

## Abstract

This research explored the phenomenon: "Professional Burnout". On the basis of what have been achieved by the recent developments in theory and research and what issues were still unresolved, the research question was formed. The object of the project was to improve the overall comprehension of the phenomenon. The intention was particularly related to bring forth more knowledge about what were the emotional and physical experiences of burnout from the perspectives of sufferers, and how the Gestalt approach could contribute to the understanding and treatment of burnout.

The project was carried out in Oslo (Norway), as a phenomenological survey. Four women and two men, who had experienced burnout, were interviewed. The phenomenological method of data reduction and analysis described the "how" of the phenomenon, through seven specific steps. The outcome of the data-analysis exhibited the etiology of burnout as a process defined by four discernable phases; the Achievement Phase, the Pressure Phase, the Psychosomatic Collapse Phase and the Personal Reorientation Phase. By going through these phases the interviewees perceived psychosomatic exhaustion and modifications in self-esteem, which gradually confirmed a negative self-image.

The etiology of the phenomenon and the chosen theory elucidated that the individual could not be understood except by considering his or her subjective "reality" in the context of the whole field and thus in the context of relationships.

The discussion concluded that burnout might be seen as a shame reaction. Shame influenced the contact style and caused a shift in the perceived self-image. Thus shame affect seemed to be of fundamental significance to the process of burning out. The study also showed that the medical support offered within the health care system was experienced as inadequate.