

Application of Focused Group Interviews in Research on Occupational Burnout¹

Iwona Olejnik

Poznań University of Economics and Business

e-mail: iwona.olejnik@ue.poznan.pl

ORCID: [0000-0002-2019-0580](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2019-0580)

Sylwia Michalak

Poznań University of Economics and Business

e-mail: sylwia.michalak@ue.poznan.pl

ORCID: [0000-0001-7036-1715](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7036-1715)

© 2024 Iwona Olejnik, Sylwia Michalak

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

Quote as: Olejnik, I., & Michalak, S. (2024). Application of Focused Group Interviews in Research on Occupational Burnout. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 68(4), 61-74.

DOI: [10.15611/pn.2024.4.07](https://doi.org/10.15611/pn.2024.4.07)

JEL: I31, J28

Abstract

Aim: The aim of this article is to highlight the possibilities and limitations of using focus group interviews in studies on professional burnout.

Methodology: The study draws on relevant literature and presents findings from original research conducted with four groups of members of Generation Z.

Results: Analysis of qualitative research methodologies used in studies on professional burnout indicates that individual and group in-depth interviews are the dominant techniques. The primary goals of these studies are to identify professional experiences contributing to burnout, determine factors leading to stress and burnout, and develop intervention methods in this area.

Implications and recommendations: The article offers recommendations for the use of qualitative research methodologies, particularly focus group interviews, in projects related to professional burnout. These recommendations pertain both to the design and implementation of such studies.

¹ Supported by funds granted by the Minister of Science of the Republic of Poland under the “Regional Initiative for Excellence” Programme for the 5 implementation of the project “The Poznań University of Economics and Business for Economy 5.0: Regional Initiative – Global Effects (RIGE)”.

Originality/value: This article presents a novel approach that examines the potential of using focus group interviews to address the sensitive issue of burnout syndrome. The value of this approach is to point out its potential to include the perspective of Generation Z.

Keywords: qualitative research, focus group interviews, professional burnout

1. Introduction

Focus group interviews (FGIs) represent a valuable qualitative research technique, particularly well-suited for exploring new and under-researched issues as well as sensitive and complex topics. One such area is professional burnout, which is characterised by emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalisation, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). From a human resource management perspective, burnout poses a serious challenge for organisations, especially in light of the contemporary labour market's complexities and the enduring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A review of Scopus publications shows a sharp increase in burnout studies after 2019. While the pandemic certainly catalysed this surge, it is not the sole reason for the heightened interest; broader global changes have also contributed to the emergence of new factors influencing burnout. Moreover, opportunities for addressing burnout are evolving, supported by ongoing research and evidence-based interventions.

The objective of this article is to investigate the viability and limitations of using focus group interviews in the study of professional burnout. This inquiry draws not only on existing scholarly literature but also on the authors' original research conducted with Generation Z participants. The literature review spans discussions of the impact of burnout on modern business management, alongside an analysis of qualitative research methodologies employed across different countries. These insights are enriched by the authors' own empirical findings.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept and Significance of Burnout in Business Management

Burnout, at its core, is described as a psychological reaction to prolonged work-related stress, characterised by physical, emotional, and cognitive depletion and fatigue (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001). A broader definition appears in the Miller-Keane Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine (2024), where burnout is identified as "a state of emotional and physical exhaustion resulting from a mix of external and internal stressors, combined with insufficient coping and adaptive skills." It may also be defined as "a psychological condition marked by physical and emotional exhaustion, considered a reaction to stress due to a decreased capacity to cope with work-related demands" (*ibid.*).

Burnout is recognised as a significant issue that impacts the quality of life of many employees, as it affects both their physical and mental well-being. It can impact both professionals who work in direct contact with others (Wu et al., 2012; Sarros & Sarros, 1987), as well as those in roles that involve minimal social interaction (Low et al., 2001; Chen et al., 2012). Additionally, burnout can affect virtually anyone, irrespective of demographic factors such as gender, age, or occupational field (Tan et al., 2021; Teo et al., 2021; Michalak & Olejnik, 2023).

More recently, burnout is increasingly viewed not only as a condition stemming from individual characteristics but also as one influenced by the organisation in which a person works. (Altinoz et al., 2016; Taka et al., 2016; Shanafelt et al., 2015; Avanzi, 2018). Thus, there is a growing awareness among managers of the need for proactive interventions to prevent and manage burnout.

From the standpoint of the employee, effective prevention includes techniques such as assertiveness training, improving problem-solving and decision-making skills, defining personal values, setting attainable personal goals, learning and using emotional coping strategies, ensuring ample rest and relaxation, pursuing a healthy lifestyle, and reducing sources of stress both at work and at home (Miller-Keane, n.d.). Simply changing jobs is not always the best solution, especially for employees who have performed well so far. In many cases, leaving a job does not resolve underlying issues for either the employee or employer. Instead, a more beneficial approach may be to re-evaluate management practices, especially where burnout may be linked to particular operational mechanisms within the organisation.

From an institutional perspective, strategies for preventing and alleviating burnout may include implementing training sessions, psychological workshops, and motivational seminars (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 2020). Employers should bear in mind fundamental principles of human resources management, such as expressing appreciation and gratitude for employees' contributions, encouraging a healthy work-life balance, promoting a supportive work culture, and taking steps to mitigate stress, alongside clearly defining employees' roles and responsibilities. Establishing an environment of open communication, mutual trust, and harnessing employees' full potential can further enhance resilience against burnout.

Knowledge surrounding the causes and symptoms of burnout, its associated risks, and methods for prevention is steadily growing. This growth is evident in the increasing volume of scholarly work on the topic. As of August 2024, over 6,000 publications on burnout syndrome, documenting the key characteristics of this complex phenomenon, could be found in the Scopus database. The term "burnout syndrome" appeared with greater frequency in Scopus titles and keywords from 1980 to 2000, escalating from a mere two publications in 1980 to 38 in 2000, surpassing 100 by 2010, and reaching an annual output of 500–600 articles during the pandemic and in subsequent years (refer to Figure 1).

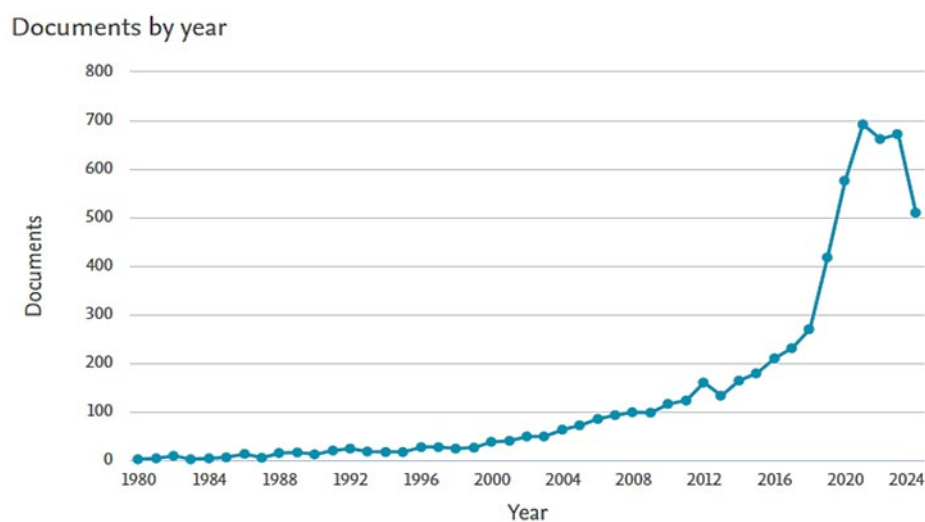


Figure 1. Publications with "burnout syndrome" in the title or keywords in the Scopus database

Source: Scopus database, as of 22 August 2024.

Most of these studies are found in the fields of medicine and psychology, while nearly 130 entries have been published in "Business, Management and Accounting" over the analysed period. This trend shows the growing recognition among researchers of human resource management of occupational burnout as a significant issue. Within this area, frequently occurring keywords associated with "occupational burnout" can be grouped into three clusters or thematic subfields (see Figure 2). These clusters were generated by assessing keyword co-occurrence in author-defined terms, using VOSviewer software to create a visual network based on similarity measures (assuming a minimum word frequency threshold of five). The circles vary in size according to keyword frequency, with lines depicting relational links between terms.

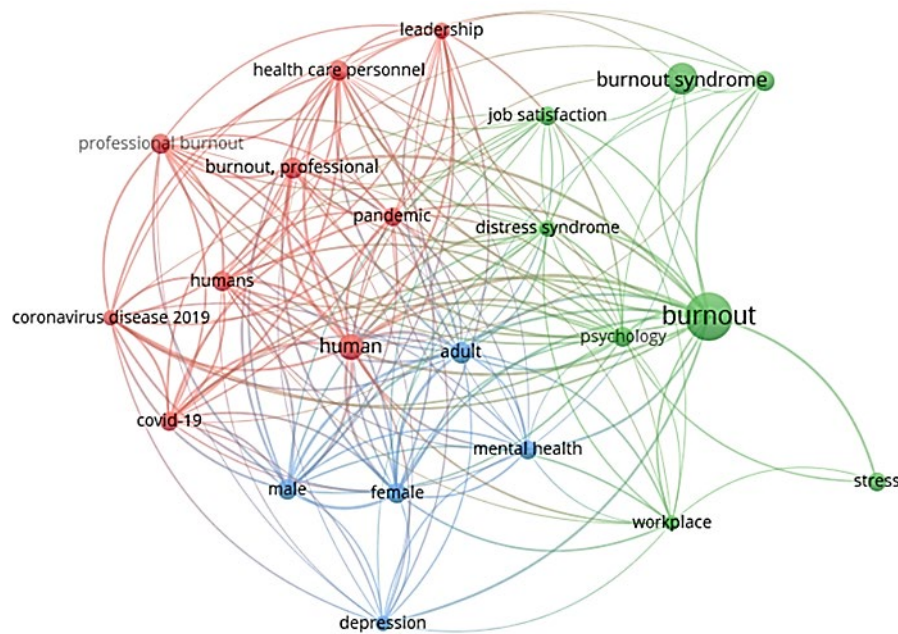


Figure 2. Thematic clusters of “burnout syndrome” publications in Scopus database

Source: based on Scopus data using VOSviewer software.

The first cluster (red) reveals a group of keywords focusing burnout, primarily in relation to the pandemic, healthcare professionals, and leadership. Studies within this cluster corroborate that occupational burnout, often escalating to resignation intentions, surged notably among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Osei et al., 2024; Sullivan et al., 2024; Lövenmark & Hammar, 2024). Key factors underpinning this rise included extreme work demands, staff shortages, and inadequate financial incentives, exacerbated by a lack of interdisciplinary support, reduced job satisfaction, unbalanced workloads, restricted learning and career development opportunities, and insufficient transparency in management communication. Consequently, the pandemic brought greater awareness to the issue of burnout and illustrated the pressing need for innovative strategies for tackling it effectively (Soklaridis et al., 2024). Proposed measures range from redesigning regular safety meetings to formalising coaching and mentorship programmes, enhancing communication through newsletters, and implementing an employee experience platform (Jelen et al., 2024).

The second cluster (green) covers conceptual understandings of burnout, as well as aspects of the workplace and job satisfaction, stress, and emotional depletion (Melnikow et al., 2024; Tahar et al., 2023). This cluster shows that burnout is multifaceted, and its analyses should consider social, political, and individual dimensions (Bracco et al., 2018). Publications here indicate the protective role of job engagement and personal ethics in mitigating emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation (Santiago-Torner et al., 2024). Stressors within the work environment, particularly those arising from a lack of respect for employees or misunderstanding of the specific nature of their work (such as tight deadlines, dismissive clients, or assignments conflicting with personal values), were cited as major contributors to burnout. While burnout is influenced by situational factors, its impact is acutely felt at an individual level (Bilowol et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies indicate a positive link between burnout and job demands, along with emotional involvement, while job autonomy and satisfaction are negatively correlated with burnout (Tahar et al., 2023).

The final cluster (blue) encompasses research on mental health, depression, and gender-related differences in burnout experiences. Findings, such as those by Cano et al. (2023), suggest that burnout rates among working mothers in managerial positions surpass those of their male counterparts. Burnout among women may be reduced through the introduction of a hybrid work pattern (i.e. working from home combined with working from the office).

Building on these insights, the following research question emerges: To what extent is qualitative research methodology applied in studies on occupational burnout, and how might this approach be tailored to research in Poland?

2.2. Burnout as a Subject of Qualitative Research

The phenomenon of professional burnout has been widely studied, with numerous research efforts employing a wide range of methods and measurement tools. Quantitative studies typically rely on validated instruments, such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), the Burnout Measure (Malach-Pines, 2005), the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008), and the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) (Kristensen et al., 2005).

In the realm of qualitative research, however, a universal methodology for studying burnout is not well-established. There is currently no standardised tool or universally accepted guideline regarding sample size that could provide a consistent approach to measuring burnout qualitatively. Thus, when preparing one's own qualitative research, it is beneficial to examine the methodologies used by other scholars in similar studies. This practice allows researchers to justify that their approach follows established research methods, or has been widely adopted in prior, published studies, which makes it more reproducible for future research (Holtkamp et al., 2019; Stefańska & Olejnik, 2021).

Table 1 outlines several key methodological aspects of selected qualitative studies on burnout, detailing specific research goals and sampling strategies.

Table 1. Selected methodological aspects of qualitative research on professional burnout

Authors	Research goals and sampling
Jelen et al. (2024)	Goal 1: Identifying workplace factors contributing to stress and occupational burnout. <i>Phases 1 and 2</i> – Individual in-depth interviews ($n = 35$) and focus groups ($n = 3$ groups, 12 participants total). Goal 2: Developing intervention strategies addressing the identified factors of stress and burnout. <i>Phase 3</i> – Co-designing workshops (2 workshops, $n = 11$ participants). Participants: Nurses ($n = 24$), other healthcare workers ($n = 10$), and doctors ($n = 17$).
Lövenmar & Hammar (2024)	Goal: Understanding the professional experiences of caregiving staff working with elderly patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, identifying challenges and preventative strategies. 4 focus group interviews ($n = 21$), including nurses, social workers, auxiliary nurses, a physiotherapist, 2 researchers, and 2 economists.
Bracco et al. (2018)	Goal: Examining institutional and social factors associated with burnout and job stress among Peruvian prison officers. 21 individual interviews with representatives from the National Prison Institute of Peru and 12 focus groups (59 staff members across 10 prison facilities).
Oksa et al. (2021)	Goal: Identifying motivations and impacts of social media use in the workplace, including its effect on stress, burnout, and mental health. Focus groups ($n = 52$) with highly skilled professionals (knowledge and solution-based service/product workers) from five Finnish organisations (finance, telecommunications, HR services, publishing, and retail).
Prochnow et al. (2020)	Goal: Examining the impact of various burnout coping strategies, including physical exercise, among fitness instructors. 3 focus group interviews ($n = 12$ fitness instructors, including 5 “master” instructors with extensive experience in training others, and 7 instructors undergoing training who have attended conferences and training sessions).
Vanheule & Verhaegh (2004)	Goal: Identifying key challenges faced by special educators working in residential care with youth or individuals with intellectual disabilities, including coping strategies for difficulties in relationships with clients, colleagues, and management. 2 respondent groups: 15 special educators with the highest and 15 with the lowest scores on the Flemish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory.
Berg et al. (2020)	Goal: Investigating causes and impacts of fatigue among cabin crew members involved in ultra-long-haul flights. 3 focus groups with airline crew members (9 participants per group).

Source: based on the cited articles.

It is noteworthy that qualitative research on occupational burnout has largely centred on understanding participants' experiences, pinpointing factors that trigger burnout, and examining both preventive approaches and strategies for coping with burnout once it occurs.

In terms of sampling methods, two points merit particular attention. First, in cases where qualitative interviews were part of a broader research project that began with quantitative surveys and the qualitative phase was used to interpret or expand on the quantitative results, the sample was often drawn from individuals who had participated in the initial quantitative phase (e.g., Jelen et al., 2024; Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2004; Prochnow et al., 2020). Secondly, when researchers determined that no new themes were emerging from additional interviews, they opted to discontinue further focus groups (Berg et al., 2020).

In constructing research tools, all authors pointed to the need for developing a structured interview protocol. This was especially necessary as multiple researchers (often the authors of the study) conducted the interviews. Typical topics covered in these guides included participants' professional backgrounds, working conditions, perceived health impacts, sources of fatigue, stress, workload, cases of unfair treatment, and other negative workplace experiences (Lövenmar & Hammar, 2024), along with assessments of work-life balance (Berg et al., 2020). Questions specifically related to burnout were then introduced. For instance, in Prochnow's (2020) study, the following interview questions were included:

- Understanding of burnout: "When you hear the term 'burnout', what comes to mind?"
- Situational context of burnout: "Can you describe a time when you may have felt burned out at work?"
- Causes of burnout: "What factors, in your view, led to this feeling of burnout?"
- Coping strategies: "What steps did you take to manage this feeling of burnout?" and "What suggestions would you offer for managing professional burnout?"

Regarding the qualitative research methodologies from the articles summarised in Table 1, the authors emphasised several key considerations:

- Ethical Standards: Following established ethical principles, participants were granted the right to withdraw from the study at any point, whether during the interview or after receiving the transcription, without providing a reason. Researchers also took care to obtain written consent from all participants beforehand, and in some cases, university research ethics committee approval was secured in advance. Additionally, researchers also stress that they need to collaborate with one another to discuss the results in successive cycles and agree on a shared interpretation.
- Researcher-Participant Relationship: To minimise potential biases and encourage honest answers, interviewers were selected based on their lack of affiliation with participants' organisations, ensuring they had no personal or professional connections.
- Location and Timing of Interviews: Interviews were held either over Zoom (Lövenmar & Hammar, 2024) or on-site at the workplace (Berg et al., 2020; Oksa et al., 2021), and durations varied widely, from around 46 minutes in some studies (Oksa et al., 2021) to 1.5–2 hours in others (Vanheule & Verhaeghe, 2004). In one study, focus group interviews (FGIs) ranged from 55 to 110 minutes despite being conducted under the same research project (Lövenmar & Hammar, 2024).
- Recording and Transcription: All interviews were recorded with participants' permission and carefully transcribed verbatim.
- Data Analysis: Some researchers utilised analytical software such as NVivo or Atlas.ti to aid in data analysis. Responses were coded by categories, such as personal, work-related, or client-related burnout, with coping strategies categorised as emotion-based, problem-based, engagement-focused, or withdrawal-focused (Prochnow, 2020). Themes were then consolidated and subjected to thematic content analysis (Jelen et al., 2024), and scholars often drew on analytic methods by Miles & Huberman (1994).

3. Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how young adults from Generation Z perceive occupational burnout and their expectations regarding strategies to manage it. This generational cohort was selected because of its members' unique experience: they have never known a world without the internet and social media, yet they are regarded as open-minded and creative. Many are at the start of their careers or are preparing to enter the workforce, which makes them a particularly compelling demographic for this research. Additionally, literature highlights specific characteristics within Generation Z: difficulty maintaining focus on single tasks, high levels of mobility, swift responses to change, and a pragmatic outlook on life (Białowas et al., 2022).

A focus group interview method was chosen to gather empirical data through in-depth group discussions among Generation Z participants on the topic of occupational burnout. The study was exploratory and conducted in four discussion groups in March 2021, with the sessions moderated by the authors of this paper. Importantly, the interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which might have influenced some of the findings.

Sampling was purposive and targeted young adults aged 20–25 ($n = 23$). Two groups included individuals who were both studying and working, while the other two groups comprised students only. Those working or studying in fields such as human resources or medicine were excluded from participation.

The focus group interview guide covered the following thematic areas:

1. Understanding of occupational burnout in work and academic settings
2. Sources and factors contributing to burnout
3. The mechanism and phases of burnout
4. Effects of burnout
5. Preventative measures (from the perspectives of employers, employees, and students)
6. Strategies for coping during different phases of burnout, sources of support, and strategies for helping affected individuals, including methods for helping employees return to work.

Table 2 provides a segment of the interview guide used, including estimated time allocations for each topic.

Table 2. Excerpt from the core section of the focus group interview guide on occupational burnout

Topic	Question/Implementation method
Understanding and Associations with Occupational Burnout (10 mins)	What comes to mind when you think of occupational burnout? <i>(Please write each association individually and anonymously; responses will be collected, discussed, and followed by a brief conversation).</i> How would you explain the concept of occupational burnout to someone unfamiliar with it?
Profile of a Burnt-Out Individual / Learner (10 mins)	How would you describe a person experiencing occupational burnout? <i>(Optional: please complete the following prompts)</i> A person experiencing burnout typically... works as a... works in... has worked for (number of years)... spends (amount of time) at work... is aged... lives in... other...
Preventive Measures (15 mins)	Is it possible to prevent burnout? Why or why not? How can one safeguard against it? What actions can an employer (or supervisor) take to reduce the risk of employee burnout? What steps can an employee take to protect themselves from burnout?
Coping with Burnout and Sources of Support (20 mins)	Imagine someone facing critical work tasks or projects that their career depends on. Due to burnout, they lack the energy to work. How might this person cope in this situation? What would you do if a friend confided in you about their burnout? Imagine you're part of a team where each member's contribution is essential for completing the project. What would you do if a colleague expressed feeling burnt out and unable to work? Imagine you are leading a project team. The contribution of each team member is crucial, and the project cannot be completed without their input. What would you do if one of your colleagues told you that they were feeling burnt out and unable to work?
Supporting Employee Return-to-Work (15 mins)	Imagine a person returning from an extended sick leave due to burnout. How could support be offered to ease their transition back to work?

Source: own elaboration.

Each research session lasted around 75 minutes and was conducted online via the MS Teams platform. Interviews were recorded with participants' consent, then transcribed and analysed through open coding. The Atlas.ti software provided additional support in data processing.

It is important to note that prior to the study, approval was granted by the University of Economics and Business Research Ethics Committee (approval no. 26/2021).

Selected Research Findings²

To understand occupational burnout, researchers first identified spontaneous associations with the term. Responses indicated that the concept is associated with a lack of motivation, disengagement, energy depletion, and reluctance toward work, alongside feelings of fatigue, monotony, stress, and loss of joy. Participants described this as leading to a general aversion not only to new ideas but to all aspects of work, including getting out of bed and going to work, as well as an absence of purpose in one's job. Moreover, Generation Z interviewees noted that burnout impacts other areas of life, and often results in anger and aggression that can negatively affect one's close relationships. They also emphasised the need to distinguish burnout from mere frustration, as burnout may lead to depressive states. Individuals experiencing burnout may express their emotions openly, but some may suppress their feelings and exhaustion, which can pose risks and potentially lead to depression.

The results of the free association test regarding burnout are presented in Figure 3. Fatigue, loss of motivation and engagement, aversion to work, depression, and monotony (as well as related synonyms) emerged as the most common associations with **occupational** burnout.

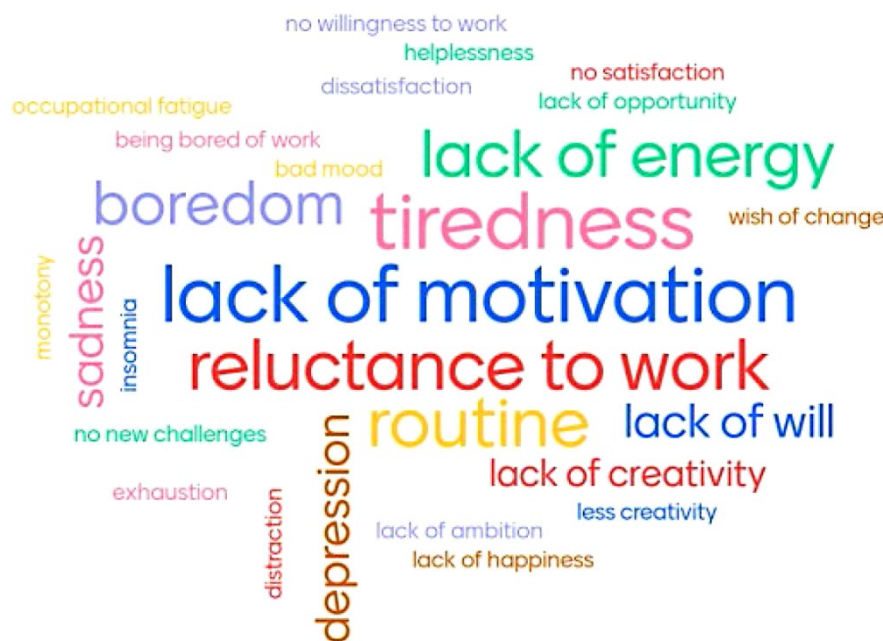


Figure 3. Burnout – perceptions of Generation Z

Source: own elaboration.

Young respondents believe that burnout can affect anyone – not only working professionals but also students. It tends to arise when academic programs fall short of expectations, when there is an increasing sense of unfair grading, or when students feel overwhelmed by the combined demands

² Due to the extensive nature of the research, this article presents selected findings related to the first two issues outlined in the guide, namely associations with occupational burnout among employees, and the perceived profile of a burnt-out employee (or student). Further results can be found in the article by Michalak & Olejnik (2023).

of work and study (leading to feeling constantly busy, lacking personal time, failing exams, or missing opportunities to showcase one's skills in the workplace).

In profiling a person experiencing burnout (either professionally or academically), members of Generation Z noted that this phenomenon is not strictly tied to specific jobs, genders, ages, tenure, or situational factors like company size or city. Instead, factors like personality, one's attitude toward work, enjoyment of one's role, and the environment both in and outside of work contribute more significantly.

Typically, the young respondents saw burnout as particularly affecting individuals who are ambitious but feel undervalued, and who are often given tasks beyond their abilities. Burnout may also impact employees with long tenure, those who perform the same monotonous and routine tasks, individuals in roles with minimal growth potential, or those for whom the prospect of advancement is illusory. Burnout may be particularly prevalent among:

- Employees who have invested considerable time, energy, and resources into becoming specialists, who have achieved their goals and may now feel that they have "reached the ceiling," and have limited retraining options, which leads to frustration and eventual burnout;
- Perfectionists who desire career growth opportunities, wish to realise new projects, and work creatively, yet find themselves completing monotonous tasks and frequently "hitting a wall," as their ideas are promised consideration but are never implemented;
- Those facing growing demands yet lacking appropriate encouragement or recognition from managers;
- Individuals who feel their career or study choices have been misguided and later come to regret these decisions;
- Those balancing numerous responsibilities outside work and feeling pressured to excel in all areas of life;
- Those sensitive to stress who experience continuous scrutiny and comparison with others in rankings;
- Sensitive people who take criticism to heart and become easily discouraged;
- Those lacking the necessary competencies for their role, assigned tasks they struggle to complete, which ultimately diminishes their motivation to make any effort;
- Those performing tasks mismatched with their temperament or professional aspirations, with few opportunities to showcase their true strengths.

Although respondents acknowledged that burnout does not need to be tied to specific professions, gender, age, years of service, or other personal characteristics, these factors nevertheless appeared in their responses in the context of varying degrees of susceptibility to occupational burnout. Regarding profession, respondents indicated that burnout is more common among individuals with higher education who either work intensively with others or perform monotonous, repetitive tasks lacking in opportunities for advancement, which ultimately dampens their ambition and drive. In particular, individuals from Generation Z believe that those in mentally taxing, high-stakes professions, such as doctors who frequently encounter life-and-death scenarios, or in repetitive office-based roles, such as accounting, where tasks can quickly become routine, as well as employees in corporate settings, seem particularly vulnerable. Another commonly cited group included senior management staff, who may face burnout due to the heavy burden of responsibility and extensive demands. A third group, though seemingly at lower risk than others, comprises students. For students, burnout can emerge from pursuing courses that do not resonate with their interests, or from stress linked to exams or classes (especially in online formats, where they lack in-person peer interactions), culminating in feelings of burnout or even consideration of quitting their studies.

Young people also suggested that those with lower educational levels, who often work in simple or manual jobs (such as construction or warehouse positions), might experience less burnout as well

as be less conscious of the issue. Concerning gender, the young participants had difficulty identifying its direct influence on burnout, though some speculated that men might be more susceptible. This assumption, they reasoned, may arise from societal expectations that “men should succeed in their careers and be primary earners,” a pressure that, if unmet, can contribute to professional burnout.

Regarding work tenure, respondents observed that while it is difficult to pinpoint an exact time when burnout might occur, time spent in a particular role can certainly influence its emergence. Repeating the same tasks in the same job and organisation for many years can gradually lead to burnout, as satisfaction and engagement often wane over time. Some respondents pointed to the 10- to 20-year mark as a period when burnout risk increases, particularly for “those over 50, whose children likely left the nest and who have more time for reflection” (male, 22). Generation Z respondents noted that burnout tends to be less common in a first job, as younger people usually find job transitions more manageable.

In summary, participants largely agree on what burnout entails and recognise its potential to affect anyone. However, each person’s perception of burnout is coloured by personal observations and experiences, with different factors being regarded as contributory.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Burnout is a broad issue that can be examined from multiple angles and ongoing debate around its perception, causes, and effects suggests ample opportunities for further research. As an area of empirical inquiry, burnout is often investigated through qualitative approaches, which allows for a fuller appreciation of its complexity, the subjective experiences of those affected, and the environments in which it arises. In terms of qualitative research methodology, in-depth interviews – especially individual interviews – are valuable for probing personal histories, emotions, and coping mechanisms related to burnout, as shown in this article (Jelen et al., 2024; Bracco et al., 2018). Paired with narrative analysis, they enable a more nuanced interpretation of how individuals experience burnout on a personal level. In addition, focus groups offer valuable perspectives of shared experiences among those working under similar conditions (Lövenmar & Hammar, 2024; Prochnow et al., 2020; Berg et al., 2020).

The rationale for using focus group interviews (FGI) in this study on occupational burnout was the exploratory nature of the research and its objective: to gain an in-depth understanding of young people’s perceptions and shared experiences of burnout. Additionally, this research aimed to prompt discussion on various preventive solutions for burnout among Generation Z, tailored to the needs of this demographic. The group interviews enabled researchers to delineate a profile of individuals affected by burnout and gather empirical data on difficult subjects and personal experiences amidst contemporary societal pressures.

FGI offers several benefits, including the positive influence participants may have on one another, the ability of the moderator to stimulate discussion, the capacity to obtain insights from a larger group within a limited timeframe, and the potential for multiple interpretations of the collected data (Kaczmarek et al., 2022). Nonetheless, FGIs also have limitations, such as the potential for negative interactions between participants (e.g., group conformity, suggestibility, dominance by certain individuals), potential biases introduced by the moderator (e.g., inhibiting discussion or steering responses towards personal hypotheses), superficial data collection, and the risk of over-interpretation or misinterpretation of participants’ statements (Kaczmarek et al., 2022). Hence, in qualitative research, it is advisable to consider a variety of complementary methods and techniques to capture a fuller view.

Participant observation may also be advantageous in research on occupational burnout. Observing employees in their natural work environments, noting changes in behaviours, work style, and other factors, can not only serve as a preliminary step towards identifying signs of burnout but also reveal elements of organisational culture that may contribute to it. In addition, content and discourse analysis

can further enrich burnout studies by exploring language and communication styles found in organisational documents, reports, and other related materials (such as materials from institutions and organisations addressing this issue). This approach sheds light on how burnout is perceived within the organisation and the norms and strategies deployed to manage it.

The study's findings reveal several practical implications for organisations looking to mitigate occupational burnout. Generation Z respondents recognise the need for both individual and organisational strategies, a perspective in line with current research (Golparvar & Parsakia, 2023; Lima & Dolabela, 2021). On the individual level, employees should be reminded of the importance of continuous learning about job satisfaction, personal growth, and coping mechanisms. Various resources, such as literature and dedicated websites, offer foundational insights, while activities like exercise and social involvement are examples of burnout prevention strategies that can be implemented by each individual. Additionally, maintaining boundaries between work and personal life can help prevent work-family conflicts. As Demerouti (2015) argues, "finding bottom-up strategies that individuals use to minimize burnout or its unfavourable effects may be essential to complement the top interventions initiated by organizations."

On the institutional level, Generation Z participants suggested that burnout prevention could begin as early as the recruitment and selection stages. Carefully selecting candidates based on role requirements, offering training and workshops, and providing access to therapeutic support are all measures that can help reduce job stress leading to burnout. This view is consistent with the findings of other studies, such as research by Schaufeli & Enzmann (2020). Furthermore, organisations should support employees with transparent communication (Soklaridis et al., 2024), along with coaching and mentoring initiatives, which are vital for burnout prevention (Jelen et al., 2024). These findings are further substantiated by this study.

5. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The expectations of Generation Z toward the job market may raise several concerns for employers. This youngest workforce is often perceived as overly demanding, disengaged, overly self-assured, and occasionally hypersensitive. It is also a generation that prioritises personal development and places significant importance on a positive workplace atmosphere (Białowąs et al., 2022; Błaszczak, 2024). Taking into account these characteristics, companies need to adapt their HR management strategies, particularly to address the risk of burnout among employees. Understanding Generation Z's perspective on burnout adds value to this effort, although, as recent research notes, "there is currently little consensus regarding how to intervene effectively" to prevent burnout among younger cohorts (Madigan et al., 2024).

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this study. Firstly, only one qualitative method – focus group interviews – was employed. In future research, methodological triangulation incorporating individual interviews, dyads, or observational methods could yield broader and more nuanced insights. The complexity of burnout's causes, development, and effects calls for such a multifaceted approach. Secondly, another limitation lies in the study's narrow focus on Generation Z, with a relatively small sample size and data collection conducted in a specific context (i.e., during the Covid-19 pandemic). The views of older generations, which could offer contrasting perspectives, were not investigated.

For future research, it would be beneficial for organisations to conduct regular assessments of burnout levels among employees, enabling pre-emptive action. From a scholarly and methodological perspective, expanding studies to include other generations and diversifying the qualitative methods – such as individual interviews, dyads, mini-groups, or observational techniques – would further enrich our understanding of occupational burnout.

References

- Altinoz, M., Cop, S., Cakiroglu, D., & Altinoz, O. T. (2016). The Influence of Organization Support Perceived in Enterprises on Burnout Feeling: A Field Research. *Procedia–Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 235, 427–434. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.11.053>
- Avanzi, L., Fraccaroli, F., Castelli, L., Marcionetti, J., Crescentini, A., Balducci, C., & Dick, R. (2018). How to Mobilize Social Support against Workload and Burnout: The Role of Organizational Identification, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 69, 154–167. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.10.001>
- Berg, M. J. van den, Signal, T. L., & Gander, P. H. (2020). Fatigue Risk Management for Cabin Crew: The Importance of Company Support and Sufficient Rest for Work-life Balance – a Qualitative Study, *Industrial Health*, 58(1), 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.2486/indhealth.2018-0233>
- Białowąs, S., Gołata, K., Krzyminiewska, G., Olejnik, I., Shelest-Szumilas, O., Waligóra, A., & Zboroń, H., (2022). *Nowe Pokolenie w Nowej Gospodarce. Raport naukowo-badawczy*. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Poznaniu
- Bilowol, J., Robinson, J. A., Wise, D. & Sison, M. (2024). ‘Always Being On’: Exploring the Experience of Burnout Among Female Professionals in the Australian Public Relations Industry. In E. Bridgen & S. Williams (Eds.), *Women’s Work in Public Relations* (pp. 129–145). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80455-538-520241007>
- Błaszczak, A., (2024). Pokolenie Z budzi postrach wśród pracodawców. *Rzeczpospolita*. Retrieved April 15, 2024 from <https://www.rp.pl/rynek-pracy/art40162451-pokolenie-z-budzi-postrach-wsrod-pracodawcow>
- Bracco, L., Váldez, R., Wakeham, N., & Velázquez, T. (2018). Professional Burnout Syndrome and Peruvian Prison Workers. A Qualitative Study of Institutional and Social Factors. *Revista Colombiana de Psicología*, 28(1), 13–28. <https://doi.org/10.15446/rcp.v28n1.66056>
- Cano, Y. M., Ruiz, D. D., & Esquivel, K. C. (2023). Burnout effect on working mothers in leadership positions during the COVID-19 lockdown. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 38(7), 962–977. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-03-2022-0085>
- Chen, Z., Sun, H., Lam, W., Hu, Q., Huo, Y., & Zhong, J. A. (2012). Chinese Hotel Employees in the Smiling Masks: Roles of Job Satisfaction, Burnout, and Supervisory Support in Relationships between Emotional Labor and Performance. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(4), 826–845. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.579918>
- Demerouti, E., & Bakker, A. B. (2008). The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory: A Good Alternative to Measure Burnout and Engagement. *Handbook of Stress and Burnout in Health Care*, 65(7), 1–25.
- Demerouti, E., (2015). Strategies Used by Individuals to Prevent Burnout. *European Journal of Clinical Investigation*, 45(10), 1106–1112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eci.12494>
- Golparvar, M., & Parsakia, K. (2023). Building Resilience: Psychological Approaches to Prevent Burnout in Health Professionals. *KMAN Counseling & Psychology Nexus*, 1(1), 159–166. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.psychnexus.1.1.18>
- Holtkamp, P., Soliman, W., & Siponen, M. (2019). Reconsidering the Role of Research Method Guidelines for Qualitative, Mixed-Methods, and Design Science Research. In *Proceedings of the 52nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS 2019)*. University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/60062>
- Jelen, A., Goldfarb, R., Rosart, J. Graham, L., & Rubin, B. B. (2024). A Qualitative Co-Design-Based Approach to Identify Sources of Workplace-Related Distress and Develop Well-Being Strategies for Cardiovascular Nurses, Allied Health Professionals, and Physicians. *BMC Health Services Research*, 24, 246. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-024-10669-x>
- Kaczmarek, M., Olejnik, I., & Springer, A., (2022). *Badania jakościowe: metody i zastosowania*. CeDeWu.
- Kristensen, T. S., Borritz, M., Villadsen, E., Christensen, K. B. (2005). The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory: A New Tool for the Assessment of Burnout. *Work & Stress*, 19(3), 192–207.
- Lima, S. dos S. F. de & Dolabela, M. F. (2021). Strategies Used for the Prevention and Treatment of Burnout Syndrome. *Research, Society and Development*, 10(5). <https://doi.org/10.33448/rsd-v10i5.14500>
- Low, G. S., Cravens, D. W., Grant, K., & Moncrief, W. C. (2001), Antecedents and Consequences of Salesperson Burnout. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(5/6). <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560110388123>
- Lövenmark A., & Hammar L. M. (2024). Being Used for the Greater Good while Fighting on the Frontline: Care Staff’s Experiences of Working with Older People during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sweden. *BMC Geriatrics*, 24(1), 135. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-023-04644-0>
- Madigan, D. J., Kim, L. E. Glandorf, H. L. (2024) Interventions to Reduce Burnout in Students: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 39, 931–957. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-023-00731-3>
- Malach-Pines, A. (2005). The Burnout Measure, Short Version. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 12(1), 78.
- Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job Burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 397–422.
- Maslach C., Jackson S. E. (1981). The Measurement of Experienced Burnout, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2(2), 99–113. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030020205>
- Melnikow, J., Xing, G., Miller, M. E., Loureiro, S., Padovani, A. J., Whitney, R., & Kravitz, R. L. (2024). Workplace Support for Physicians during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Did it Affect Burnout?. *BMC Health Services Research*, 24(1), 888.
- Michalak, S., & Olejnik, I. (2023). Burnout and Ways of Preventing It: A Qualitative Analysis. *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Krakowie*, 2(1000), 87–103. <https://doi.org/10.15678/ZNUEK.2023.1000.0205>

- Miles, M., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Sage.
- Miller-Keane. (n.d.) Burnout. In *Miller-Keane Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing, and Allied Health*, Seventh Edition. Retrieved August 22, 2024 from <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/burnout>
- Oksa, R., Saari, T., Kaakinen, M., & Oksanen, A. (2021). The Motivations for and Well-Being Implications of Social Media Use at Work among Millennials and Members of Former Generations. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 18, 803. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020803>
- Olejnik, I. (Ed.) (2021). *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Sustainable Development*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Poznaniu. <https://doi.org/10.18559/978-83-8211-072-2>
- Osei, H.V., Arthur, J., Aseibu, F., Osei-Kwame, D., Fiakeye, R., & Abama, C. (2024). The joint impact of burnout and neurotic personality on career satisfaction and intention to leave among health workers during the first 2 years of COVID-19. *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 38(5), 621–637. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHOM-03-2023-0089>
- Prochnow, T., Oglesby, L., Patterson, M. S., & Umstattd Meyer, M. R. (2020). Perceived Burnout and Coping Strategies among Fitness Instructors: A Mixed Methods Approach. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 27(5), 484–498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2020.1825986>
- Saldana, J. (2021). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Sage.
- Santiago-Torner, C., Corral-Marfil, J. A., & Tarrats-Pons, E. (2024). Relationship between Personal Ethics and Burnout: The Unexpected Influence of Affective Commitment. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(6), 123. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14060123>
- Sarros, J. C., & Sarros, A. M. (1987). Predictors of Teacher Burnout, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 25(2), <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb009933>
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Greenglass, E. R. (2001). Introduction to Special Issue on Burnout and Health. *Psychology and Health*, 16, 501e510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440108405523>
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Enzmann, D. (2020). *The Burnout Companion to Study and Practice. A Critical Analysis*. Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003062745>
- Shanafelt, T.D., Gorringer, G., Menaker, R., Storz, K. A., Reeves, D., Buskirk, S. J, Sloan, J. A., & Swensen, S. J. (2015). Impact of Organizational Leadership on Physician Burnout and Satisfaction. *Mayo Clin Proc.*, 90(4), 432–440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2015.01.012>
- Soklaridis, S., Zaheer, R., Scully, M., Shier, R., Williams, B., Dang, L., Sam, D., Sanjeev S., & Tremblay, M. (2024). ‘We Are in for a Culture Change’: Continuing Professional Development Leaders’ Perspectives on COVID-19, Burn-out and Structural Inequities. *BMJ Leader*, 8(2), 142–1461. <https://doi.org/10.1136/leader-2023-000837>
- Stefańska, M., & Olejnik, I. (2021). Dobór próby i analiza wyników w badaniach jakościowych. In M. Rószkiewicz, K. Mazurek-Łopacińska, A. Sagan (Eds.), *Dobór próby we współczesnych badaniach marketingowych. Podejścia ilościowe, jakościowe i mieszane* (pp. 59–74). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego.
- Sullivan, E. E., Etz, R. S., Gonzalez, M. M., Deubel, J., Reves, S. R., Stange, K. C., Hughes, L.S., & Linzer, M. (2024). You Cannot Function in “Overwhelm”: Helping Primary Care Navigate the Slow End of the Pandemic. *Journal of Healthcare Management*, 69(3), 190–204. <https://doi.org/10.1097/JHM-D-23-00102>
- Taka, F., Nomura, K., Horie, S., Takemoto, K., Takeuchi, M., Takenoshita, S., Murakami, A., Hiraike, H., Okinaga, H., & Smith, D. R. (2016). Organizational Climate with Gender Equity and Burnout among University Academics in Japan. *Industrial Health*, 54, 480–487. <https://doi.org/10.2486/indhealth.2016-0126>
- Tahar, Y. B., Rejeb, N., Maalaoui, A., Kraus, S., Westhead, P., & Jones, P. (2023). Emotional Demands and Entrepreneurial Burnout: The Role of Autonomy and Job Satisfaction. *Small Business Economics*, 61(2), 701–716. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-022-00702-w>
- Tan, K. L., Lew, T. Y., & Sim, A. K. S. (2021). Effect of Work Engagement on Meaningful Work and Psychological Capital: Perspectives from Social Workers in New Zealand, *Employee Relations*, 43(3), 807-826. <https://doi.org/10.1108/er-11-2019-0433>
- Teo, S. T. T., Nguyen, D., Shafaei, A., & Bentley, T. (2021). High Commitment HRM and Burnout of Frontline Food Service Employees: A Moderated Mediation Model, *Employee Relations*, 43(6), 1342-1361. <https://doi.org/10.1108/er-06-2020-0300>
- Vanheule, S., & Verhaeghe, P. (2004). Powerlessness and Impossibility in Special Education: A Qualitative Study on Professional Burnout from a Lacanian Perspective, *Human Relations*, 57(4), 497–519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726704043897>
- Wu, S., Li, H., Zhu, W., Lin, S., Chai, W., & Wang, X. (2012). Effect of Work Stressors, Personal Strain, and Coping Resources on Burnout in Chinese Medical Professionals: A Structural Equation Model, *Industrial Health*, 50(4), pp. 279-287. <https://doi.org/10.2486/indhealth.MS1250>

Zastosowanie zogniskowanych wywiadów grupowych w badaniach nad wypaleniem zawodowym

Streszczenie

Cel: Celem artykułu jest wskazanie na możliwości i ograniczenia zastosowania zogniskowanego wywiadu grupowego w badaniach dotyczących problemu wypalenia zawodowego.

Metodyka: W opracowaniu wykorzystano literaturę przedmiotu oraz wyniki badań własnych przeprowadzonych wśród czterech grup przedstawicieli pokolenia Z.

Wyniki: Analiza metodyk badań jakościowych zrealizowanych przez badaczy zajmujących się tematyką wypalenia zawodowego wskazuje, że dominującymi technikami badawczymi są indywidualne oraz grupowe wywiady pogłębione. Głównymi celami badań są zaś identyfikacja doświadczeń zawodowych przyczyniających się do wypalenia zawodowego, określenie czynników przyczyniających się do stresu i wypalenia zawodowego oraz opracowanie metod interwencji w tym zakresie.

Implikacje i rekomendacje: W artykule zawarto rekomendacje dotyczące możliwości zastosowania metodologii badań jakościowych, w szczególności zogniskowanych wywiadów grupowych, w projektach dotyczących wypalenia zawodowego. Dotyczą one zarówno projektowania przygotowywania takich badań, jak i ich realizacji.

Oryginalność/wartość: W artykule przedstawiono nowatorskie podejście polegające na analizie możliwości zastosowania zogniskowanych wywiadów grupowych w odniesieniu do wrażliwej kwestii, jaką jest syndrom wypalenia zawodowego. Wartością jest wskazanie na potencjał tej metody w kontekście uwzględnienia perspektywy pokolenia Z.

Słowa kluczowe: badania jakościowe, zogniskowane wywiady grupowe, syndrom wypalenia zawodowego
