

STRESS OF THE TEACHING STAFF IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: The article contains a study in which we wanted to see to what extent stress affects teachers and whether there are differences in the type of school they teach, depending on age or gender. The results show a higher, statistically significant stress on special education teachers, the fact that younger teachers are more stressed, regardless of the type of activity they provide, and women working in education are more stressed than their men colleagues.

Key words: teachers, stress, age, gender, means of coping.

Theoretical frame

Work is part of our lives, whether we like it or not. Thus, stress also becomes a natural part of life, this being the way our body responds to professional demands.

Sometimes our reactions are exaggerated, generating anxious states, psychosomatic diseases, discomfort, irritability and other mental and physical complications. This should not lead us to the idea that stress must be eliminated, but that we must learn to manage it effectively.

The level of stress depends on each individual. Our response to stress is subjective, depending on the importance that each person attributes to professional activity, but also to everyday life in general. Requests can only produce mental stress if the individual anticipates that he or she will not be able to cope with them. Anticipating the consequences, we can change our stress by either avoiding demands, either by meeting them with a tolerable nervous consumption, or by changing our optics on demands, minimizing them.

We can talk about subsistence stress through monotony, routine, lack of stimulation, and information that prevents the individual from manifesting all possibilities, mobilizing and using his resources.

In our paper, we wanted to see how stress affects teachers and whether there are differences in the type of school they teach, by age or gender, how they use their resources by means of coping.

We chose this topic because we consider it up to date, quality education being a national priority. This involves well-trained, involved and motivated teachers. Stress can affect these values and implicitly affects performance.

Methodology of research

Our research has started from the idea that, like all professions and the teaching profession, it involves stress accumulation. Teachers who have participated in our studies are either in normal schools or in inclusive education centres, or are support teachers who, although employed by inclusive education centres, they work in normal schools where they support children with disabilities (atypical children) integrated into classes with typical children.

Young people consider themselves more stressed than older people, on the other hand those with a longer length of work accuse more accumulation of stress. This has prompted our interest in comparing the stress level to the age of the teachers. We also wanted to find out if there are gender differences in stress. Well-being is a wish for every person. Because we have seen studies in the literature which state that there are differences between teachers according to the type of school they work in: normal school, an inclusive education centre, we found it useful to find out if this is also found among the participants in the our research.

The last study of our research is about the association of stress with the coping mechanisms of the participating teachers.

For our research, we have proposed a research that has the following objectives:

1. Stress assessment for teachers.
2. Identify the differences between certain categories of teaching staff according to their age, gender and type of school.
3. Identification of coping mechanisms used by teachers.

We conducted three studies. In the first study, we evaluated the stress in the teaching staff teaching in normal education, especially the support teachers, we calculated the differences in age and gender, in the second study we wanted to see life satisfaction at teachers and in the third study we tried to see what coping mechanisms are often used by teachers and how they correlate with the stress in this professional category.

In view of the above, we have postulated the following assumptions:

1. We assume that there are significant differences among teachers in terms of stress, depending on the type of school they work for.
2. We assume that there are significant differences between teachers in terms of

age-related stress.

3. We assume that there are significant differences between teachers in terms of stress, by gender.

4. We assume that there are significant differences between teachers in terms of well-being, depending on the kind of type of activity they perform: teacher in normal school, psycho-pedagogue teacher in inclusive education centres, support teacher.

5. We assume that there is a positive or negative association between teacher stress and coping mechanisms.

Our research was attended by 141 teachers from different schools. Of these, 32 work in normal schools, 87 in inclusive education centres, and 22 are support teachers. 79 of the participants are aged between 24 and 40, and 62 are over 40, 114 are women and 27 are men.

To assess the stress of the past six months, we used the Stress Perception Scale that helped us divide the participants into three categories: low, moderate and intense stress, depending on the score obtained in this test. The questionnaire contains 30 items to which participants can respond by choosing from a scale of 1 to 4 one of the answers: 1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often 4 = almost always.

In order to compare the well-being of the participants in the mass schools with those of the inclusive education centres, we have used the Life Satisfaction Scale (SSV), which assesses overall satisfaction with our own lives.

In order to find out the coping mechanisms used by teachers and the extent to which they correlate positively or negatively with their stress, we used the 53-item Coping Scale to which the participants chose the following possible answers: 1 = usually do not this, 2 = rarely do this, 3 = sometimes do this, and 4 = often do so.

Presentation and interpretation of results

1st Study. Because we have come to find out if there are differences in teacher stress, according to the type of school in which they work, age and gender, we made some comparisons. First, we wanted to see if there are differences between the teachers who teach in the mainstream schools, those who teach in special education, the inclusive education centres, or those who are support teachers and work with children with disabilities integrated into mainstream education significant in terms of stress. The 141 teachers participating in our research were divided into three categories according to the scores obtained at the Scale of Perception of Stress, respectively reduced, moderate and intense. Given the response frequencies, we applied the χ^2 test to compare the results. For research, the SPSS program, the Chi Square test, was

used.

Table 1. Start dates:

Category	Before the intervention
Reduced stres	87
Moderate stres	48
Intense stres	6
Total	141

Table 2. Expected frequencies, percentages and adjusted standardized residues to teacher responses by type of stress.

Type of teaching	Type of stres				Total
		Reduced	Moderat	Intens	
Normal school	Number of subjects	23	7	2	32
	Expected frequency	19.7	10.9	1.4	32.0
	Total percentages	16,3%	5%	1.4%	22.7%
		-1.3	-1.7	.6	
CSEI	Number of subjects	47	36	4	87
	Expected frequency	53.7	29.6	3.7	87.0
	Total percentages	33.3%	25.5%	2.8%	61.1%
	Adjusted standardized residues	-2.4	2.3	.3	
	Number of subjects	17	5	0	22
Support teachers	Expected frequency	13.6	7.5	.9	22.0
	Total percentages	12.1%	3.5%	0%	15.6%
	Reziduurile standardizate ajustate	1.6	-1.2	-1.1	
Total	Number of subjects	87	48	6	141
	Total percentages	61.7%	34.0%	4.3%	100%

In table 2 we can see the number of subjects, expected frequencies,

adjusted percentages and standardized residues for the responses of the 141 teachers participating in our intervention, stressed through the stress type: low, medium and intense:

1. For low stress: the observed frequency (87 subjects) represents 61.7%, the best score being for the teachers in the special education, respectively 33.3%.

2. For moderate stress: observed frequency (48 subjects) is 34%;

3. For intense stress: the observed frequency (6 subjects) represents 4.3%.

In order to observe where the significant differences are, we followed the tailored standardized residue for each cell. Out-of-range values (2, 2) will be considered as indicators of significant differences between observed and expected frequencies. As we can see in Table 3, we have values in the significant range for the teachers working in inclusive education centres, so we can state that the differences identified between the degree of stress in the three categories of teaching staff according to the type of teaching are significant only to psycho-pedagogical teachers and educators working in special education.

Table 3. Value of semnificative adjusted standardized residues

Response type: Type of teaching	Value of adjusted standardized residues		
	Reduced stress	Moderate stress	Intense strss
Normal school	-1.3	-1.7	.6
CSEI	-2.4	2.3	.3
Support	1.6	-1.2	-1.1

Table 4. Value of x2 test

	Value	df	p
(Pearson) χ^2	7.087	4	.131
Nr. of valid cases	141		

The values in the table confirm the above, so we hold a χ^2 with the degree of freedom 4 of 7,087 with a significance threshold .131 higher than the critical threshold of .05, so we can say that there are no significant differences in terms the stress in all categories of teachers on the basis of teaching at the

mainstream school, CESI or supporting the integration of children with ESCs into mainstream education.

2nd Study. In the second study we made, we wanted to find out if there are significant differences in the well-being of teachers in the three categories. First we tested the normality of the distribution of the dependent variable (satisfaction) with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. For a K-S of 1.126 we get a .159 score higher than the significance threshold of .05, so we can say that the distribution is symmetric. In order to compare teachers' performance in terms of life satisfaction we used the one-factor ANOVA statistical test for independent samples and we obtained the following results:

Table nr. 4. The results of the test One Way ANOVA

F	(df)	p
1.122	2	.329

As we have already predicted by comparing the averages of the results, we can see that for a F (2) we obtained a p .329, higher than the significance threshold .05, so we can say that there are no differences between the teachers mentioned in satisfaction with life.

3rd Study. In the third study we made, we wanted to see what coping mechanisms are used from teachers.

Table 5. Stress correlation - defense mechanisms for teachers

	Stres	Γ	p	N
1	Active Coping	.177	.018*	141
2	Planning	.459	.000**	141
3	Elimination of competition activities	.347	.000**	141
4	Withhold from action	.323	.000**	141
5	Search for instrumental social support	.383	.000**	141
6	Looking for emotional social support	.381	.000**	141
7	Positive reinterpretation	-.152	.086*	141
8	Acceptance	.038	.328	141
9	Denial	.020	.407	141
10	Emotional download	.394	.000**	141
11	Orientation towards religion	.307	.000**	141
12	Mental pasivity	.394	.000**	141
13	Behavioral pasivity	.507	.000**	141
14	Alcohol consumption	0	0	141

Following the statistical processing of the data, we wanted to find out the extent to which the stress in teaching staff is positively or negatively associated with certain coping mechanisms. Thus, using the Pearson correlation coefficient, we obtained the following results: - a significant positive correlation, with a probability of less than 1 in 100 to mistaken, between stress and the following coping mechanisms: planning, eliminating competing data, restraining from action, searching for instrumental social support, searching for emotional social support, emotional download, orientation towards religion, mental passivity and behavioral passivity; - a significant positive correlation, with a probability of less than 5 to 100 mistakes, between stress and active coping; - a significant negative correlation, with a probability of less than 5 to 100 mistakes, between stress and positive reinterpretation; - a relatively insignificant correlation between stress and acceptance, namely stress and denial.

Conclusions

As a result of our research, we have achieved significant results in most of the studies. Concerning study 1, we observed a higher, statistically significant stress on special education teachers. These results are due to the fact that, at least in recent years, through the abolition of correction schools, students with behavioral disability are transferred to inclusive education centres, being assimilated to students with mild disabilities. Their transfer is done in gymnasium classes, some of them are already teenagers and they have reprehensible skills, are aggressive, vulgar, they are very absent and have no respect for the school and the staff employed. This makes teaching more difficult, teaching and listening are hampered by repetitive interruptions, acts of verbal aggression towards teachers and peers, so that priority number one for the teacher is to restore order and discipline to the detriment of teaching.

Another possible cause is that, in special education, teachers do not enjoy breaks at all because they can't leave the class unattended. Thus, they are obliged to remain in the classroom and after the classes, wait for the other discipline teacher to change and run in the class where he will surrender the next hour to change his colleague there. To take a short respite (for example, to go to the toilet) they have to find a colleague to replace them.

Perhaps the most difficult task for a teacher who teaches in special education is to bear the humiliation of injuries or even acts of physical aggression on the part of students. Unfortunately, there were situations where male teachers had tried to impose and set order in class or intervene by helping a colleague have been reported, and this attitude has been struck by pupils.

For a devoted teacher who is concerned about the fate of children with disabilities and cares about their fate, a big problem may be that, due to the

existence of children with behavioral disorder in the same class. He or she can't handle enough students who need it, sometimes he is in a position to physically and verbally defend the aggressive students.

One solution from our point of view could be the separation into special classes of children with behavioral disorder in order to be able to intervene with special techniques, therapies and counselling, specific to this type of problem and to protect and help students with disabilities.

Another significant result we obtained in comparing the stress level with teachers up to 40 years of age and those over 40 years of age. From our study we can infer that younger teachers are more stressed, regardless of the type of activity they perform. This, in our view, is due to the following:

- In the last few years, high school graduates students, who did not necessarily want this profession, turned to education because they did not manage to go to other faculties they would be preferred. They turned to education as a temporary solution.

- Because they don't intend to remain long term in education, a proportion of young teachers do not attach due importance to their professional training.

- The relationship with the parents of students aren't desirable in recent years. The school-parents partnership is often initiated by teachers who often face the absence of parents from meetings.

- The teacher-student relationship is also affected by the fact that the students have high expectations from the teachers, have no patience and no more respect for the teachers.

- Relationship with other teachers is often affected by all sorts of scoring and running after certificates and diplomas in order to obtain a better post, a pre-transfer.

- The financial situation affects especially young people without length of work.

- The portrait of the teacher is no longer attractive, the image of the teacher is always a subject of social and political controversy.

Significant results have been obtained in comparing the stress of the teachers by gender. After the study, we can say that women working in education are more stressed than their male colleagues. The explanations of this phenomenon can be found in the fact that men can be more easily enforced by students when faced with problems of indiscipline. The subjects that most male teachers teach - sports, religion - are closer to students and make them more obedient.

Relevant is also the fact that we have not found significant differences comparing the satisfaction with life to the three categories of teachers. We supposed teachers have the same satisfaction with life. The most significant

results we have identified in the coping mechanisms encountered most frequently by the teachers. Thus, they use planning because they are accustomed to the type of activity that involves a strict timetable and a well thought-out program for one school year, they know what they have to do hourly, even minutes per minute, they have directional action for the future.

Regarding the elimination of competing data, we can say about teachers that they tend to focus on what they have to do and don't let themselves be distracted from their work. This is also due to the fact that they are responsible for what is happening in their classrooms and can't leave the students unattended, so they are at the pre-set location. An eventual lack of a teacher would lead to disruption of peace and order throughout the school. Sometimes a too high level of stress can make the didactic framework use as a defense mechanism. In this situation, we don't refer to their absence from the classrooms, but to the lack of willingness to involve and search for active teaching methods, attractive means for pupils, because the teacher's disposition is not favorable to major professional involvement.

In stressful situations, teachers require both professional, financial and emotional support, and understanding from students, parents, the community, and even the personal family. We can also say that sometimes teachers also resort to emotional downloading, expressing their professional dissatisfaction and failure in methodological committees, teaching councils or in free discussions with directors, trade union representatives or school inspectorates. We found significant dates in active coping. It seems that teachers are working to remove stressors or to diminish at least part of their effects.

A negative correlation was obtained in positive reinterpretation. This makes us believe that in the long run, unfortunately, teachers don't find longer benefit in their profession or find them below their expectations. Some of them are looking for other jobs to give them more financial opportunities and a superior intellectual status.

No correlations between stress and acceptance, or denial, have been identified. This makes us appreciate that teachers are in some way drifting down, are not even determined to accept the disconcerting situation itself, but neither deny it enough. We believe that this result is one that must be considered, because it shows the teachers' dissatisfaction.

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