gender ($\lambda = 2.5, p > .05$) or Age Group ($\lambda = 2.6, p > .05$) but a significant Gender × Age Group interaction ($\lambda = 3.5, p < .05$). The results for univariate effects indicated no effect for Gender on the emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, or personal accomplishment variables. There were no Age Group effects for the emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation variables; however, scores on the personal accomplishment variable were different (F(1,45) = 5.3, p < .05); younger participants (M = 36.2, SD = 6.6) reported lower levels of personal accomplishment than older participants (M = 40.7, SD = 4.5, d = 0.8). There was no significant Gender × Age Group effect for the emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment variables, although the latter approached significance (p = .08). There was a significant Gender × Age Group effect for the depersonalisation variable (F(1,45) = 4.5, p < .05), younger males reported higher levels depersonalisation than older males (d = 0.9), while both younger and older females reported low levels of depersonalisation (d = 0.2) (see Table 1).

	All	Male		Female	
		\leq 35 yrs	> 35 yrs	\leq 35 yrs	> 35 yrs
	(<i>n</i> = 49)	(<i>n</i> = 8)	(<i>n</i> = 12)	(<i>n</i> = 15)	(<i>n</i> = 14)
MBI subscale					
Emotional exhaustion	21.0	19.0	17.9	21.3	24.5
	(9.8)	(10.6)	(10.7)	(8.1)	(1.0)
Depersonalisation	4.7	8.3	3.6	3.7	4.5
	(4.5)	(6.5)	(3.8)	(3.2)	(4.5)
Personal accomplishment	38.6	39.6	40.4	34.3	40.9
	(6.0)	(5.0)	(4.5)	(6.8)	(4.7)

 Table 1
 Mean (SD) Burnout scores (Maslach burnout inventory) for gender and age subgroups

Notes. Higher scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation subscales indicate higher levels of burnout; higher scores on the personal accomplishment subscale indicate higher levels of accomplishment and lower levels of burnout

DISCUSSION

This study explored levels of burnout among Australian secondary physical education teachers. The findings show that over half of the physical education teachers surveyed reported experiencing moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion and low levels of personal accomplishment. Most reported low levels of depersonalisation but a small percentage reported high levels of depersonalisation. Younger physical education teachers. There was a significant interaction effect for depersonalisation with younger male physical education teachers reporting higher depersonalisation than older male physical education teachers, and both younger and older female physical education teachers reporting low levels of depersonalisation.

The levels of burnout reported by the secondary school physical education teachers in the current study were generally higher than those reported in the limited previous research including physical education teachers, which have generally reported low to moderate levels of burnout (e.g., Brouwers, Tomic, & Bolujit, 2011; Fejgin et al., 1995; Fejgin et al., 2005; Koustelious & Tsigillis, 2005; Smith & Leng, 2003; Tsigilis et al, 2011). These other studies were conducted in countries other than Australia, so there may be different factors contributing to higher levels of burnout in Australia.

The physical education teachers reported high levels of emotional exhaustion; this may be due to the unique stressors placed upon the secondary school physical education teacher (Brudnik, 2005). In their study of secondary school physical education teachers in the Netherlands, Brouwers, Tomic, and Boluijt (2011) reported that emotional exhaustion was the highest reported burnout variable, albeit in the moderate range. Thus, it may be that stress is a common burnout issue for secondary school physical education teachers. The increasing societal pressures on teachers to expand their roles beyond teaching may be a particular stressor leading to emotional exhaustion and burnout seen in teaching (Maslach et al., 2001) and perhaps this is even more so in physical education, with its additional demands (Brudnik, 2005; Tsigilis et al., 2011). Levels of depersonalisation were generally low, and this appears consistent with the previous literature in physical education by its interactive and active nature helps teachers remain involved with other people and not become too detached. Nevertheless, the findings did indicate that younger male teachers reported higher levels of depersonalisation, although it is unclear why this would be the case.

Feelings of personal accomplishment were low in the sample, which reflects the feelings of reduced self-efficacy, reduced productivity or capability, low morale, and an inability to cope with job demands. This reduced personal accomplishment may be an indicator of some of the challenges in physical education teaching, including the perceived low status of physical education, physical isolation, personal and professional scrutiny, reduced support from administrators and school staff, and a lack of personnel, resources or specialist teaching spaces (Kougioumtzis et al., 2011; MacDonald, 1993, 1995; MacDonald & Kirk, 1996; Schempp & Graber, 1992; Smyth, 1995; Whipp, et al., 2007). These low levels of personal accomplishment were not reported by Brouwers, Tomic, and Boluijt, (2011) in their study on secondary physical education teachers in the Netherlands. The inconsistency of the findings related to personal accomplishment might be due to differences in the sample characteristics (e.g., age of the study participants) and other contextual factors specific to Australia; however, this would require further research.

The low levels of personal accomplishment were particularly evident in younger physical education teachers. Younger physical education teachers reported significantly lower personal accomplishment than older physical education teachers. This is clearly the consequence of the fact that a lack of personal accomplishment early in a career may be a demotivating factor. Identifying why younger teachers reported experiencing lower personal accomplishment seems an important undertaking for those involved in physical education teacher education. Although not age-specific, Whipp et al. (2007) reported differences in stressors for beginner and experienced teachers, with experienced physical education teachers citing a lack of opportunity to participate in decision-making, limited professional respect, untenable workloads, intensity of demands, lack of intellectual challenge and direction, and politicking as stressors, and beginner teachers citing discipline and student management and day-to-day lesson planning as issues. These different stressors may relate to different perceptions of self-efficacy, productivity or capability, and the ability to cope with job demands, as well as feelings of competence and achievement for younger and older teachers and may explain some differences in the perceptions of personal accomplishment. An alternative explanation for the differences in personal accomplishment between younger and older secondary school physical education teachers is dropping out from the profession. The younger teachers may be reporting lower personal accomplishment because the older teachers in the sample are those who have experienced some personal accomplishment and consequently have remained in the profession, whereas those who experienced low levels of accomplishment may have already dropped out. Burnout scores for emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation did not differ in terms of the teacher's age, indicating that these variables may be less strongly tied to age than feelings of personal accomplishment.

There was a significant interaction effect for depersonalisation, with younger male physical education teachers reporting higher levels than older male physical education teachers, and both younger and older female physical education teachers reporting low levels of depersonalisation. The experience of younger male physical education teachers who reported higher depersonalisation than older male physical education teachers is a concern. This detached response by younger male teachers may be a mechanism of coping with the demands of the job. This may be related to the different stressors for beginner and experienced teachers (Whipp et al., 2007) discussed previously, with beginner teachers feeling that day-to-day lesson planning, discipline and student management were issues for them. Brudnik (2010), in a study on physical education teachers, reported that male teachers tended to experience depersonalisation towards difficult students. Depersonalisation may be an approach used by younger male physical education teachers to deal with student management and discipline issues, especially with more difficult students. Research that investigates this speculation may add to our understanding of the experience of the contextual factors influencing younger or beginner male physical education teachers.

The low levels of depersonalisation for younger and older female secondary school physical education teachers may also be due to the way that they deal with stressors, in that they experience more emotional exhaustion and lower personal accomplishment, rather than depersonalisation. For example, Brudnik (2010) reported that female physical education teachers tended to react to discipline issues with reduced personal accomplishment, and to aggressive behaviour with emotional exhaustion. Further research exploring how discipline-related issues and gender-specific factors influence

burnout in physical education teaching may add to our understanding of the burnout experience in the physical education teaching profession.

This study was the first study of burnout among Australian secondary physical education teachers using a validated instrument to measure burnout, and has provided a number of interesting findings regarding the levels of reported burnout and the differences between age and gender. Nevertheless, the findings need to be interpreted in light of a number of limitations. The sample size was small; ideally larger samples are needed for future studies. We used a convenience sample drawn from two regions in one Australian state and the response rate was low; therefore, the sample may not represent the wider physical education teaching population. In addition, because teachers feeling high levels of burnout may leave the teaching profession, therefore, it is possible this study did not include teachers with particularly high levels of burnout due to the possibility they had already left the profession. It is also likely those physical education teachers, feeling the symptoms of burnout, may not have the time to complete the survey, as they may be too busy and emotionally drained. Because of its cross-sectional design, with a mail survey conducted at one stage of the year, only a snapshot of burnout at one time is presented. It is possible that feelings of burnout will vary depending on the time of the year.

As physical education teachers were experiencing moderate to high levels of burnout, consideration of strategies to reduce burnout should occur. This increased burnout can have effects on physical education teachers, but also on the educational experience these teachers can offer their students. Burnout was more frequently reported by younger teachers, with younger male physical education teachers reporting higher depersonalisation than older male physical education teachers, and both younger and older female physical education teachers reporting low levels of depersonalisation. Because of the higher levels in younger physical education teachers, the training of physical education teachers should consider how to best prepare teachers to cope with the demands they face as they move into teaching. At the same time, educational departments and schools should consider how structural and systemic changes could be implemented to ensure that these staff can be better supported.

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SINDROM SAGOREVANJA NA POSLU NA PRIMERU NASTAVNIKA FIZIČKOG OBRAZOVANJA KOJI RADE U SREDNJIM ŠKOLAMA

U ovom istraživanju bavili smo se sindromom sagorevanja na poslu (engl. burnout) na primeru nastavnika fizičkog obrazovanja koji rade u srednjim školama. Testirali smo da li se stepen sagorevanja razlikuje od nastavnika do nastavnika na osnovu njihovih godina i pola. Ispitivanjem 49 (41% muškaraca) nastavnika fizičkog obrazovanja, starosti 25 do 63 god. (M = 37.0, SD = 8.7god), prikupljeni su podaci vezani sa svakodnevni život i rad ovih nastavnika kao i podaci vezani za stepen sagorevanja na poslu, i to u vidu emotivne iscrpljenosti, depersonalizacije, i osećanja ličnog uspeha. U tu svrhu primenili smo Maslach Burnout Inventor. Rezultati su pokazali da, uopšte gledano, nastavnici fizičkog obrazovanja navodili srednje, niske i niske/srednje nivoe sagorevanja na poslu u vidu emotivne iscrpljenosti (M = 21.0), depersonalizacije (M = 4.7), i osećanja ličnog uspeha (M = 38.6), tim redosledom. Vrednosti sagorevanja nisu se razlikovale među polovima, i jedino su vrednosti za osećanje ličnog uspeha varirale u odnosu na godine starosti, pri čemu su mlađi nastavnici prikazivali niske stope vrednosti za osećanje ličnog uspeha, što ukazuje na veći nivo sagorevanja na poslu. Nije utvrđena značajna Pol x Starosna grupa interakcija ni za emotivnu iscrpljenost, ni za osećnjej ličnog uspeha, ali su efekti značajni za dimenziju depersonalizacije; mlađi nastavnici imali su više vrednosti (srednji nivo) depersonalizacije od starijih nastavnika (nizak nivo), dok su i mlađe i starije nastavnice imale podjednako niske vrednosti (nizak nivo). Rezultati nam govore da nastavnici fizičkog vaspitanja pokazuju umerene vrednosti sagorevanja na poslu, što se pre svega odnosi na mlade nastavnike. Obrazovanje nastavnika fizičkog obrazovanja trebalo bi da obuhvati instrukcije o tome kako da se ovi nastavnici na najbolji način izbore sa zahtevima koji su pred njima.

Ključne reči: sagorevanje na poslu, fizičko obrazovanje, nastava, obrazovanje, iscrpljenost.