

## **Burn Out and Depression of Employees Who Worked in Essential Supply Stores during the Pandemic Covid -19**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The global COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected people's lives, created many challenges and impacted many areas, including health, work, education, the economy and social welfare. The restrictive measures imposed to control and deal with the pandemic were many and at many different levels. Because of these measures, the majority of people were forced to stay indoors, isolated, without their daily activities, with very specific movements and with a lot of free time. On the other hand, there was a part of the population that continued to work (such as doctors, nurses, and workers in the shops of essential goods) and even in very difficult conditions.

The employees in the supermarkets in particular faced a significant difficulty, since on the one hand the opening hours of the supermarkets were extended and on the other hand they were in daily contact with many different people, so they also had to manage their fear of being exposed to the virus. The present study examines the burnout and depression of workers in grocery stores during the pandemic. Specifically, the stores in which the survey was conducted were two large supermarkets of the SKLAVENITIS chain in the area of Elefsina and Psychiko in the Prefecture of Attica and it appeared that the employees showed moderate emotional exhaustion during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**KEYWORDS:** Burn out, Depression, COVID-19, Workers in Essentials Stores, Supermarket

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Covid-19 pandemic was caused by SARS-Cov-2 which first appeared in Wuhan, China on December 31, 2019. The symptoms were dry cough, fever and shortness of breath. In Greece, the virus spread from February 26, 2020 onwards. There were many restrictive measures - lock down - nationwide (interruption of any unnecessary movement, closure of restaurants and retail, etc.). The measures taken were many and at many different levels.

One movement that allowed citizens was to go to the shops of essential goods. According to the instructions of the civil protection, these were the supermarkets and the mini markets ("Certificate of Marketing Authorization - Instructions to Citizens", etc.). However, the shops that remained open during the pandemic for the supply of basic necessities were

"All retail businesses to meet household needs, especially supermarkets, grocery stores, butchers, fishmongers, bakeries, bakeries fruit shops, wineries, (Corona various: What is forbidden and what is allowed - Which shops are open", 2020).

There have been serious health consequences for COVID-19 and many negative social and economic changes. All this created great stress for the people and those who lived in confinement and did not work but mainly to those who worked such as doctors, supermarket employees, etc. Also, people were greatly affected psychologically as "in every epidemic people are affected as they feel: anxiety about losing health", "fear of death, feeling of inability and inability to protect and care for loved ones, fear of social stigma in case of isolation or illness, boredom and depression due to the

observance of isolation measures (Triantaphyllidou, 2020, pp.21-22).

According to El-Terk, in a research that has been conducted, there is a direct connection between the fear and uncertainty that people felt in the COVID-19 pandemic with over-consuming behaviors since there was a shortage of food and basic necessities in the supermarket, e.g. toilet paper (Bhullar, Durkin & Usher, 2020).

In the general population it is obvious that there is no significant difference compared to the previous situation. On the contrary, consumer choices remain generally the same as their consumer behavior (Tzillili & Bisbardi, 2020).

According to most research conducted in Greece, consumers did not change their consumer behavior much after the outbreak of the pandemic. Nevertheless, there are points in the literature that refer to reckless consumer behavior at certain intervals. It should be borne in mind that research in Greece on COVID-19 and consumer behavior is quite limited.

Another way to buy products from supermarkets is to order online. According to the following research, it increased a lot and also affected the working conditions of the employees. This is because employees are required to collect the products to be sent to consumers. The first period of the pandemic "sales of electronic supermarkets increased by 180% compared to the same period last year" (Manifava, 2020, pp.15-16) It is reported that according to IRI Hellas "the super markets had a turnover, higher by about 400 million euros compared to last year" not the same and IELKA estimates "that in the last quarter 82.4 million fewer visits were made to the physical stores of the chains. » (op.cit.).

Therefore, it follows from all this that for supermarket employees there was a very special difficulty due to COVID-19. In addition, "the extension of working hours", as they were available to consumers fourteen hours a day from Monday to Friday and 13 respectively on Saturdays, allowing the most convenient processing of visits to them, with the relevant ministerial decision which was part of the measures of the pandemic "(Tzillili & Bisbardi, 2020) led the workers to work non-stop.

Therefore, due to all these special conditions and difficulties that were reported, and which were faced, during the pandemic, by the workers in the shops of essential goods, it was considered important to study the burnout and depression that may have occurred. Maslach (1982) argues that "Job burnout is the loss of interest in the people one works with, including physical exhaustion, and is characterized by emotional exhaustion where the professional no longer has any positive feelings of sympathy or respect for clients or patients" (Vassiliadou, 2013). Specifically, Maslach defined three main dimensions of this syndrome "of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced sense of personal achievement in the professional field" (Karagianni, 2018). Emotional exhaustion "is characterized by a lack of energy and enthusiasm and the depletion of emotional resources",

depersonalization refers to "a set of negative attitudes for patients, colleagues and the work environment" and a reduced sense of personal achievement "is described as an employee's tendency for negative self-evaluation and as an unpleasant feeling regarding their performance at work "(Giakovis, 2014).

The term "burnout" is used to describe the psychosomatic condition and work performance of a person (or group of persons) involved in the production process. It declares the almost complete annihilation of the professional (and personal) existence of the individual (Vassilopoulos, 2012). Burnout is a syndrome, which concerns "the psychosomatic condition but also the work performance that a person experiences under certain working conditions, declaring for that person the complete exhaustion of both his professional and personal condition". This syndrome appears more and more often in the last decades and especially "in professions that offer mainly services to people" (Karagianni 2018). The main causes of burnout are on the one hand the difficult and stressful working conditions (such as excessive workload, bad working environment, job insecurity, low pay, etc.) and on the other hand the expectations that the person has both of himself as well as from his work environment (e.g. high expectations, achievement of high goals, search for existential meaning through work, etc.) (Karagianni, 2018). Burnout has consequences for a person's health (e.g. heart disease, stomach ulcer, depressed mood), presence and performance in the workplace (e.g. reduced productivity, frequent absences, retirement, and even resignation) and leads to "intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions" both at work and in his family (Vassilopoulos, 2012).

In psychiatry, however, the term depression refers to a specific illness, a disorder (often referred to as "clinical depression") that causes a combination of symptoms. Depression is a disorder that affects mood, thoughts and is usually accompanied by physical discomfort. It affects a person's eating habits, his sleep, the way he sees himself and the way he thinks and perceives. "This depressive feeling is very intense, lasts for at least two consecutive weeks or more and leads to a decrease in the functionality of the person in many areas of his life to work, exercise, love, etc. Therefore, there is confusion between being depressed and just feeling sad, as they are different (Helen M. Farrell, 2015). Depression affects almost all areas of a person's life, one of which is work life. The patient with depression shows reduced efficiency in his professional space due to his inability to concentrate, his loss of energy and his physical fatigue. He is often forced to be absent from work and, thus, is in danger of losing it. Therefore, quite often, depression is confused with burnout, which however is limited to the workplace. Depression and burnout share some characteristics, but they are two different phenomena that can coexist and show some common elements. However, they are not identical, as in depression negative thoughts and emotions are not limited to the workplace but extend to various areas of life (Karadede,

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2019). Depression is a serious health problem worldwide, with an increasing number of vulnerable patients being overwhelmed by anxiety and other related disorders. As she states in her work, depression, today, is a particularly stigmatized social-psychological disorder. So, often, sufferers remain silent, refuse any help and experience the fear that they will remain stigmatized forever (Karadede 2019).

It was observed that in Greece no research seems to have been carried out on the burnout and depression of workers in shops supplying essential goods. In our country, research on burnout and depression mainly concerns teachers and health professionals (doctors and nurses) (Vassiliadou, 2013). Therefore, due to this lack and the special conditions in which we live due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was considered important to conduct this research.

### METHODOLOGY

The present study aims to investigate burnout syndrome in grocery store workers and to search for a possible association with depression during COVID-19. In addition, the data will be correlated with the individual, social and work characteristics of the participants and whether the pandemic affects the feeling of burnout on supermarket employees.

In order to investigate the above objectives of the present research, the quantitative methodological approach was chosen and the main selection criteria of the population were 1) to be employees in supply stores and 2) to want to participate in the research. The sample of the research consisted of 200 employees, who were employed in various positions, in 2 supermarkets of the chain SKLAVENITIS in the area of Elefsina and Psychiko in the Prefecture of Attica during the COVID-19 pandemic. The total sample that finally participated was 117 employees, 86 women (73.50%) and 31 men (26.50%), aged 20-60 years with a rate of 6.84% at 52 and 53 years and with a rate of 5, 98% in 42 years, in the majority married at 63.25%, with educational level mainly high school at 52.14%, the majority with residence in Elefsina at 52.99%, who worked in various departments (29.06% in the exhibition, 27.35% in the cash registers, 7.69% in the warehouse etc.) with years of service in the respective department at 2 years at a rate of 10.26% and total years of service from 1 - 41 years, at a rate of 9.40% at 33 years and at a rate of 5.98% at 15 -28 years.

An anonymous, self-administered questionnaire consisting of three parts was used to collect the data: the first part included the demographic and social characteristics of the sample, as well as information on anonymity and the purpose of the research. The second part included the Maslach Occupational Exhaustion Scale for burnout syndrome (Maslach Burnout Inventory -MBI) and the third part the Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI) scale. The MBI scale, which consists of 3 subscales with a total of 22 questions (9 for emotional exhaustion, 5 for depersonalization and 8 for personal achievement), where participants are asked to rate how often

they feel a situation, using a 7-point Likert scale scaled from 0 to 7 (Maggita, 2020).

The third part included the Beck Depression Scale (BDI), a 21-item self-administered Depression Symptom Scale that describes specific symptoms of depression and self-assessment suggestions that express its severity symptom from 0 to 3.

Initially, the members of the research work obtained the approval of the research from the University of Patras, then informed the managers of the stores about the purpose of the research and asked for their consent to provide the questionnaires to their staff. A member of the research work approached the employees, informed them about the purpose of the research, about their voluntary and anonymous participation, as well as about the confidentiality of the research results, in order to ensure their participation. The research was conducted from the beginning of April to On May 10, 2021, 200 questionnaires were distributed and 117 fully completed questionnaires were finally collected, 31 by men (26.50%) and 86 by women (73.50%). The questionnaires were completed individually, out of work and the participants returned the questionnaires anonymously, while for the statistical analysis of the data the statistical package IBM Statistics SPSS version 25 was used.

### RESULTS

In relation to gender, the sample consists of 73.50% of women and 26.50% of men. The sample was aged 20 to 60 years. The most numerous age group of the sample was that of 50-60 years, which accounted for 41.1% of the total, while the least numerous was that of 20-29 years, which accounted for 8.7%. In terms of marital status 63.25% of the sample was married, 22.22% unmarried, 12.82% divorced.

In relation to education, 67.52% of the sample has completed high school, 17.95% has graduated from IEK or technical school, 13.68% has graduated from university or TEI and as for the labor department, the largest percentage of the sample 29.06% works in the exhibition, while the immediately smaller percentage 27.35% works in the funds. Of the total sample, 25.64% felt mentally exhausted from work several times a month, compared to exhaustion in the morning (waking up and having to deal with another day of work) 23.08% of the sample stated 42.74% of the sample stated that it is never too tiring to work with people all day, in relation to burnout, 23.08% of the sample stated that it feels this way several times a year, in relation to frustration, 28.21% said they never feel frustrated with their job. 35.04% of the sample stated that every day they feel that they work very hard at work, 28.21% of the sample stated that working all day with people creates a lot of stress, 23.93% do not feel never at the limits of its endurance, and 38.46% of the sample never feels empty after work. The majority of the sample stated that they deal very effectively with the problems of their colleagues and 28.21% of the sample believes that they achieve many remarkable things in their work every day. Of the total

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sample, 41.88% stated that they calmly deal with the problems that arise at work every day, while 64.96% of the sample stated that they never feel that they treat their colleagues fadelessly, as if they were objects. 43.59% said they have not been harsher with people since they started this job, while 55.56% said they are interested in what happens to their colleagues.

In relation to emotion, the majority of the sample, with a percentage of 63.25%, answered that they do not feel sad (43.59% were women and 19.66% men). On the other hand, 29.92% said they felt sad or melancholy (24.79% were women and 5.13% men). As for pessimism, the majority of the sample, at 62.39%, said they were not particularly pessimistic or discouraged about the future (47.86% were women and 14.53% men). Regarding productivity, the majority with a percentage of 75.21% answered that they succeed in their work as before.

### DISCUSSION

In the present study, an attempt was made to investigate burnout and possible association with depression in employees working in basic supply stores during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees appear to have moderate emotional exhaustion, a high negative score on personal fulfillment (32% of the sample) and a high negative score on depersonalization (63% of the sample). In addition, there seems to be an absence of depression in employees. Thus, we assume that in our sample there is no correlation between exhaustion and depression.

After the analysis of the results, regarding the burnout, it was observed that from all the employees the women show in all three levels (emotional exhaustion, personal fulfillment and depersonalization) answers with a higher negative score than the men, with their percentages differing by very. In terms of marital status, divorcees seemed to have more responses that indicated high burnout than married, unmarried, and widowed. Nevertheless, unmarried people showed high percentages of negative scores in several questions.

### CONCLUSION

The main conclusion that emerges is that, during the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece, the sample (employees in large supermarkets) showed moderate to high levels of burnout (moderate emotional exhaustion, high negative score on personal fulfillment & high negative score on depersonalization) while not experiencing depression. Thus, there is an inability to correlate burnout with depression, a result that is impressive given the conditions prevailing during the pandemic.

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