

**PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT AMONG ENGLISH LANGUAGE FEMALE  
TEACHERS IN UKRAINIAN GENERAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS: DO WAR  
TIME MATTER?**

*ESGOTAMENTO PROFISSIONAL ENTRE PROFESSORAS DE LÍNGUA INGLESA  
NAS ESCOLAS SECUNDÁRIAS GERAIS UCRANIANAS: O TEMPO DE GUERRA  
IMPORTA?*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research represents a continuation of previous research focusing on the professional burnout experienced by general secondary English teachers in emergency situations. Through the implementation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, empirical data were collected from a sample of 70 female English language teachers working in general secondary schools in Ukraine. The results revealed notable patterns in the components of professional burnout, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of personality, and reduction of professional achievements. Specifically, teachers' significant proportion reported experiencing high to medium levels of emotional exhaustion, medium to low levels of depersonalization, and medium to low levels of reduction in professional achievements amidst the backdrop of war. Conversely, teachers' minority reported low-level emotional exhaustion but high-level reduction in professional achievements and depersonalization. Statistical analysis indicated significant differences in emotional exhaustion (medium level), depersonalization of personality (high and low levels), and reduction of professional achievements (high level) between prewar and wartime contexts. However, no significant correlation was found between professional experience and professional burnout among female English language teachers. The implications of these empirical findings are discussed in relation to existing literature on the professional burnout experienced by English language teachers in general secondary schools, with emphasis placed on both theoretical considerations and practical implications.

**Keywords:** English language teachers, burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, general secondary school, war time.

### **RESUMO**

Esta investigação representa uma continuação de pesquisas anteriores centradas no esgotamento profissional vivenciado por professores de inglês do ensino secundário geral em situações de emergência. Através da implementação do Maslach Burnout Inventory, foram recolhidos dados empíricos de uma amostra de 70 professoras de língua inglesa que trabalham em escolas secundárias gerais na Ucrânia. Os resultados revelaram padrões notáveis nos componentes do esgotamento profissional, incluindo exaustão emocional, despersonalização da personalidade e redução das realizações profissionais. Especificamente, uma proporção significativa de professores relatou experimentar níveis elevados a médios de exaustão emocional, níveis médios a baixos de despersonalização e níveis médios a baixos de redução nas realizações profissionais num contexto de guerra. Por outro lado, a minoria de professores relatou um baixo nível de exaustão emocional, mas um alto nível de redução nas realizações profissionais e na despersonalização. A análise estatística indicou diferenças significativas na exaustão emocional (nível médio), na despersonalização da personalidade (níveis alto e baixo) e na redução das realizações profissionais (nível alto) entre os contextos pré-guerra e de guerra. No entanto, não foi encontrada nenhuma correlação significativa entre experiência profissional e esgotamento profissional entre professoras de língua inglesa. As implicações destas conclusões empíricas são discutidas em relação à literatura existente sobre o esgotamento profissional experimentado pelos professores de língua inglesa nas escolas secundárias gerais, com ênfase tanto nas considerações teóricas como nas implicações práticas.

**Palavras-chave:** professores de línguas, esgotamento, Exaustão emocional, despersonalização, redução da realização pessoal, escola secundária geral, tempo de guerra.

## Introduction

In contemporary society, professional stress and consequently, the syndrome of professional burnout as its consequence, are recognized as serious global phenomena with potential significant ramifications for the economy of each nation and the well-being of its workforce (Greenberg, 2002). Professional stress, compounded by emotional strain experienced by working individuals in challenging life circumstances such as pandemics, natural disasters, and wars, can hasten the onset of professional burnout syndrome (Greenberg et al., 2016). This syndrome predominantly afflicts professionals in the social sphere, notably school teachers, among others (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Professional burnout among these specialists is characterized by a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, evident through symptoms such as emotional depletion, depersonalization, and diminished professional efficacy (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998).

The general secondary school teachers' professional activity, which involves exerting a positive influence on students' learning and behavior, can be carried out in challenging conditions that elevate the risk of professional burnout. These conditions encompass students' negative motivation towards learning, high demands of professional activity, lack or absence of social support (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014), intricacies in interaction with other participants in the educational process (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014; Fesun et al., 2020), professional satisfaction (Gedvilienė, & Didžiulienė, 2020; Fesun et al., 2020; Romero et al., 2023), insufficient support from management, and a scarcity of personal life resources (Greenberg et al., 2016), amid ongoing reforms in the educational sphere (Gedvilienė, & Didžiulienė, 2020).

To ensure quality education in general secondary schools, it is crucial for teachers to maintain good health, get sufficient rest, and avoid experiencing tension and professional stress, thereby preventing burnout. The priority task outlined in the Law of Ukraine "On Comprehensive General Secondary Education" (2024) is the provision of high-quality educational activities by teachers, ensuring students receive excellent education. However, the fulfillment of this significant state duty in

Ukraine is hindered by wartime conditions, which amplify emotional stress and elevate the risk of professional burnout among secondary school teachers.

Teachers' professional burnout is a prolonged process characterized by emotional exhaustion (such as indifference, pessimism, and helplessness), depersonalization (manifested by weakness, chronic fatigue, lack of vital energy, and physical exhaustion), and a decline in personal achievements in professional activities (including the emergence of a negative attitude towards oneself, others, and the profession, as well as neglecting professional duties) (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2023). Teachers' professional burnout can be exacerbated by school burnout students (Dogan & Dogan, 2023). Consequently, there is a pressing need to explore literature on the diverse factors contributing to this process.

### **Literature review**

The teachers' professional activity as social specialists, involving frequent interactions with others, presents both advantages and disadvantages.

Foreign language teachers have an increased risk of professional burnout due to several factors. Specifically, they contend with significant additional emotional and mental burdens stemming from: the requirement for bilingualism (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014; Trotsenko et al., 2020; Harvey-Torres et al., 2022; Rathert, & Ağçam, 2023; Scherzinger & Brahm, 2023); the necessity to deliver a substantial amount of educational content, even with reduced instructional hours; and insufficient support or managerial obstacles (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014). In Iranian schools, the occurrence of professional burnout among foreign language teachers is correlated with their educational attainment and is not contingent upon age, gender, or social standing (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2014).

However, we believe that learning a foreign language imposes a significant burden on female teachers, which can contribute to and expedite the onset of professional burnout. Women, in addition to fulfilling their professional duties, often shoulder numerous household responsibilities, care for their own children, and attend to the needs of elderly parents (Rasheed-Karim, 2020; Madigan & Kim, 2021).

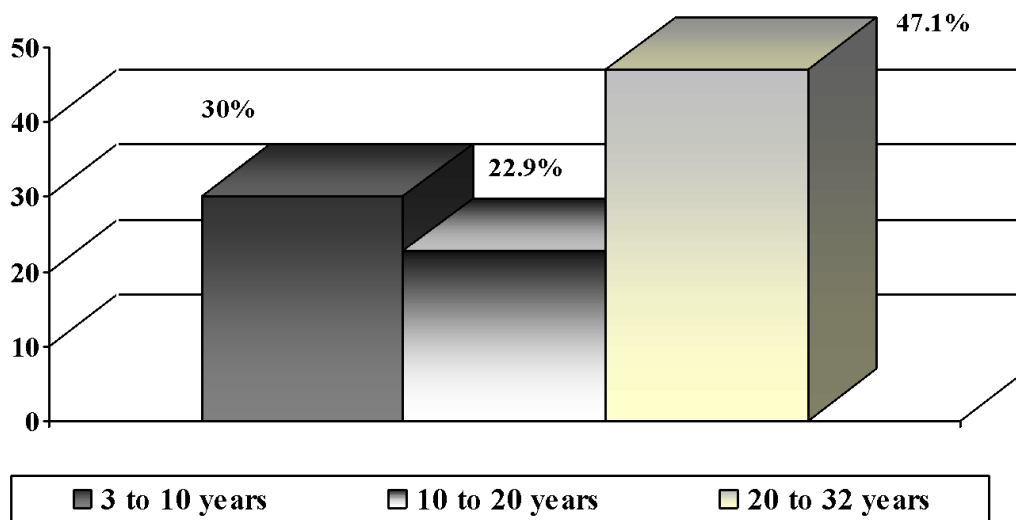
Nevertheless, as indicated by the literature review, the matter of professional burnout among female English teachers in Ukrainian secondary schools during wartime conditions has yet to be thoroughly investigated by researchers.

## Methodology

### Participants

An empirical research was conducted online using Google Forms in both the spring and fall of 2023 to examine the professional burnout experienced by women teachers during wartime. The research cohort comprised 70 female English language teachers with professional experience ranging from 3 to 32 years (refer to Figure 1), all employed in general secondary schools across Ukraine.

Figure 1 – The experience of English teachers’ professional activity



During the research period, the education of students in Ukrainian general secondary schools occurred primarily through remote technologies, often encountering technical challenges due to unstable internet and electricity supply. All participating teachers were well-versed in distance learning tools.

The research focused on general secondary education institutions located in cities and villages across various regions of Northern, Central, and Southern Ukraine. Notably, 75% of the female English teachers involved in the empirical

research resided in cities and villages that had been liberated by the Armed Forces of Ukraine following occupation by aggressor forces.

### ***Ethics***

The research adhered to the Code of Ethics for Psychologists of Ukraine. Respondents completed the questionnaires anonymously. Contact details of the research organizers were provided to respondents for psychological counseling support in case their participation in the survey resulted in any distress.

### ***Instruments***

The teachers' professional burnout empirical research was conducted utilizing the Maslach Burnout Questionnaire (Maslach et al., 1996). The teachers' evaluations of 22 statements, measured against the scale provided in the questionnaire, facilitated the determination of high, medium, and low levels of the components of professional burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of personality, and diminished professional achievements.

Additionally, teachers responded to supplementary inquiries regarding professional burnout syndrome. The first question, utilizing a Likert scale, prompted teachers to assess their level of emotional exhaustion following instruction via distance technologies within a year of the commencement of hostilities in the country. The question reads, "Rate your level of emotional exhaustion after conducting training via remote technologies within a year of the start of hostilities in the country with a single number from 1 to 10 (where 1 - I do not feel exhausted, and 10 - I am completely drained and lack the strength to continue working)". The second question focused on teachers' utilization of psychological strategies for preventing their own professional burnout. The second question reads, "Do you employ psychological prevention strategies to mitigate your own professional burnout? If so, which ones?"

**Procedure**

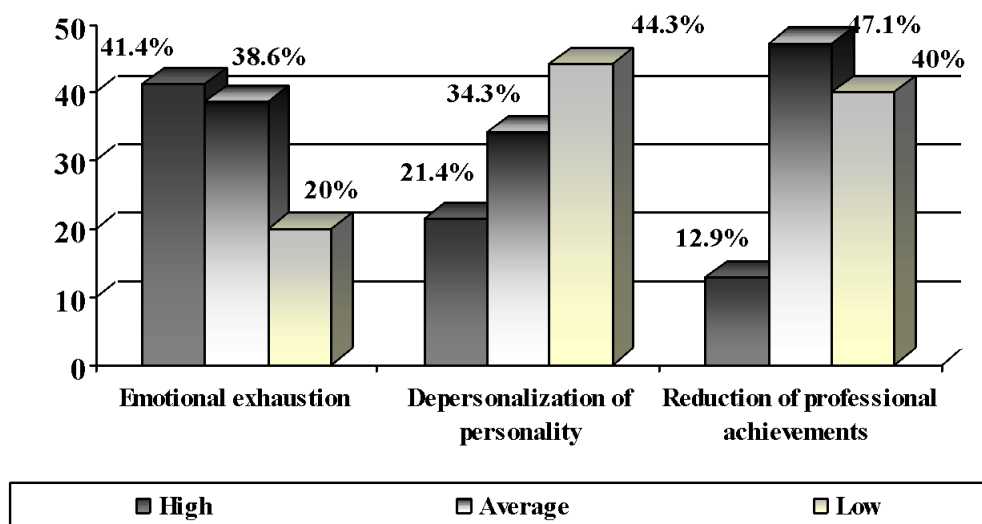
The  $\varphi^*$  angular transformation criterion by R. Fisher and K. Pearson's correlation coefficient were calculated using the SPSS 23.0 software.

**Findings**

***Professional burnout among English teachers in Ukrainian schools is a significant concern***

The results of an empirical research on the components of professional burnout among English teachers in Ukrainian schools after one year of professional activity in wartime conditions are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Levels of components of English teachers' professional burnout



As depicted in Figure 2, many female English teachers in Ukrainian schools exhibited high and medium levels of emotional exhaustion, as well as medium and low levels of depersonalization of personality and diminished professional achievements. A small minority of teachers demonstrated low levels of emotional exhaustion, while high levels of depersonalization of personality and diminished professional achievements were observed in some cases.

A high level of emotional exhaustion was observed in 41.4% of teachers. They frequently experience feelings of being emotionally drained, akin to being “squeezed like a lemon”. Upon waking up in the morning, they often feel extremely tired, which diminishes their motivation to engage in professional activities. These teachers consistently seek solitude after teaching lessons and fulfilling their professional duties. They commonly exhibit symptoms of depression, apathy, indifference, disappointment in life, and a pervasive sense of exhaustion.

The average level of emotional exhaustion was identified in a smaller cohort of teachers (38.6%). They frequently or occasionally experience feelings of being emotionally drained. In the morning, they seldom feel tired, thus they are usually eager to engage in professional activities. These teachers occasionally desire solitude after completing their professional tasks. They often or sometimes feel symptoms of depression, disillusionment with life, apathy, and profound exhaustion.

A low level of emotional exhaustion was observed in 41.4% of teachers. They seldom or never feel emotionally drained, akin to being “squeezed like a lemon”. Upon waking up in the morning, they rarely experience significant tiredness. They are highly motivated to engage in their professional activities very often or every day. These teachers seldom seek solitude after completing lessons and professional tasks. They rarely or never experience symptoms of depression, apathy, indifference, disillusionment with life, or feelings of exhaustion.

A high level of personality depersonalization was observed in 21.4% of teachers. They frequently or daily engage in formal and unempathetic communication with colleagues, students, and parents, attempting to minimize the time spent in such interactions. They often or daily feel overwhelmed by the demands placed upon them by others, including leadership, colleagues, students, and parents, during professional interactions, which causes considerable fatigue. Teachers perceive, on a daily or frequent basis, that their colleagues employ manipulation tactics to offload responsibilities onto them.

The average level of personality depersonalization was observed in a slightly larger proportion of teachers (34.3%). They frequently or occasionally engage in



unemotional and formal interactions with colleagues, students, and parents, without investing significant time in these interactions. They often or sometimes feel that others, including supervisors, colleagues, students, and parents, demand excessive amounts from them in their professional endeavors, leading to fatigue. According to the teachers, their colleagues sometimes resort to manipulation tactics to shift their responsibilities onto them.

A low level of personality depersonalization was noted in a slightly larger percentage of teachers (44.3%). They seldom or never engage in formal, emotionless interactions with colleagues, students, and parents within the realm of their professional duties, and they allocate minimal time to such communication. It is very rare for them to perceive excessive demands from others (management, colleagues, students, and parents) in their professional interactions, leading to fatigue. Similarly, teachers very rarely believe that their colleagues resort to manipulation in an attempt to offload responsibilities onto them.

A high level of reduction in professional achievements was identified in 12.9% of teachers. In professional interactions, they occasionally or rarely demonstrate the ability to accurately understand the emotions of their colleagues and students. Teachers occasionally or rarely exhibit the capability to select and implement effective strategies of behavior in conflict situations that may arise during professional interactions. They rarely feel optimistic when planning their future. Teachers occasionally or rarely succeed in fostering a positive atmosphere by communicating kindly with their colleagues and students. They seldom or very rarely possess the skills to properly manage their time throughout the day and complete numerous professional tasks on time and with high quality.

The average level of reduction in professional achievements was observed in a significantly larger percentage of teachers (47.1%). Throughout their professional activities, they often demonstrate an accurate understanding of the emotions of their colleagues and students. Occasionally, they correctly select and employ effective strategies of behavior in conflict situations that may arise during professional interactions. They plan their future optimistically, believing in their ability to realize many of their life goals. These teachers frequently exhibit a positive

attitude towards their colleagues and students, thus contributing to the creation of a positive working atmosphere. They possess the ability to effectively plan their time during the day, enabling them to efficiently complete numerous professional tasks.

A low level of reduction in professional achievements was observed in a slightly smaller proportion of teachers (40%). Throughout their professional activities, they often or very often demonstrate an accurate understanding of the emotions of their colleagues and students. Teachers frequently select and employ effective behavior strategies in conflict situations that may arise during professional interactions. They often plan their future optimistically, believing in their ability to realize many of their life goals. These teachers very often exhibit a positive attitude towards their colleagues and students, thus contributing significantly to the creation of a positive working atmosphere. They often possess the skill to effectively plan their time during the day, enabling them to efficiently complete numerous professional tasks.

However, as empirically established during the pre-war period (Ponomarenko et al., 2024), amidst quarantine restrictions due to the surge in cases of influenza and acute respiratory viral diseases (including COVID-19), a considerable proportion of female English teachers in Ukrainian schools were empirically found to experience correspondingly high and medium levels of professional burnout components: emotional exhaustion (40% and 60%), depersonalization of personality (40% and 60%), and reduction of professional achievements (40% and 60%). Only a small percentage (8%) of teachers exhibited a low level of depersonalization of personality.

The results of calculating R. Fisher's  $\varphi^*$  angular transformation criterion concerning the levels of professional burnout components among English language teachers in Ukrainian schools during both pre-war and wartime periods are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – The value of the criterion  $\varphi^*$  of the angular transformation of R. Fisher about the levels of components of professional burnout of English language teachers of Ukrainian schools in the pre-war and wartime

Levels	Professional burnout' components		
	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization of personality	Reduction of professional achievements
High	0.146	4.087*	5.232*
Average	2.175**	1.635	0.727
Low	-	2.674*	-

Note. The value  $\varphi^*$  at  $p \leq 0.01$  is marked \*; the value  $\varphi^*$  at  $p \leq 0.05$  is marked \*\*.

Statistically significant differences are evident from Table 1, indicating that English language teachers in Ukrainian schools experience varying levels of depersonalization of personality and reduced professional achievements during prewar and wartime. Significant disparities were observed at a high level concerning depersonalization and professional achievement reduction. At a moderate level, statistically significant differences were noted in teachers' emotional exhaustion. At a lower level, differences in depersonalization of personality remained statistically significant.

Hence, during wartime, numerous female English teachers in secondary schools across Ukraine faced high and moderate levels of emotional exhaustion, alongside medium and low levels of professional achievement reduction and depersonalization of personality. In these circumstances, only a small number of teachers experienced low-level emotional exhaustion, high-level professional achievement reduction, and depersonalization. Statistically significant differences exist across all facets of professional burnout among English language teachers in Ukrainian schools between pre-war and wartime periods, including emotional exhaustion (medium level), depersonalization of personality (high and low levels), and reduction of professional achievements (high level).

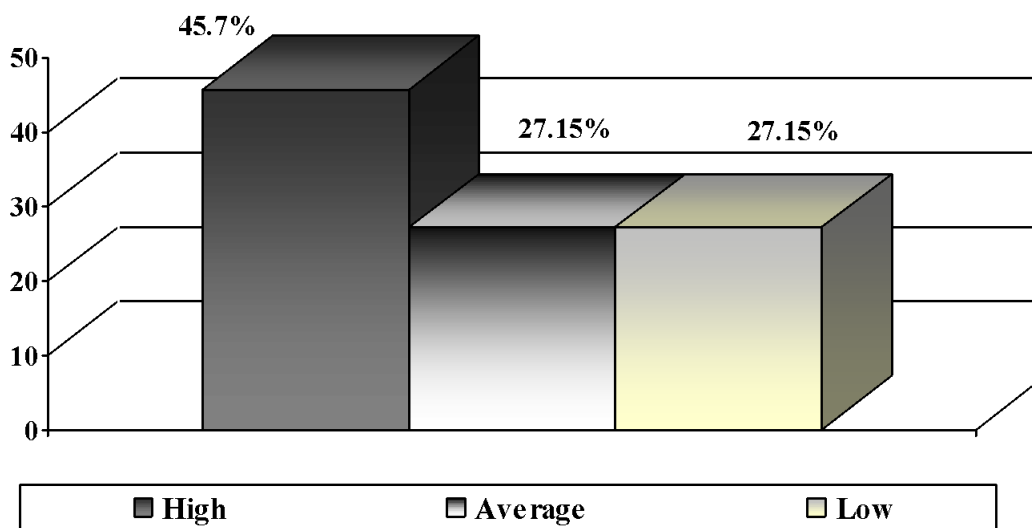
Furthermore, employing K. Pearson's correlation coefficient, a weak relationship was identified between the duration of professional activity and the

elements of professional burnout (emotional exhaustion (0.0625), depersonalization of personality (0.06266), and reduction of professional achievements (0.000866)) among English teachers in Ukrainian secondary schools during wartime.

***Self-assessment of emotional exhaustion among English teachers in Ukrainian schools***

The self-assessment of emotional exhaustion among English language teachers in Ukrainian schools is depicted in Figure 3. The research illustrates the teachers’ evaluation of their own emotional exhaustion levels after one year of professional activity during wartime conditions.

Figure 3 – Female English teachers’ self-esteem of own emotional exhaustion’ level



In Figure 3, it is evident that the majority of teachers (45.7%) rated their emotional exhaustion level as high. High emotional exhaustion is often accompanied by health issues such as poor sleep, weakened immunity, and frequent headaches. Teachers experiencing high emotional exhaustion often find themselves lacking time for relaxation, facing conflicts at work and home due to irritability and an unstable nervous system and hormonal balance. These symptoms indicate the need for assistance from specialists such as doctors and psychotherapists. Additionally,

teachers should consider adjusting their work schedules and immediate life plans to address these challenges.

A significantly smaller percentage of teachers (27.15%) rated their emotional exhaustion level as average. At this stage, they typically begin to lose interest in their professional activities and development. They frequently experience fatigue and notice initial signs of health decline. Consequently, they reduce their communication time, both with colleagues and relatives, and struggle to find adequate rest on weekends. These symptoms underscore the importance of seeking timely assistance from specialists, including psychotherapists and doctors.

An equal proportion of teachers (27.15%) rated their emotional exhaustion level as low. They seldom experience fatigue, but when they do, they require longer periods of sleep and more extensive weekend rest to overcome it.

Thus, nearly half of the English language teachers rated their emotional exhaustion as high, while approximately a quarter rated it as moderate or low.

### ***The female English teachers' utilization of psychological prevention methods to manage their professional burnout***

When asked about effective self-prevention methods for managing professional burnout during wartime, a significant majority of English language teachers in Ukrainian general secondary schools (71.4%) cited various strategies. These included activities such as rest, walks in the forest, communication with friends and relatives, maintaining a positive mindset, watching movies, reading, listening to classical music, engaging in drawing, participating in sports and yoga, maintaining a clear schedule, taking frequent breaks at work, switching between different types of activities, and focusing on professional self-development.

Contrary to our findings in the pre-war period (Ponomarenko et al., 2024), where only 40% of English language teachers in Ukrainian secondary schools reported using effective self-prevention methods for professional burnout, a notable portion (28.6%) did not mention any utilization of psychological prevention strategies for managing their professional burnout.

## Discussion

Our findings regarding the professional burnout experienced by English language teachers in Ukrainian schools during the wartime period align, to some degree, with the results of empirical studies on the professional burnout of English language teachers in emergency situations conducted by other researchers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, professional burnout among teachers in South African comprehensive secondary schools was empirically identified. This burnout was attributed to factors such as the fear of contracting COVID-19, as well as age-related concerns, ambiguity, and role conflict. Notably, the gender of teachers influenced their levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2023). Similarly, high levels of professional burnout were observed among teachers in schools in Germany (Weißenfels et al., 2022), Spain (Sánchez-Pujalte et al., 2021) and Canada (Sokal et al., 2020) during the pandemic. In Spanish schools, female teachers exhibited higher levels of professional burnout compared to their male counterparts. Interestingly, neither the age nor the work experience of teachers appeared to significantly impact their levels of professional burnout (Sánchez-Pujalte et al., 2021).

## Conclusions

School teachers of English represent a crucial asset in every developed country. However, the professional duties of English language teachers during emergency situations, including wartime, can induce significant stress, potentially leading to professional burnout. Empirical findings reveal that amidst wartime conditions, many female English teachers in Ukrainian general schools endure emotional exhaustion at both high and moderate levels, experience depersonalization of personality at medium and low levels, and encounter a reduction in professional achievements at moderate and low levels. Statistically significant differences in all aspects of professional burnout among female English teachers in Ukrainian schools during prewar and wartime periods – namely,

emotional exhaustion (at a medium level), depersonalization of personality (at high and low levels), and reduction of professional achievements (at a high level) – have been identified. Interestingly, the onset of professional burnout among female teachers during wartime appears to be unaffected by their professional experience. These research findings underscore the imperative for interventions aimed at enhancing the working conditions of English language teachers in general secondary schools and implementing psychological programs geared towards mitigating indicators of professional burnout.

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