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## Personality Traits and Professional Burnout of Pre-School and Early Childhood Teachers and School Counsellors. The Mediating Role of Professional Self-Efficacy

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*Cechy osobowości a wypalenie zawodowe pedagogów  
i nauczycieli przedszkolnych i wczesnoszkolnych.  
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**Abstract:** Professional burnout is a widespread phenomenon among preschool and early childhood teachers and school counsellors. Many factors predisposing to its emergence and progression are present in the nature of this profession. These include, among others, ever-increasing social expectations, a decline in the prestige of the profession, an increasing amount of bureaucratic work, heavy overload and responsibility. As a result, school counsellors and teachers may experience the chronic pressure to meet demands, while at the same time having a sense of doing important work based on helping other people. All of this, with low self-efficacy beliefs, exacerbated by parents' demanding attitudes, may translate into the occurrence of professional burnout in the described group. Consequently, professional burnout among school counsellors and teachers became the subject of a self-study. The aim of this study was to attempt to identify the relationship between personality traits and professional burnout and to determine whether self-efficacy acts as a mediator of this in relationship. Fifty-eight professionally active school counsellors and teachers participated in the study. Research tools such as the LBQ, IPIP-BFM-20, SVOSES and the author's sociodemographic survey questionnaire were used. Correlates among personality traits with such dimensions of workaholism as perceived lack of professional efficacy, psychophysical exhaustion and disillusionment were identified. Furthermore, it was revealed that self-efficacy acts as a mediator in the relationship between emotional Stability and psychophysical exhaustion of school counsellors and teachers. The study was exploratory, as no attempt has been made so far to arrangements mediators in the relationship between personality traits and burnout in the described group. Therefore, it is very important to further explore the topic undertaken.

**Keywords:** professional burnout; personality; self-efficacy; correlates; mediators; teachers; school counsellor

**Abstrakt:** Wypalenie zawodowe to zjawisko o szerokiej skali występowania w grupie pedagogów i nauczycieli przedszkolnych i wczesnoszkolnych. W pracy na tym stanowisku obecnych jest wiele czynników predestynujących do jego pojawienia się i rozwoju. Wśród nich można wymienić między innymi wciąż rosnące oczekiwania społeczne, spadek prestiżu zawodu, coraz większą ilość pracy biurokratycznej, silne przebodźcowanie i odpowiedzialność. W efekcie pedagodzy i nauczyciele mogą odczuwać chroniczną presję wymagań, jednocześnie mając poczucie wykonywania ważnej pracy, opartej na niesieniu pomocy innym ludziom. Wszystko to przy niskim przekonaniu o własnej skuteczności zawodowej, nasilanej roszczeniową postawą rodziców, może przekładać się na występowanie wypalenia zawodowego w opisywanej grupie. W związku z tym wypalenie zawodowe wśród pedagogów i nauczycieli stało się przedmiotem badania własnego. Celem opracowania było podjęcie próby określenia zależności między cechami osobowości a wypaleniem zawodowym oraz ustalenie, czy samoskuteczność pełni rolę mediatora w tej relacji. W badaniu wzięło udział 58 aktywnych zawodowo pedagogów i nauczycieli. Zastosowano takie narzędzia badawcze jak LBQ, IPIP-BFM-20, SVOSES oraz autorski kwestionariusz ankiety socjodemograficznej. Wyłoniono korelaty wśród cech osobowości z takimi wymiarami pracoholizmu jak: poczucie braku skuteczności zawodowej, wyczerpanie psychofizyczne i rozczarowanie. Ponadto ujawniono, że samoskuteczność pełni funkcję mediatora w relacji między stabilnością emocjonalną a wyczerpaniem psychofizycznym pedagogów i nauczycieli. Badanie miało charakter eksploracyjny, ponieważ jak dotąd nie podjęto prób ustalenia mediatorów w relacji cech osobowości i wypalenia zawodowego w opisywanej grupie. W związku z tym bardzo istotne jest dalsze zgłębianie podjętego tematu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wypalenie zawodowe; osobowość; poczucie własnej skuteczności; korelaty; mediatorzy; nauczyciele; doradca szkolny

## INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapid social change, global crises, and the accelerated development of modern technologies, expectations toward teachers and school counsellors are continually increasing. As a result, professional burnout in this group is no longer merely an individual issue but has become a systemic phenomenon that requires ongoing, in-depth diagnosis and an interdisciplinary research approach. Teachers – particularly those working in preschool and early childhood education – are considered among the professional groups most vulnerable to the onset and progression of professional burnout. Constant interaction with children, persistent overstimulation, and the need to regulate not only their own emotions but also those of their students are just a few of the risk factors associated with the development of work-related pathologies. Studies conducted (Federowicz et al., 2013) indicate that many Polish teachers report being overwhelmed by bureaucratic tasks that are not directly connected to educational instruction. Additionally, they point to the declining social prestige of the profession, as reflected in the lack of respect from both parents and students. Another important factor to consider is remuneration, which is widely recognized in the literature as a key contributor to the development of professional burnout (Bańka, 2000). Teachers employed in preschool and early childhood education perceive their salaries as disproportionately low and inadequate given the demands and responsibilities associated with their roles. Moreover, this profession – especially at this stage of education – is highly feminized, which means that women in these roles often face the additional

burden of balancing multiple social and professional responsibilities, such as those of employee, mother, and wife. Research conducted over the years consistently shows that teachers (Gaś, 2011; Tucholska, 2001) report chronic fatigue, psychosomatic symptoms (such as headaches and stomachaches), sleep disturbances, and decreased motivation and job satisfaction. A study on Polish preschool and early childhood teachers (Dziurzyński, 2019) found that one in three respondents reported a high level of professional burnout. These findings were corroborated by a nationwide study of teachers (Paliga, 2023), which revealed the particular prevalence of two dimensions of burnout: exhaustion and a sense of meaninglessness in their work. This is especially concerning in light of international findings, which show that Polish teachers report the lowest job satisfaction in the world (Mullis et al., 2023).

### **Theoretical foundations of the present study**

Professional burnout is a multidimensional phenomenon that has been extensively addressed in theoretical literature, with various conceptualizations differing in terms of both the dimensions and stages of the process. The most widely recognized theoretical framework is the multidimensional model of professional burnout developed by Maslach, which has undergone substantial revisions over the years, including changes in terminology and the identification of risk groups (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). Maslach defines burnout as a “psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity” (Maslach, 2020, p. 15). Despite growing criticism, this model remains the most popular worldwide and continues to serve as the basis for the development of measurement tools (Mańkowska, 2016). An expansion of the three-dimensional model to include a fourth dimension – disillusionment – was introduced by Santinello (Jaworska, 2014), drawing upon existential psychology (Pines & Aronson, 1988). He defines this additional dimension as related to existential expectations, which he argues are particularly relevant for individuals who choose helping professions. When working as a teacher, psychologist, or physician, one may exhibit a tendency to view their occupation as a mission to help others, which may, in turn, influence self-perception as a person doing good (Jaworska, 2014).

Given that many researchers over the years have investigated the correlates of professional burnout with individual-level variables such as personality (Brown et al., 2019; Cox & Ferguson, 1991; Goral & Zdun-Ryżewska, 2022; Jędrzysek-Geisler & Izdebski, 2018; Mańkowska, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Ogińska-Bulik, 2005, 2006; Pines, 1996; Sęk, 2020; Tucholska, 2009), it is worth highlighting one of the most widely accepted personality theories that underpins the current study. This is the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of Personality developed by Costa and McCrae – commonly known as the Big Five – which encompasses the following personality traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Mc-

Crae & Costa, 1987, 2005). It is important to note that, over time, in the course of numerous modifications, the names of some traits have evolved. In the literature, neuroticism is sometimes referred to by its opposite – emotional stability – and openness to experience is often used interchangeably with intellect. The model owes its global popularity to its empirically validated cross-cultural universality (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Each of the five scales measures a distinct domain: extraversion: level of activity, sociability, energy, and assertiveness; agreeableness: positive vs. negative attitude toward others; conscientiousness: level of organization, orderliness, and sense of duty; emotional stability: degree of emotional balance, resilience, and frustration tolerance; intellect: intellectual openness, imagination, and creativity (Topolewska et al., 2014). Moreover, the present study draws on the theoretical construct of self-efficacy beliefs, derived from Bandura's (1997) social-cognitive theory. This construct posits a reciprocal relationship among an individual's personal factors (emotional states and cognitive processes), behavior, and the social environment. Self-efficacy influences the actions individuals choose to pursue in order to achieve specific goals (Bandura, 1997). The researcher distinguishes between outcome expectations, which relate to the belief that a particular behavior will lead to specific results, and efficacy expectations, which concern the belief that one possesses the resources necessary to perform such behaviors. Therefore, simply knowing how to achieve a goal does not automatically translate into believing in one's ability to exert the effort needed to pursue it (Bandura, 1977). According to the researcher, individuals with high self-efficacy set ambitious goals and persist in striving to achieve them. They devote more time and energy to learning new skills and engage more actively in their tasks, believing in the likelihood of successful outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, employees with a high sense of professional self-efficacy tend to think less about work during their free time, enabling more effective rest and recovery, which are essential for meeting future challenges (Rigotti et al., 2008). Accordingly, the present study assumes that self-efficacy may act as a mediator in the relationship between personality traits and the various dimensions of professional burnout.

Given that the variables under investigation are inherently multidimensional and multifaceted, only selected theoretical models related to professional burnout and its antecedents have been presented above. These models constitute the theoretical foundation of the current study, which aimed to examine the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between personality traits and professional burnout. This specific research problem has not been previously investigated in any known scientific study. Therefore, the present research may be regarded as exploratory in nature, with the following two central research questions:

1. Does a relationship exist, and if so, of what nature, between personality and professional burnout among teachers and school counsellors?
2. Does self-efficacy serve as a mediator in the relationship between personality and professional burnout among teachers and school counsellors?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study utilized four instruments: the Link Burnout Questionnaire (LBQ), the IPIP-BFM-20 Questionnaire (Polish adaptation), the Short Version of the Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale (SVOSES), and an original sociodemographic survey.

The Link Burnout Questionnaire (LBQ), developed by Massimo Santinello and adapted to Polish by Jaworska (2014), is designed to measure professional burnout. The tool consists of 24 items, presented as statements relating to the respondent's subjective experience of their professional duties. Participants respond on a six-point scale indicating the frequency of the described feelings: never, rarely, once or more per month, approximately weekly, several times per week, and daily. The questionnaire assesses four dimensions of professional burnout: psychophysical exhaustion, lack of engagement in relationships with clients, perceived lack of professional efficacy, and disillusionment. The internal consistency coefficients in the Polish adaptation are comparable to the original version; Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the individual subscales ranged from 0.67 to 0.86 among teachers (Santinello, 2014).

The IPIP-BFM-20 Questionnaire is a shortened version of the IPIP-BFM-50, used to assess personality traits according to the Five-Factor Model (Big Five): extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and intellect. The tool includes 20 items rated on a five-point scale, from 1 – “very inaccurate description of me” to 5 – “very accurate description of me”. The scale demonstrates satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.65 to 0.78 across subscales (Topolewska et al., 2014).

The Short Version of the Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale (SVOSES) measures beliefs about one's self-efficacy in the professional context. Participants evaluate six statements using a six-point scale from 1 – “completely untrue” to 6 – “completely true”. The scale is unidimensional and demonstrates good construct validity (both convergent and discriminant) as well as reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.85 to 0.90 (Baka & Grala, 2022).

The sociodemographic survey, developed specifically for this study, included questions on variables such as gender (female, male), age, work experience, place of employment, and job position.

### Research procedure

The study was conducted using the four aforementioned tools via the MS Forms platform from March to April 2025. A purposive sampling method was employed: the electronic versions of the questionnaires were distributed within a group of actively employed pre-school and early childhood teachers and school counsellors. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

## Statistical data analysis methods

To assess the correlates between variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used. A significance level of  $p < 0.001$  or  $p < 0.05$  was adopted to determine the presence of statistically significant relationships. The database and statistical analyses were carried out using JASP software (version 0.18.3.0, jasp-stats.org). The final stage of the study involved testing for mediators in the observed relationships using mediation analysis. The indirect effects were estimated using the bootstrapping technique (Bootstrap = 1000) with bias-corrected confidence intervals (95% CI). Although three models were tested, only one was reported in the present work – namely the model in which the relationship between the independent variable (personality traits) and the mediator (self-efficacy), as well as between the mediator and the dependent variable (dimensions of professional burnout), reached statistical significance.

## RESULTS

### Participants

The study sample consisted of 58 participants ( $N = 58$ ). The vast majority were women, accounting for 93% of the sample ( $n = 54$ ), while men represented only 7% ( $n = 4$ ). This reflects the gender distribution characteristic of the occupational group under study – preschool and early childhood teachers and school counsellors – where strong feminization is observed. The mean age of the participants was 39.24 years ( $M = 39.24$ ;  $SD = 7.73$ ), with the youngest participant aged 24 and the oldest 60. The average length of professional experience was 12.53 years ( $M = 12.53$ ;  $SD = 9.41$ ), ranging from 1 to 47 years. Most respondents, constituting 83% of the sample ( $n = 48$ ), reported working as teachers, while 17% ( $n = 10$ ) worked as school counsellors. Regarding the place of employment, 74% ( $n = 43$ ) worked in schools, and 26% ( $n = 15$ ) were employed in kindergartens. Descriptive statistics for the quantitative sociodemographic variables are presented in Table 1, and for qualitative variables in Table 2.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the study sample for quantitative sociodemographic variables

| Variable                | Descriptive statistics |             |          |           |           |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
|                         | <i>Min.</i>            | <i>Max.</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>Me</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| age                     | 24.00                  | 60.00       | 39.24    | 38.00     | 7.73      |
| professional experience | 1.00                   | 47.00       | 12.53    | 11.50     | 9.41      |

Source: Author's own study.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the study sample for qualitative sociodemographic variables

| <i>Gender</i>       | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---------------------|----------|----------|
| female              | 54       | 93       |
| male                | 4        | 7        |
| <i>Job position</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
| teacher             | 48       | 83       |
| school counsellor   | 10       | 17       |
| <i>Workplace</i>    | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
| school              | 43       | 74       |
| kindergarden        | 15       | 26       |
| Total               | 70       | 100.00   |

Source: Author's own study.

In the first stage of statistical analysis, descriptive statistics were calculated for the variables under investigation. The descriptive statistics – minimum (*Min.*), maximum (*Max.*), mean (*M*), median (*Me*), and standard deviation (*SD*) – for the study sample ( $N = 58$ ) are presented in Table 3.

 Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the analyzed variables ( $N = 58$ )

| Variable         |                                                  | Descriptive statistics |       |          |           |           |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------|----------|-----------|-----------|
|                  |                                                  | Min.                   | Max.  | <i>M</i> | <i>Me</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| IPIP –<br>BFM 20 | Extraversion                                     | 9.00                   | 20.00 | 13.72    | 13.00     | 2.95      |
|                  | Agreeableness                                    | 12.00                  | 20.00 | 16.52    | 17.00     | 2.24      |
|                  | Conscientiousness                                | 4.00                   | 20.00 | 15.47    | 15.50     | 2.98      |
|                  | Emotional Stability                              | 5.00                   | 20.00 | 12.21    | 12.00     | 3.54      |
|                  | Intellect                                        | 11.00                  | 20.00 | 15.90    | 16.00     | 2.33      |
| SVOSES           | Self-efficacy                                    | 14.00                  | 36.00 | 26.91    | 27.00     | 5.15      |
| LBQ              | Psychophysical exhaustion                        | 6.00                   | 29.00 | 16.78    | 16.00     | 5.18      |
|                  | Lack of engagement in relationships with clients | 6.00                   | 26.00 | 15.98    | 16.00     | 4.02      |
|                  | Perceived lack of professional efficacy          | 6.00                   | 26.00 | 14.17    | 14.00     | 4.10      |
|                  | Disillusionment                                  | 6.00                   | 27.00 | 17.71    | 17.00     | 4.01      |

Source: Author's own study.

In the next step, Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficients were calculated. Detailed results of the correlations between professional burnout, personality traits, and self-efficacy are presented in Table 4.

The strongest correlates with personality traits were found in the dimension of *perceived lack of professional efficacy*. This dimension of professional burnout was significantly correlated with two personality traits: *intellect* ( $r = -0.457$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and *emotional stability* ( $r = -0.353$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). These are moderate, negative correlations. Additionally, *perceived lack of professional efficacy* showed a moderate negative correlation with *self-efficacy* ( $r = -0.353$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Another dimension of professional burnout, namely *psychophysical exhaustion*, correlates with one personality trait,

which is *emotional stability* ( $r = -0.501$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This is a strong negative correlation. Additionally, *psychophysical exhaustion* shows a negative correlation of moderate strength with *self-efficacy* ( $r = -0.494$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The only correlation of very weak strength and negative direction occurred between the next dimension of professional burnout – *disillusionment*– and *emotional stability* ( $r = -0.286$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The final dimension of professional burnout, namely *lack of engagement in relationships with clients*, does not correlate with any of the examined personality traits. The only revealed correlation is with *self-efficacy* ( $r = -0.336$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This is a negative correlation of moderate strength.

Table 4. Pearson's  $r$  correlations between analyzed variables ( $N = 58$ )

| Instrument    |          | IPIP – BFM 20 |               |        |                             |                 |                 | LBQ             |                |                |        | SVO-SES |
|---------------|----------|---------------|---------------|--------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|---------|
| IPIP – BFM 20 | Variable | E             |               | A      | C                           | ES              | I               | PE              | LERC           | SLPE           | D      | S       |
|               | E        | r             | -             |        |                             |                 |                 |                 |                |                |        |         |
|               | A        | r             | <b>0.269*</b> | -      |                             |                 |                 |                 |                |                |        |         |
|               | C        | r             | -0.029        | -0.160 | -                           |                 |                 |                 |                |                |        |         |
|               | ES       | r             | 0.161         | 0.014  | -0.067                      | -               |                 |                 |                |                |        |         |
|               | I        | r             | <b>0.259*</b> | 0.061  | -5.227<br>×10 <sup>-4</sup> | <b>0.423**</b>  | -               |                 |                |                |        |         |
| LBQ           | PE       | r             | -0.194        | 0.075  | -0.248                      | <b>-0.501**</b> | -0.301          | -               |                |                |        |         |
|               | LERC     | r             | -0.192        | 0.054  | -0.125                      | -0.120          | -0.227          | <b>0.655**</b>  | -              |                |        |         |
|               | PLPE     | r             | -0.112        | 0.198  | -0.178                      | <b>-0.353*</b>  | <b>-0.457**</b> | <b>0.386*</b>   | <b>0.440**</b> | -              |        |         |
|               | D        | r             | -0.124        | 0.163  | -0.203                      | <b>-0.286*</b>  | -0.116          | <b>0.506**</b>  | <b>0.602**</b> | <b>0.531**</b> | -      |         |
| SVOSES        | S        | r             | 0.031         | 0.019  | 0.241                       | <b>0.282*</b>   | <b>0.500**</b>  | <b>-0.494**</b> | <b>-0.336*</b> | <b>-0.353*</b> | -0.087 | -       |

Source: Author's own study.

Note: IPIP – BFM 20: E – extraversion; A – agreeableness; C – conscientiousness; ES – emotional stability; I – intellect; LBQ: PE – psychophysical exhaustion; LERC – lack of engagement in relationship with clients; PLPE – perceived lack of professional efficacy; D – disillusionment; SVOSES: S – self-efficacy

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.001$

Subsequently, the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between personality traits and professional burnout was tested. Three models were evaluated, developed on the basis of the five personality traits (*extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, intellect*) and the four dimensions of professional burnout (*psychophysical exhaustion, disengagement from client relationships, perceived lack of*

*professional efficacy*, and *disillusionment*). As the criterion for qualifying a model, the assumption was adopted that mediation may occur when the relationship between the independent variable (in the present study, these are specific personality traits) and the mediator (self-efficacy), as well as the relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable (dimensions of professional burnout), reaches the level of statistical significance (Table 5). Based on the obtained results, a decision was made to include 1 out of 3 possible models in further analyses (Table 6).

Table 5. Summary of the analyzed correlation results in the analyzed mediation model

| Analyzed relationship |      | <i>r</i>        | CI95                  | <i>p</i>    |
|-----------------------|------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| S                     | PE   | <b>-0.494**</b> | -0.667 – -0.271       | < 0.001     |
|                       | LERC | <b>-0.336*</b>  | -0.546 – -0.085       | 0.01        |
|                       | PLPE | <b>-0.353*</b>  | -0.560 – -0.104       | 0.01        |
|                       | D    | <i>-0.087</i>   | <i>-0.338 – 0.175</i> | <i>0.52</i> |
|                       | E    | <i>0.031</i>    | <i>-0.229 – 0.287</i> | <i>0.82</i> |
|                       | A    | <i>0.019</i>    | <i>-0.240 – 0.276</i> | <i>0.89</i> |
|                       | C    | <i>0.241</i>    | <i>-0.019 – 0.470</i> | <i>0.07</i> |
|                       | ES   | <b>0.282 *</b>  | 0.026–0.504           | 0.03        |
|                       | I    | <b>0.500 **</b> | 0.277–0.671           | < 0.001     |

Source: Author's own study.

Note: IPIP – BFM 20: E – extraversion; A – agreeableness; C – conscientiousness; ES – emotional stability; I – intellect; LBQ: PE – psychophysical exhaustion; LERC – lack of engagement in relationships with clients; PLPE – perceived lack of professional efficacy; D – disillusionment; SVOSES: S – self-efficacy

E, A, C, ES, I – independent variables; PE, LERC, PLPE, D – dependent variables; S – mediator

\*\* $p < 0.001$  \* $p < 0.05$

Statistically significant values are marked in bold; non-significant values are written in italics

Table 6. Summary of mediation analysis results for the effect of personality traits on psychophysical exhaustion and the perceived lack of professional efficacy, with self-efficacy as the mediator

| Dependent variable | Independent variable | Direct effect |                 |          | Indirect effect |                 |          |                       |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------------|
|                    |                      | b             | CI95            | <i>P</i> | B               | CI95            | <i>p</i> | <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> |
| PE                 | ES                   | <b>-0.576</b> | -0.901 – -0.246 | < 0.001  | <b>-0.159</b>   | -0.392 – -0.033 | 0.05     | <b>0.216</b>          |
| PLPE               | ES                   | -0.317        | -0.583 – -0.057 | 0.02     | <i>-0.089</i>   | -0.247 – -0.010 | 0.11     | 0.219                 |
|                    | I                    | -0.653        | -1.012–0.218    | < 0.001  | <i>-0.145</i>   | -0.448–0.063    | 0.23     | 0.182                 |

Source: Author's own study.

Note: IPIP – BFM 20: SE – emotional stability; I – intellect; LBQ: PE – psychophysical exhaustion; PLPE – perceived lack of professional efficacy

Statistically significant values are marked in bold; non-significant values are written in italics

### General model

In the general model (Figure 1), *self-efficacy* functions as a mediating variable in the relationship between personality traits and professional burnout among school counsellors and early childhood teachers.

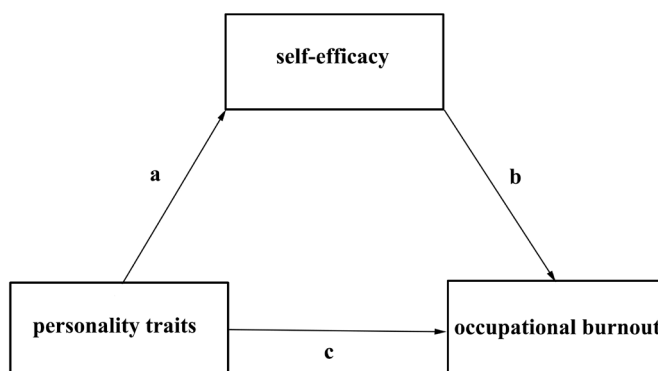


Figure 1. Empirical model of the study – diagram of relationships in the proposed multiple mediation model

Source: Author's own study.

Note: The indirect effect of a given personality trait on a given dimension of professional burnout through self-efficacy =  $ab$

In Model I (Figure 2), the mediating role of *self-efficacy* was tested in the relationship between the personality trait of *emotional stability* and the dimension of professional burnout referred to as *psychophysical exhaustion*. The analysis demonstrated that the indirect effect of *emotional stability* on *psychophysical exhaustion* through *self-efficacy* borders on statistical significance ( $ab = -0.159$ ;  $SE = 0.084$ ; bootstrap CI:  $-0.392 - -0.033$ ;  $p = 0.05$ ). Therefore, caution is advised when interpreting this result. It was shown that *self-efficacy* acts as a mediator in the relationship between *emotional stability* and *psychophysical exhaustion*. The results can be interpreted as follows: the greater the *emotional stability* in a teacher or school counsellor, the stronger the sense of *self-efficacy* they report ( $\beta = 0.28$ ;  $p = 0.05$ ), which in turn translates into a lower level of psychophysical exhaustion experienced ( $\beta = -0.38$ ;  $p = 0.05$ ).

Moreover, it is worth considering what percentage of the relationship between *emotional stability* and *psychophysical exhaustion* is explained by *self-efficacy*. In the examined group of school counsellors and early childhood teachers, it accounts for 22% of the relationship between *emotional stability* and *psychophysical exhaustion*.

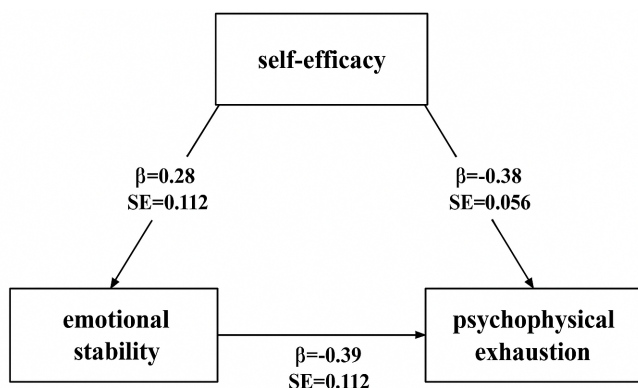


Figure 2. Model of the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between emotional stability and psychophysical exhaustion among school counsellors and early childhood teachers (standardized values)

Source: Author's own study.

In the present study, within the constructed model, partial mediation was obtained. This means that the indirect effect is statistically significant, while the direct effect is also significant. It is worth noting that the indirect effect is at the level of  $p = 0.05$ , and therefore, particular caution should be exercised when interpreting it. The results obtained in the study indicate that *self-efficacy* only partially explains the relationship between *emotional stability* and *psychophysical exhaustion*. This may result from the fact that there is a unique relationship between personality traits and professional burnout, or there may be other important factors (other mediators), apart from self-efficacy, that can explain the relationship between personality traits and professional burnout in the studied group.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to assess the relationship between personality traits and professional burnout among school counsellors and preschool and early childhood teachers, as well as to verify whether self-efficacy plays the role of a mediator in the relationships between these variables.

In response to the first research question, significant correlations were found between personality traits and such dimensions of professional burnout as: *the perceived lack of professional effectiveness*, *psychophysical exhaustion*, and *disillusionment*. A negative, strong correlation was obtained between psychophysical exhaustion and emotional stability. The results may indicate that, in the examined group of school counsellors and preschool and early childhood teachers, as the level of *emotional stability* – understood as emotional balance and resistance to frustration – increases, the level of *psychophys-*

*ical exhaustion* decreases, and thus the sense of fatigue and pressure is reduced. This is consistent with the results of studies on Polish primary and middle school teachers, in which negative relationships were revealed between neuroticism and emotional exhaustion (cf. Jędryszek-Geisler & Izdebski, 2018). Another study on teachers also showed that a high level of neuroticism co-occurred with a higher level of professional burnout (cf. Kim et al., 2022; Liu & Chen, 2022; Lopes et al., 2012; Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2022). A meta-analysis of studies on teachers also demonstrated that neuroticism positively correlates with emotional exhaustion (cf. Basim et al., 2013).

Moreover, moderate negative correlations were revealed between *the perceived lack of professional effectiveness* and two personality traits: *intellect* and *emotional stability*. The negative direction of the relationship indicates that as the level of intellectual openness and emotional balance increases, the sense of professional inefficacy weakens, and the work outcomes as well as the school counsellors' and teachers' own competences are assessed by them in positive terms. This result is partially consistent with the conclusions from a meta-analysis of 28 studies conducted among teachers, which indicates that neuroticism correlates negatively with the sense of personal accomplishment (cf. Liu & Chen, 2022). Furthermore, research in a group of Polish teachers revealed that neuroticism is associated with perceived lack of personal accomplishment (cf. Zawadzka et al., 2018).

Another relationship – negative in direction and very weak in strength, and thus requiring cautious interpretation – occurred between *disillusionment* and *emotional stability*. The direction of the correlation suggests that with increasing emotional stability and resistance to frustration, the level of disillusionment with one's work decreases, while enthusiasm for it increases in the studied group.

Numerous studies confirm significant relationships between personality traits and professional burnout in groups of school counsellors and teachers, which, for the most part, align with the findings of the present study. However, it must be acknowledged that research results may differ depending on the methodology applied, the measurement tools used, and the cultural context. The majority of researchers exploring the phenomenon of professional burnout have used a questionnaire based on its classical three-dimensional model, which does not take into account a fourth dimension – disillusionment.

In response to the second research question, it was found that self-efficacy serves as a mediator in the relationship between emotional stability and psychophysical exhaustion. Based on the constructed mediation model, it can be inferred that school counsellors and early childhood teachers characterized by a high level of emotional stability – manifested in balance and resistance to frustration – demonstrate stronger beliefs in their professional self-efficacy and simultaneously experience lower levels of psychophysical exhaustion in work-related situations. To explain the results obtained in this study, it is worth referring to international research and theoretical frameworks. The findings are partially consistent with results from a study on Croatian teachers,

in which self-efficacy was shown to be a significant mediator in the relationship between self-regulation and social awareness and professional burnout (cf. Pikić Jugović et al., 2025). Additionally, self-efficacy was found to be a significant mediator in the relationship between stress and professional burnout among air traffic controllers. Researchers concluded that belief in one's own effectiveness impacts psychological well-being, which in turn modifies the effect of stress on professional burnout (cf. Makara-Studzińska et al., 2021). In a study conducted among German teachers, it was shown that self-efficacy predicts burnout through job stress (cf. Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Italian researchers demonstrated that belief in professional self-efficacy mediates the negative relationship between emotional stability and professional burnout (cf. Alessandri et al., 2018). Moreover, Polish researchers indicated that a sense of self-efficacy plays a moderating role, protecting teachers with high levels of neuroticism from developing professional burnout, particularly in the dimension of personal accomplishment (cf. Zawadzka et al., 2018).

To date, however, no researchers have attempted to determine mediators such as self-efficacy in the relationship between personality traits and professional burnout using the same questionnaires employed in the present study. Therefore, the topic addressed in this study undoubtedly requires further empirical exploration – both in the group of early childhood teachers and school counsellors and in other occupational groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of empirical material gathered during the present study demonstrates that the topic of professional burnout among school counsellors and early childhood teachers is significant due to the presence of this phenomenon in the studied group. It is also important to consider the current, rapidly changing working conditions in the education sector, which involve increasing demands related to bureaucratic workload, top-down reforms, the development of new technologies, and the declining prestige of the teaching profession. All of these factors may exacerbate work-related pathologies and change their nature. Moreover, the analyses conducted in the current study may constitute an important contribution to the advancement of knowledge on the phenomenon of professional burnout, particularly its correlates with personality traits and the role of mediators such as self-efficacy, which may function as protective resources. Referring to the principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy – which assumes that modifying dysfunctional beliefs can lead to changes in emotions and behaviors – it is worth considering working on the cognitive restructuring of beliefs about one's professional self-efficacy, especially among school counsellors and teachers with low levels of emotional stability, and thus higher levels of neuroticism. Individuals with lower resistance to stress and frustration may attribute excessive responsibility to themselves for situations beyond their

control and burden themselves with a disproportionate sense of guilt, which over time may lead to the depletion of psychophysical resources. Efforts to correct dysfunctional beliefs about professional self-efficacy could realistically reduce the risk of developing professional burnout in the studied group. Therefore, it can be concluded that the results obtained have significant practical value and may serve as a first step toward developing appropriate preventive and supportive interventions to help school counsellors and teachers effectively prevent and manage professional burnout.

It should also be noted that the present study is not without limitations, which should be addressed in future research. One such limitation is the research sample, which could be expanded to increase the representativeness of the findings. Since an indirect mediation effect was found in the current study, it would be worthwhile to consider including additional mediators, beyond self-efficacy, in the relationship between personality traits and professional burnout in the studied group. Future research may also include the relatively underexplored aspect of disillusionment with work, which, as a newer dimension of professional burnout, is particularly important in helping professions, where the reality of the job often starkly contrasts with the initial sense of mission. Undoubtedly, further research on mediators in the relationship between professional burnout and personality traits in the group of school counsellors and early childhood teachers is warranted, as few scientific studies are currently available on this valuable area of inquiry.

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