

## The selection of strategies for coping with stress at midwife and nurse's work

### Dobór strategii do walki ze stresem w pracy zawodowej położnej i pielęgniarki

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**Słowa kluczowe:** położna, pielęgniarka, strategie, syndrom burnout

#### Abstract

Nowadays, the interest in issue of occupational stress focuses on the ways of coping and on improving the quality of life, therefore the individual's activity undertaken in the face of factors causing it. The causes of occupational stress could be divided into these associated with the employee, workplace and its organization. In practice, they all could occur simultaneously. The ubiquity of stress releases human activity to struggle with it. Some people handle it quite well, others bend under its weight.

#### Streszczenie

Współcześnie zainteresowanie problemem stresu w pracy koncentruje się na sposobach radzenia sobie z nim (ang. coping) oraz na podnoszeniu jakości życia (ang. quality of life), a więc aktywności podejmowanej przez jednostkę w obliczu czynników go powodujących. Przyczyny powstawania stresu zawodowego można podzielić na związane z osobą pracownika, z miejscem pracy oraz z jej organizacją. W praktyce zdarza się, że wszystkie

występują jednocześnie. Wszechobecność stresu wyzwała aktywność człowieka do zmagania się z nim. Część ludzi radzi sobie z nim całkiem dobrze, inni uginają się pod jego ciężarem.

## **Introduction**

The effective coping with stress requires identification of risk factors, consideration of the specificity of stressors that influence various workstations, which is extremely important in midwives and nurses work. The reduction of the high level tension in workplace, supported by various types of strategies, helps with regaining internal balance.

## **The aim of the study**

The aim of the study was to determine the type of strategies of coping with stress used in midwives and nurses work.

## **The stress at midwife and nurse's work**

Stress plays a vital role in human life. The judgment of the stress experienced, attempts to deal with it and the assessment of the effectiveness of the undertaken actions interact with each other [1,2]. Stress is an inseparable companion of human life. This is the body's response to the demands. On the one hand, it is a positive reaction that is the driving force of human life, and on the other hand, constant stress could cause many dangerous diseases and leads to deterioration of the body's functioning which have a psychogenic character (referred to as psychosomatic disorder). Repeated failures in the fight against stress, foster conviction about helplessness in coping with problems in work. These lead to conviction about the failure in the implementation of intentions and professional ideals [3,4,5]. In this kind of situation, a person is prone to burnout syndrome [1,2,6].

The occurrence of adverse effects of burnout syndrome, resulting from the excessive stress load, is counteracted by the flexible use of individual strategies which are extracted from own personality resources and the social support offered, e.g. families as well as co-workers and some professional groups and institutions [7,8,9].

## **The burnout syndrom**

The burnout syndrome occurs in the groups of midwives and nurses who have "lit up", i.e. they had began working with great commitment, enthusiasm, they had been overflowing with ideals and energy. "To burn - you have to be in the fire "[9,10].

The burnout syndrome is the body's response to stress at work, manifested by the loss of attention for the people with whom you work. In a situation when the requirements at work become too big, a special kind of response appears, involving the care of patients in a distanced and mechanical manner [10, 11].

In the situation when the psychological mechanisms activated to overcome stress turn out to be unreliable, prolonged stress causes pathological reactions. These lead to functional disorders (neurotic disorders) and organic disorders (psychosomatic diseases) [11, 12].

## **Strategies for coping with stress at midwife's work**

Individualized strategies used by people experiencing stress are described as coping. These include: attempts to find positive sides of the difficult situation, to return the activity in a different direction which help with removing the problem, treating the difficult situation as a challenge, assigning professional problems to the occupational problems [13,14]. The strategy of coping with stress is also described as personal and permanent disposition of the individual to a specific struggle with stressful situations. The chosen method of coping with stress depends on the type of stressful situation, on the intensity of stress and other individual properties [14].

Some people are stressed because of low qualifications and lack of experience, and for others the reason for stress is the contrast between the ideas of their position in the profession and social prestige and the reality. A midwife / nurse instead of improving the professional situation and its derivatives, gives up, becomes indifferent, lowers self-esteem. The second category of stressors is associated with the multidisciplinary nature of the work of midwives and nurses and involvement in the treatment process. In such conditions, competence difficulties appear, the sense of responsibility is blurred [15,16]. In a team, conflicts and lack of mutual respect between professionals from different fields and at different levels of education are easier [17-19].

In research of adapting to stressful life events, resources for coping with stress are differentiated from these for coping with difficult situations. These resources include: personality, attitudes and determinants, providing a psychological context for stress response [21-23].

The most well-known strategies to overcome stress at work are: searching for information, directing action, failing to act and intrapsychic processes. The searching for information consists in an in-depth knowledge of all the characteristics of a stressful situation, and then we choose a defense strategy. The direct actions are all kinds of activities, with the exception of cognitive activities, with the help of which we try to control stress, e.g. aggression, swearing, stimulants. Abandonment of actions and inactivity is carried out by suppressing the impulse to action that exceeds moral, social and physical boundaries [24-26].

The intrapsychic overcoming of stress are all cognitive processes that control emotions, everything that we could imagine to overcome stress. These are mechanisms such as: deceiving oneself, repression, projection, avoidance and distance from the problem [26, 27].

At the individual level, person prevents the negative psychological effects of stress by referring to individual (personal) reactions to stressors. These are strategies for self-discovery of the employee, which is the first step to face the problem or strategies to reduce the negative effects of stress: self-observation, self-assessment, learning to control stress, promoting a healthy lifestyle, relaxation, etc. [28, 29].

In the relationship between the individual and the institution, activities that increase the resilience of midwives and nurses to occupational stressors in the workplace play a huge role. They concern, among others; improving the employee's knowledge about himself, getting emotional and instrumental support at work, therapy and rehabilitation for employees with burned out syndrome, by reducing the effects of stress and rebuilding faith in one's own strength [30]. The institutional strategies focus on assessing stress, removing or reducing stressors, which lead to improving working environment conditions [31]. Thanks to the analysis concerning also own emotional reactions and behaviors in group situations, people could more effectively face the threats caused by professional stress [32-34].

Midwives and nurses experience a special type of stress. This is associated with the specifics of the work of people employed in professions which have caring and helping others character [35, 36].

## **Summary**

Stress in the work environment is one of the most important issues, because its consequences might have a negative impact on the health and psychosocial functioning of midwives and nurses. In the literature, we could find reports that work under constant stress

could cause increased sickness absence, high employee turnover, reduced quality of care and low sense of job satisfaction [37, 38].

The feeling a lack of job satisfaction is also an additional source of stress [39, 40]. Contemporary education of midwives and nurses should prepare midwives and nurses for efficient and effective work with other people (patients and co-workers) and equip them with the ability to choose the right strategy for a given situation fighting stress [41]. Physical conditions, the sphere of interpersonal relations, organizational culture, could reduce or increase the burdensomeness of work. Midwives aspiring to professionalism in a stressful situations feel discomfort, they feel that their knowledge and professional skills are not used in the proper extent [42,43].

The selection of a strategy appropriate for person to fight stress is related with the adoption of a specific style of dealing with it through the use of personality instructions. It is widely believed that people with high self-esteem are more likely to actively cope with stress [7,44]. The advantageous strategies to cope stress include the possibility of a positive withdrawal from emotionally burdensome contacts. These are not only breaks at work intended for rest or meals, but also the possibility of short-term changes in the nature of work [45]. For the most constructive strategies which lower the level of negative stress in midwives and nurses work are cognitive and emotional methods for solving problems [7,46]. In addition to the modification of the place and working conditions, the acquisition and practice of interpersonal and expressive skills is an important element of prophylactic activity that counteracts excessive stress in the workplace. The training of creative expression serves to learning about yourself and the world, facilitates communication and interpersonal relationships, develops imagination, sensitivity and empathy [47].

Excessive stress load requires long-term cooperation with a psychotherapist. A break at work could very quickly bring an improvement in the health of the employee, while returning to the activities performed in the same conditions could be long-lasting and bring the disease back. This is because, due to the break in duties, the person is separated from the source of stress, but emotional problems remain unresolved. In a situation where the choice of strategy to overcome stress is inappropriate or a midwife / nurse does not make a conscious efforts against the negative effects of stress, it might turn out that changing the profession is the only solution [9,48].

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