

Tamara Goncharova
Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego

An Inside Look at Teacher Stress: Is Teaching (Un)stressful?

Many people, regardless of their age, occupation, or gender, experience stress in their everyday activities as the intensity of modern life is stress-inducing in and of itself, provoking a variety of responses. Stress is a structural problem that can affect persons in any social environment, be it the workplace, home, or church. Teachers are particularly prone to stress because of the nature of their work. The causes of stress can either be internal or external. Furthermore both internal and external circumstances to what happens in the classroom could make teaching a stressful experience. There are decisions made regarding the process or reorganization of education and changes in the instructional process. Such initiatives may have a negative effect on the teacher¹.

A teacher who is hurt or resentful may be aggressive in class and take it out on the students. An insecure principal may hide away and fail to hold staff meetings, to the employees' detriment. Similarly, an inflexible principal will fail to listen to her staff. People do not have any sense of how difficult it is nowadays to teach. While the problems of parenting are believed to be generally understood, those very same problems are vastly magnified for teachers who have to cope with classes of up to 40 children. Teaching has become what is now termed a "high strain job", O'Boyle points out. This means that the demands of the job are high and the decision latitudes are low. The ideal and least stressful job is one in which both demands and decision latitudes are high. To address this imbalance, changes need to be made at the organizational level².

Numerous studies have established that teaching can be a stressful profession and that stress may affect career motivation and diminish effectiveness and job satisfaction of many loyal and gifted teachers. Van der Westhuisen observes that the increasing demands made on schools and teachers have led to an alarming escalation of stress

¹ Maphalala, 2014.

² Humphrey, 2002.

and professional burnout as career risks for those in the teaching profession³. A major concern with occupational stress in the teaching profession is that a prolonged experience of stress can precipitate both mental and physical ill-health⁴. The widespread anxiety regarding occupational stress in teaching has motivated many researchers to focus on this area. Furthermore, there has been increasing recognition of the link between mental and physical health and occupational stress, prompting calls to improve the working lives of teachers⁵.

Teaching various subjects, especially languages, entails a major risk of encountering different factors connected with stress. As mentioned by Kretschmann, Epictetus, a Greek-speaking Stoic philosopher who lived on the cusp of the 1st and 2nd century BC, said that “It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters”⁶. This well-known quotation posits that attitude is everything, because it has the strength to shape peoples’ lives. What is more, as a result of overcoming complicated or troublesome situations, one may become more resistant to stress and learn how to handle this difficulty in the future.

Additionally, Rosh emphasizes the fact that stress cannot be defined conclusively, taking into account how its significance and meaning vary for different researchers⁷. Thereby, it becomes difficult to measure it due to this indeterminate level of accuracy and the duality of human nature (the good and the bad that lives inside one single person).

Definitions of Stress

There is a wide variety of definitions of stress, and each of them appears to be uniquely personal. As Grzegorzewska states, the term was coined in 1936 by the physiologist Hans Selye, who first conceptualized it as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change”, and then kept on expanding it throughout his life⁸. Moreover, as argued by Richard Kasschau, stress is an unavoidable presence in one’s psychic life, regardless of the fact that people do not enjoy it⁹.

Yusoff notes that “stress is generally defined as the body’s nonspecific response or reaction to demands made on it, or to disturbing events in the environment”¹⁰. According to Merriam Webster’s Dictionary, stress is “a physical, chemical, or emo-

³ Van der Westhuisen, 1999.

⁴ Dunham, 1992.

⁵ Williams & Gersch, 2004.

⁶ Kretschmann, 2003 (27).

⁷ Rosh, 1996.

⁸ Grzegorzewska, 2006 (17).

⁹ Kasschau, 1995.

¹⁰ Yusoff, 2010 (2).

tional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in diseases causation”¹¹. In another definition, stress is “a normal physiological response of the body to situations or stimulus which are perceived as dangerous to the body”¹². According to Middelbrooks et al., “stress is internal or external influence that disrupts an individual’s normal state of well-being”¹³. Another researcher of stress defines it in the following way: “Stress is a process that occurs when there is an imbalance between environmental demands and response capability of the organism”¹⁴. The next explanation of the term argues that “stress is a fundamentally rational concept signifying an imbalance between environmental opportunities and individuals’ goals and capability to cope with that imbalance”¹⁵.

The abovementioned definitions of “stress”, understood here in the broadest sense, indicate that this particular term is supposed to include a complicated sequence of events. Among them there may be such factors as, firstly, events that need some change; they may contain external or mental, real or imaginary situations. Secondly, there are also internal processes, such as perception, interpretation of the event, learning adaptation or coping mechanisms. The next factors are emotional reactions such as people’s feelings. Last but not least, there are other behavioral-bodily reactions among which we may count nervousness, sweating, stumbling over words, and high blood pressure¹⁶.

Causes of Stress

A great number of researchers have proved that teachers are facing many different sources of stress. It comes as no surprise that stress levels among teachers are still increasing. Kyriacou shows that teachers, when compared to representatives of other professions, tend to experience a much higher level of stress¹⁷. One of the most frequently mentioned factors is a lack of limited working hours and the feeling of an interminable weekday due to poor work/life separation¹⁸.

High expectations might be another cause of stress in this profession. To be specific, it is not only the pupils’ expectations, but more importantly, their parents’, too. Lack of students’ motivation and failure to follow certain rules are other reasons of stress. It is often the case that teachers imagine their cooperation with pupils to be based on mutual trust and understanding. However, they may find such expectations wildly

¹¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

¹² <http://www.stressfocus.com>.

¹³ Middelbrooks et al., 2008 (3).

¹⁴ Lazarus, 1996.

¹⁵ Evans and Cohen, 2004.

¹⁶ <http://www.psychologicalselfhelp.org>.

¹⁷ Kyriacou, 1980.

¹⁸ Fontana, 1988.

confounded. Moreover, this profession not infrequently involves a fair amount of dissatisfaction, exhaustion, and feeling unsupported by peers and superiors. A feeling of powerlessness is a universal cause of job stress.

Fear of Criticism and Lack of Satisfaction

In elaborating the term “stress”, one must not ignore the fact that each teacher has at least once been afraid of criticism in their job. Critical remarks may be offered not only by students but also by other teachers, principals and, most frequently, by the students’ parents. As Farber claims, those negative opinions about teachers are often expressed by people who are by no means related to education and know very little about its realities¹⁹. Unfortunately, teachers are often blamed for students’ lack of progress in learning or their misbehavior. Being the subject of parents’ scrutiny and disparagement may cause a teacher’s frustration and reluctance to meet with them. Korczyński adds that approximately 33% of teachers feel mentally exhausted after parent-teacher meetings, and a similar percentage do not receive any support in matters related to didactic and educational actions²⁰.

Grzegorzewska states that one of the stress-causing factors is often “inappropriate interpersonal relations at school such as pressure from authorities or parents and an unpleasant atmosphere among teachers”²¹. According to Rudolf Kretschmann, conflicts with principals and authorities are among the top contributing factors of teachers’ stress²². This proves how significant criticisms from senior-position colleagues are for teachers. Their support, meanwhile, would definitely strengthen teachers’ self-esteem in their relations with students. Delamont pays close attention to the fact that teachers have to solve various issues in class on their own and have to do it quite efficiently, whereas doctors or lawyers can ask their colleagues for advice or find solutions in professional literature²³. Studies prove that interpersonal relations in the workplace exert a great influence on teachers’ psychical condition²⁴. Many studies also show that social support from colleagues, authorities, or friends is likely to have a positive impact on buffering stress at work²⁵.

What is more, stress is likely to emerge as a combination of many causes, with the level of job satisfaction being one of them. This term was first applied by Hoppock in reference to a combination of physiological, psychological, and environmen-

¹⁹ Farber, 1991.

²⁰ Korczyński, 2014.

²¹ Grzegorzewska, 2006 (56).

²² Kretschmann, 2003 (17).

²³ Delamont, 1984.

²⁴ Sloan, Cooper, 1987.

²⁵ Dunham, 1980; Freeman, 1987.

tal circumstances that cause a person to feel satisfied or dissatisfied with their job²⁶. Borg M., Riding R. and Falzon J. presented four basic concepts related to teachers' stress; one of them was a need for job satisfaction²⁷. It includes recognizing limited possibilities for career advancement, underpayment, and a general lack of appreciation. A teacher may feel stressed even if one of these elements does not bring satisfaction. Indeed, lack of satisfaction can be a reason for many subsequent negative changes in a teacher's approach toward their job. Darmody and Smyth state that "teacher job satisfaction and stress can have both economic and personal implications as it can lead to stress-related employee absenteeism, burnout and a negative impact on pupil outcome"²⁸.

Relationship with Students

The teaching profession involves frequent, close interactions with people, children or teenagers more specifically. The primary goal is not only to pass knowledge along to the students but also to educate them and maintain a stable relationship with them in order to improve the character of young people. However, this task may be much more difficult to perform than it seems. Students' behavior in the classroom certainly has consequences for teachers' well-being and mental health, but there may also be found some different views about it. Grzegorzewska claims that "neither students' behaviour nor discipline in class greatly affects teacher's attitude"²⁹. Furthermore, one may deduce that students' behavior puts some pressure on teachers, but it is not as influential as are many other stress factors. Relations between the teacher and the student seem to be quite a complex problem; therefore, one may encounter many inconsistent opinions. Kirenko and Zubrzycka-Maciąg explain that the teacher must maintain a good rapport with her students, because she functions as a role model. Nonetheless, the teacher should also keep a safe distance in order to avoid disrespect³⁰.

Another stressful aspect of dealing with students is their misbehavior³¹. There are multiple actions performed by students that may preclude the proper course of classes. Some of the most disruptive actions are disengagement and verbal aggression. The more frequently the students' misbehavior incidents occur in the classroom, the higher the risk of feeling stressed out. Also, a lack of students' engagement may be related to teacher stress³². Confirmed lack of preparation to class or uncompleted homework may call the teacher's competence into question. As a result, the teacher may have

²⁶ Hoppock, 1935.

²⁷ Borg M., Riding R. and Falzon J., 1991.

²⁸ Darmody and Smyth, 2011 (39).

²⁹ Grzegorzewska, 2006 (64).

³⁰ Kirenko and Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2011.

³¹ Geving, 2007.

³² Ibid.

problems coping with stress. It is worth noting that students tend to use violence more often, not only toward the teacher but their classmates as well. As Grzegorzewska claims, students' wrong behavior is the first factor among others that causes stress in teachers³³. The other factors are loudness in the classroom, difficulties with preservation of discipline, students' lack of sufficient interest in the subject, and an excessive number of people in the class.

It is worth considering the fact that students' aggression is likely to occur at schools. It happens not only toward the other students but also the teachers and often has a strong impact on their mental condition. Students are becoming more and more rebellious; they are more eager to cause conflicts, objecting to anything that is said by the teacher. These actions frequently irritate teachers, especially when they occur repeatedly³⁴.

Work Overload and Insufficient Amounts of Time

Speaking of time: many people erroneously believe that teachers have a lot of free time after work. In reality, however, many of them often work much longer hours than one may assume. Teachers tend to feel overstretched due to constant preparing for classes or grading essays and tests³⁵. These actions seem to be easy on the surface, but taking into account the fact that the teacher does it at home, technically "off the clock", one should understand how time-consuming and challenging it becomes. As a result, working under this pressure may put an extreme strain on them, which is difficult to become accustomed to.

Oversized classes, too, make effective teaching impossible and reduces the teacher's feeling of efficacy. In turn, reduced efficacy becomes a source of lesser satisfaction with the work one does. According to Florkowski, because of the insufficient amounts of time devoted to each student, teachers may feel that they do not do reasonably well³⁶, which may be a consequence of occupational stress³⁷. Everyone wants to pay as much attention to each student as possible. Unfortunately, regarding the number of learners, it becomes frankly impossible. Kretschmann shows that teacher work lasts the whole week, including weekends³⁸. Sometimes, teachers, in spite of constantly caring for the quality of their performance, cannot stop feeling insufficiently prepared. Extensive time devoted to preparations may bring satisfaction if it yields positive effects, but it should not deprive educators of energy and joy of life.

³³ Grzegorzewska, 2006 (55).

³⁴ Kirenko, Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2011.

³⁵ Grzegorzewska, 2006.

³⁶ Florkowski, 1998.

³⁷ Kirenko, Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2011.

³⁸ Kretschmann, 2003.

Coping Strategies for Teachers

All the above-discussed stressors divert teachers' efforts away from performing their job functions toward coping with the stressors³⁹. To minimize stress, teachers adopt different coping strategies such as relaxing at work, keeping things in perspective, and avoiding confrontation.

Dunham lists the ten most often used coping strategies by teachers:

set aside a certain amount of time during the evening from school related work, try to come to terms with each individual situation, talk over stressful situations with partner or family, become involved with family and friends when not at school, learn to say 'no' to unnecessary demands, switch off, be open about feelings and opinions, more readily admit their own limits, accept the problem and talk about the problem with colleagues at school⁴⁰.

Cockburn observed that stress was reduced when a teacher understood what she was about to teach and prepared lessons accordingly⁴¹. The author identifies the six most common strategies that teachers intended to use: "stopping to enjoy the job, having some physical exercise during the school day, playing music in the classroom, being realistic about goals, concentrating on one thing at a time, and reading books about stress".

Apart from these, some teachers also adopt various palliative strategies in order to relieve their stress. However, these strategies relieve the person's stress for the time being but do not cure it. Johnstone provides the following list: "relaxation, seek promotion elsewhere, develop a sense of humour, meditation, listening to music, going out and getting drunk and learning greater self-control⁴². In one of her study, Johnstone found one in 12 teachers resorted to a glass of wine or a stiff whisky as their coping strategy"⁴³.

With respect to "professional distress", teachers should be made aware of the fact that teaching is a vocation, and they should seek satisfaction and fulfilment in the changes they manage to bring about in the lives of their learners. Teachers' dissatisfaction should not result in destructive and negative conduct. For this reason, stress-coping skills should be included in curricula for prospective teachers and in-service training programs⁴⁴.

However, teaching also provides a living for them. In this regard, they need to develop effective budgeting skills. It is further recommended that the best possible rep-

³⁹ Koslowsy, 1998 and Jex, 1998.

⁴⁰ Dunham, 1984.

⁴¹ Cockburn, 1996.

⁴² Johnstone, 1989.

⁴³ Johnstone, 1993.

⁴⁴ Keiper & Buselle, 1996:21; Travers & Cooper, 1996:174.

representatives of teachers unions negotiate a better salary structure⁴⁵, to improve their situation and to prevent teachers from leaving the profession. In regard to discipline and motivation, teachers should be innovative and find effective ways other than corporal punishment to handle undisciplined behavior of their learners⁴⁶.

Teachers should also empower themselves more through further studies and regular workshops, by means of which they can gain confidence in themselves as professionals, through improved knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes⁴⁷. The principal and his/her management team must take the initiative and responsibility in regard to discipline in the school. The school has to put a proper policy and code of conduct in place and ensure that all involved in the school know the rules⁴⁸.

Teachers should be able to handle stress better through practicing a hobby or getting physical exercise. It is also crucial to learn when to say “no”: for example, when they are unable to do a task or if the task is not their responsibility, and delegate more responsibilities to the learners⁴⁹. Teachers should not bite off more than they can chew.

COVID-19

Though the current study concerning teacher stress was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, we could not but include this novel cause of stress for teachers as it is the most burning problem nowadays.

COVID-19 has necessitated many changes in society, including those in education that are likely to be cognitively and emotionally taxing for teachers. Engaging in remote teaching has clearly been one of the most prominent changes required of teachers. This challenge has been exacerbated by pupils' varying levels of access to online technology and willingness to engage⁵⁰.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added more stress to an already high-stress profession. Across the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic has wrought substantial challenges on individuals and societies. As part of this, teachers have faced significant stressors in relation to their work. The pandemic required a very sudden shift to remote learning, and teachers were called upon to support students' academic development and well-being throughout this shift, while also navigating adversity and stress in their own lives.

BBC Teach has been speaking to professionals soliciting advice on how to manage this additional strain. Georgia France is the head of Year 7 and PE teacher at Forest

⁴⁵ Saptoe, 2000:71.

⁴⁶ Saptoe, 2000:71.

⁴⁷ Keiper & Buselle, 1996:21; Travers & Cooper, 1996:174.

⁴⁸ Saptoe, 2000:75.

⁴⁹ Travers & Cooper, 1996: 174.

⁵⁰ Borup *et al.*, 2020.

Gate Community School in London. Suzy Reading is a psychologist and author. These are their top tips for dealing with the work-related stress of Covid 19:

1. Work together

- *It is really helpful to feel like you are part of a team right now.*
- *If you and your colleagues can pull together, things might feel less daunting.*
- *Collaborating gives an opportunity for a variety of voices to be heard and cultivates a feeling of shared experience: we are not alone, but in it together.*
- *By working together we are able to come up with the most effective strategies we can.*
- *One thing that is key is having consistency across the board – making sure every member of staff is singing from the same song sheet.*
- *The most important thing is to remember we are all in it together. It is new for everyone.*
- *What you are doing is not going unnoticed, and it is really appreciated.*

2. Keep a routine

- *If you have to self-isolate for a few days recently whilst waiting for a test result, you may be able to teach remotely and join staff meetings.*
- *For pupils, routine is key and it is vital that they know what to expect in every lesson, and every day whilst they are at school. This can be as simple as having the same routine at the start of every lesson. This helps pupils to know exactly what they should be doing.*
- *Keeping a routine for yourself can include things like preparing your meals or clothes the night before, finishing at a set time each day, and taking time out to relax every day – even if it is just for ten minutes.*
- *Routines are crucial, especially in times of uncertainty.*
- *If we can create a sense of rhythm and regularity in our day that helps us cope.*
- *Also, rituals in our day reduce the amount of decisions we have to make – it reduces the mental load.*

3. Keep talking

- *If you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed speak to other people.*
- *Let people know how you are feeling. You are not the only person who may be feeling down.*
- *It is important to be heard and understood and validated.*
- *Let your family members know how you are feeling – it gives them an inkling as to how they can best support you.*

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- *Reach out and check in with each other, even if it is just a quick chat in the staffroom.*
 - *There is a sense of mutual support. And let people further up the chain at work know how you are feeling too.*
 - *We are doing what we need to do to ensure our students continue to thrive.*
 - *It is about having an open environment where everyone is willing to help everyone, and where you know that you can talk to other members of staff in your department and across the school.*
 - *It is a challenging time for us but we are doing it in the best interest of kids up and down the country.*
- 4. Take strength from your pupils – they are the reason you are doing this**
- *Students need us and we need them.*
 - *There is a lot to get used to but it is nice to be back in school doing what we are meant to be doing.*
 - *Take strength from how well pupils have adapted to this: “They know they are still getting a good education”.*
 - *Teaching is a calling, a true vocation, so remembering why you are doing what you are doing can be very galvanizing.*
 - *It is about connecting with a deeper purpose and how valued you are.*
 - *Teachers play such an important role in kids’ lives.*
- 5. Take time for self-care**
- *Try to reframe self-care as health care, and prioritize it right now.*
 - *Make time for something soothing for the nervous system on an everyday basis, like healthy boundaries and clocking off.*
 - *Do regular fitness sessions at school and at home and go for long walks at the weekend.*
 - *Make sure you prioritize sleep, rest, deep breathing or try using touch, massage or scent.*
 - *Try gentle stretches or a guided meditation.*
 - *It is so challenging to be there physically and emotionally for your students through such a long period of uncertainty.*
 - *What you are doing is not going unnoticed, and it is really appreciated⁵¹.*

⁵¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/teacher-support/covid-stress/zfh4bqt>.

Positive Stress

As is generally known, stress connotes a negative feeling and is largely characterized as something unpleasant. However, not many people are aware of the fact that there is one more category of stress. This new term “eustress” was first presented by Hans Selye, who differentiated between two types of stress, distress and eustress⁵².

Presumably, everyone is familiar with the first but less so with the second. Eustress is a good type of stress that motivates teachers to continue their work. The initial fear of failure may transform into pleasure thanks to the positive effect of stress. It does not only make a person feel more awakened but also increases physical endurance and puts one in a state of optimism. Thanks to eustress, teachers may overcome obstacles related to their job and relationship with students. Taking into consideration the fact that an adequate amount of stress significantly contributes to the functioning of a teacher’s organism, one should use it as a good, strong pressure to have something done faster or better⁵³. Selye pays close attention to the fact that optimal agitation caused by small doses of stress is likely to improve the teachers’ emotional state and encourage them to achieve the stated objectives⁵⁴.

The Yerkes–Dodson model suggests a close connection between productivity and an optimal state of stress⁵⁵. The model explains that in order to achieve success, it is necessary to control the level of stress and provide the appropriate dose of it to one’s organism.

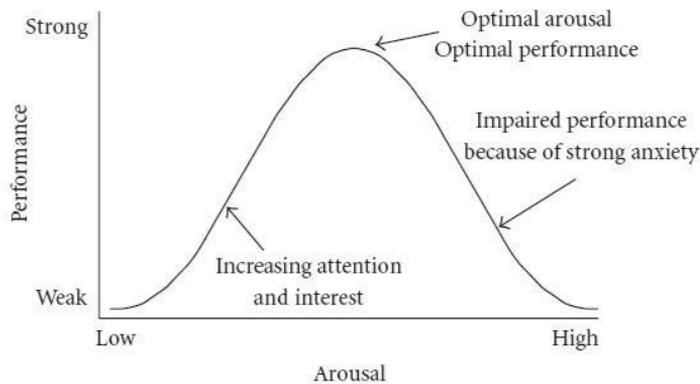


Fig 1. The Yerkes-Dodson model (2007)

⁵² Selye, 1935 cited in Korczyński, 2014 (14).

⁵³ Kretschmann, 2003.

⁵⁴ Selye, 1935 cited in Korczyński, 2014.

⁵⁵ Hendrick, 2016.

Personality Traits

It is well known that character traits may negatively or positively impact people's attitude towards their job or many different aspects of life. Besides, self-efficacy denotes the people's approach to constructing beliefs about their competences in order to perform given acts and tasks⁵⁶. It is proved by Kokkinos that particular personality traits are somehow related to different reactions to stress and the way people handle it⁵⁷. Moreover, certain character traits may lead to excessive feeling of stress⁵⁸.

What is interesting, based on Lisowska's suggestions, personality characteristics that contribute to stress are divided into Type A and Type B⁵⁹. These two types illustrate two different sets of behavior that are opposite to each other. Many researchers show that this difference has a power of co-decision in teachers' stress and burnout. These personality types vary in the way of achieving aims and the intensity of need to achieve them.

Lisowska mentions that people characterized by the first type are thought to be high achievers who constantly seek to reach their goals and cannot rest on their laurels⁶⁰. Moreover, it is extremely difficult for them to accept failures. This group of people are known for their high ambitions and continuous need for competition. Consequently, according to Szmagalski, their stress level is high, because many incentives are received as stressors, whereas in fact they are neutral for other people⁶¹. Another complication is the fact that these people live in constant tension, making it harder for them to relax. In consequence, by working under time pressure or behaving aggressively, it becomes much more likely for teachers to develop stress-related illnesses.

Conversely, individuals classified as Type B, according to Mmaduakonam, tend to be much more relaxed and easygoing, and less competitive⁶². All these traits enable the people of Type B to cope with stress more easily. That is why Type A teachers are more likely to report more emotional and physical strain than Type B teachers. Type B personalities are more tolerant and permissive. In addition, they record higher levels of satisfaction in life.

No matter which type of personality one is, everyone can be vulnerable to the feeling of stress and susceptible to burnout during their career. However, it does not necessarily happen to every teacher. Maslach states: "The people who were more prone to burnout had one or more of the following personality traits: weak and unassertive,

⁵⁶ Bandura, 1997.

⁵⁷ Kokkinos, 2007.

⁵⁸ Bandura, 1997.

⁵⁹ Lisowska, 2012.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Szmagalski, 2004.

⁶² Mmaduakonam, 2015.

impatient and intolerant, more reserved and conventional, and can have a low self-esteem with very little ambition”⁶³.

On the whole, in order to eliminate unfavorable personality traits, one must be aware of certain strategies that may turn out to be helpful to reduce the feeling of stress.

Study

Stress continually affects teachers. In order to prove this statement, the following study will present the level of stress accompanying teachers in their everyday life.

This study sought to:

- Ascertain the main sources of stress amongst college teachers.
- Illustrate the problems that teachers struggle with.
- Determine whether teachers’ biographical factors (namely age, gender, educational level and marital status) have any influence on the incidence of teacher stress.
- Conduct an empirical investigation into the nature of stress experienced by teachers.

This study uses the descriptive approach to data collection. The descriptive approach is chosen because of its relevance in describing systematically the facts and characteristics of an area of interest, factually and accurately. Of the various types of descriptive approaches, this study used the survey. A total number of 53 teachers participated in the study. The female teachers constituted 71% of the population and the male teachers, 29%. This study used a questionnaire for collecting data. The questionnaire was designed for college teachers from a few universities in Poland and focused on demographic data which included teaching experience, qualifications, gender, and age. The questionnaire focused on stress in relation to work, as well as stress outside the working environment that might put pressure on the teachers.

Results

The initial part of the survey questions is supposed to examine the participants who have completed it. The first question relates to the age of the participants. 67.9% of them are women, 32.1% are men.

Another question is the marital status. Out of two possible answers, 69.8% of the participants declare to be married or in a long-term relationship, and 30.2% of them are either unmarried or divorced. This result shows that the greater number of teach-

⁶³ Maslach, 1982 (62).

ers may have struggled with a strong influence of stress on their life outside the workplace, as teacher stress is likely to affect the family life and the atmosphere at home.

The largest age group is teachers between 30 and 40 years old – 35.8%. The next group – 40-50 years old – scores 30.2%. Then, 17% of the interviewees declare to be in the youngest group, 20-30 years old. Two smallest groups encompass the oldest, 50-60 years old (9.4%) and 60+ years old (7.5%). Taking into consideration the answers of the questionnaire, most educators at universities appear to be middle-aged.

The next question concerns the experience of working as a teacher. The results show that age does not correlate significantly with the experience. The largest groups comprise the people with 6-10 years of experience – 22.6% and 11-15 years – 18.9%. Three groups (less than 5 years, 16-20 years and 21-25 years) obtain the same result, which is 15.1%. The least frequent answers are 26-30 years (9.4%) or 31 years of experience and more (3.8%).

Another issue that the participants were asked about was the level of stress occurring at work. The vast majority of the answers is 'at a medium level' (47.2%). 'A high level of stress' came in second, obtaining 20.8% of all votes. Additionally, the next two positions are 'a low level of stress' (18.9%) and 'a very high level of stress' (9.4%). What is interesting, the answer concerning a very low level of stress is chosen by only two persons, giving 3.8%.

The following multiple-choice question was raised in the questionnaire in order to better understand symptoms of stress and examine them more thoroughly. The participants were asked about the signs they noticed while experiencing stress. Over a half of the teachers who completed the survey struggle with irritation (56.6%). Similar results were received regarding the sleep disturbance problem – 54.7%. Another noteworthy points is that almost a half of the participants have to contend with a faster heart rate (47.2%), headache (30.2%), anxiety (32.1%), and indigestion or stomachaches (30.2%).

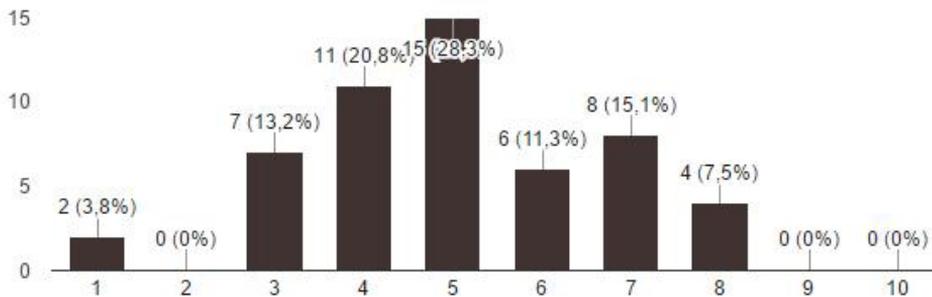


Fig. 2 Symptoms in stressful situations

The teacher's attitude toward stressful situations seems to be of great importance. The more positive it is, the easier it would be to overcome stress and deal with the problem. The participants were asked to estimate their attitude toward stress, on a scale from 1 (completely negative) to 10 (completely positive). The results varied dramatically. As a matter of fact, nobody chose answers 9 or 10, which means that none of the teachers is favorably disposed toward stressful situations. However, the most frequent answer is 5, with the result of 28.3%. That proves that participants are rather cautious when it comes to stress, or their responses depend on the type of stress they have to struggle with.

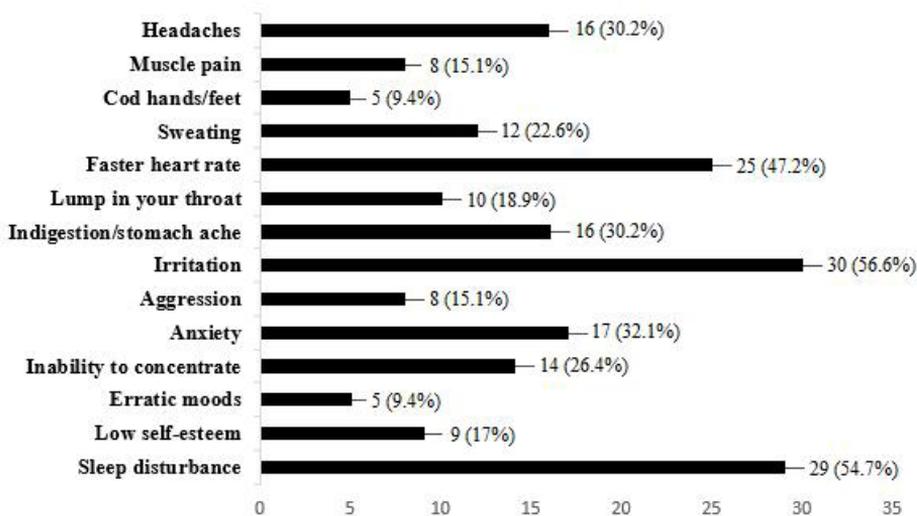


Fig. 3 Attitude towards stressful situations

One may know that eustress is likely to occur in the workplace. Presumably it does not appear as frequently as negative stress, but it is still a possibility. Indeed, over three-quarters of the participants of the questionnaire (75.5%) answer that they have experienced positive stress within the last year.

Types of personality and character traits have much in common with the level of stress and teachers' vulnerability to its effects. Surprisingly, the answers to the question concerning personal traits are almost identical: 50.9% of the participants describe themselves as type A, which tends to be much more competitive, outgoing, ambitious, impatient, self-critical and displays a tendency to overreact. A slightly less frequent answer (49.1%) is type B personality, which may be characterized by being more relaxed, uncompetitive, creative, reflexive, and tolerant.

As has been noted, stress may have its negative consequences in the form of different addictions. 50.9% of the participants admit that in order to deal with stress they had to resort to some addictive substances such as drugs, medication, alcohol, coffee, etc.

The participants were asked about their suspicion of experiencing any of the stages of burnout. 54.7% of the teachers confess to having suspected themselves of burnout. On the other hand, approximately half of the participants (45.3%) denied this experience.

When asked about the occurrence of any diseases concerned with stress, the vast majority (67.9%) of the participants answered negatively, and only one third (32.1%) of them admitted to have suffered from some illness caused by stress.

By answering the penultimate question, the participants enumerate the factors that occur in their daily life and create work related stress. The response considering work overload and time pressure is chosen by over a half of the teachers, 62.3%. Another answer that appears very frequently, with 50.9% of votes, is taking work home. It is also important to pay attention to the fact that a great number of teachers struggle with a lack of students' discipline (45.3%), pupils' misbehavior (37.7%), and a lack of acceptance or satisfaction (24.5%). Only 18.9% of the participants picked the answer concerning a bad quality of relationships with other teachers, which proves that most of them are likely to get support from their colleagues and feel good in their company.

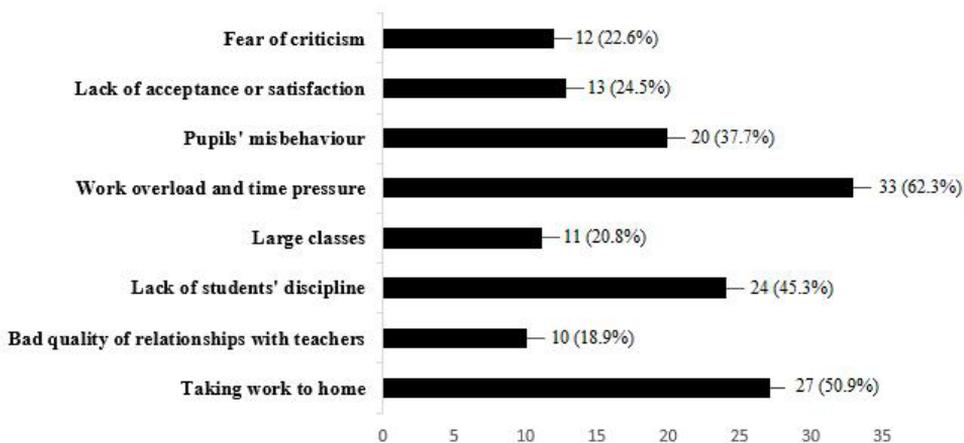


Fig. 4 Factors creating work related stress

The participants were asked about the efforts they undertake in order to deal with stress. Over a half of the teachers (58.5%) say that planning in advance helps them to neutralize the bad effects of stress. 47.2% of them believe that family and friends' support becomes very helpful while dealing with stress. 41.5% of the participants resort to hobbies, 34% try to find an immediate solution of the problem, and 34% are likely to create a distance between their private life and troubles at the workplace.

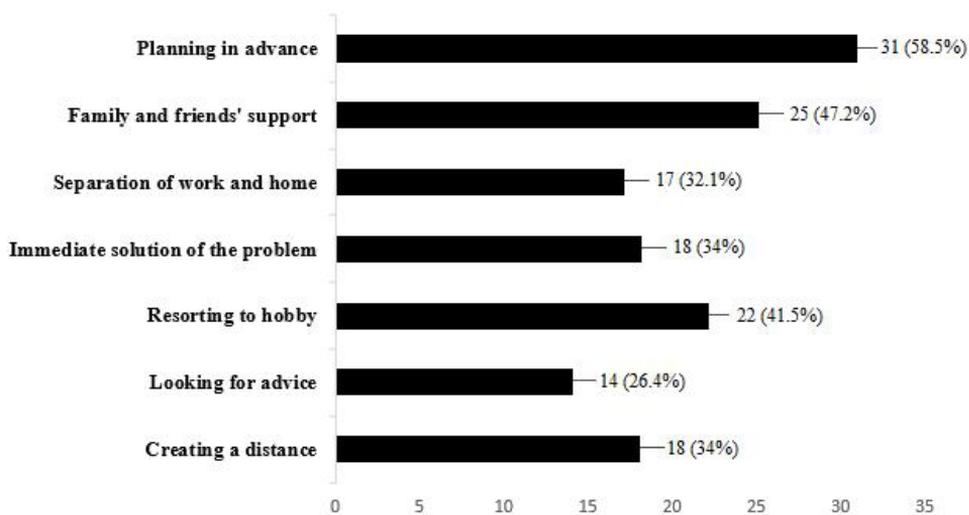


Fig. 5 Ways of dealing with stress

Discussion

Starting from the very first questions concerning gender, marital status, age and experience, one is likely to notice the diversification of answers provided by the respondents. One may also think that the age of a participant directly relates to the great experience in being a teacher. However, looking more deeply into individual answers, it is not always the case. Some of the teachers who are older have the same or even less experience than those who are younger. Similarly, on closer inspection, it turns out that the level of stress does not really depend on the age or experience of the teacher, but is rather a personal matter.

The analysis has also confirmed that stress strongly affects almost every teacher who took part in the survey. 47.2% evaluate their level of stress at work as medium. It looks quite similar when it comes to the attitude towards stressful situations. The questionnaire proves that most of the participants lean towards the answer in the middle of the scale, just as it was in the previous question. The majority of answers oscillate between numbers 4 and 7, which proves that the level of positive or negative attitude is rather moderate.

The analysis demonstrates the symptoms one experiences during stressful situations. Thanks to this particular question, one learns that being a teacher entails many outcomes, not all of them necessarily pleasant. It is likely that each teacher has struggled with more than just one symptom in their professional career. The most frequent answer is irritation with 56.6% of votes and sleep disturbance with 54.7%. These, apparently harmless and innocent signs may be in fact extremely disruptive and troublesome. A large part of the participants (47.2%) are also affected by a faster

heart rate while experiencing stress. A little bit over 30% of the teachers suffer from anxiety, indigestion, stomach- and headaches. It is worth pointing out that the teachers normally try not to reveal their emotions that are hidden inside, which may pose an additional difficulty.

The research clearly shows that the vast majority of the participants who completed the questionnaire are likely to have experienced eustress within the last year. 75.5% of the teachers claim that the positive stress triggers motivation for them in order to improve their emotional state and supplies them with energy to function more effectively. This result shows that stress does not always have to be associated with a negative feeling, as it may become a good reason for teachers to continue and improve their work.

On the other hand, over one half of the participants (54.7%) have suspected themselves of experiencing some stages of burnout, which in fact seems to be quite a staggering number. However, only 32.1% of the interviewees admit to have been cured from some diseases attributable to stress. These data clearly show that although some of the teachers recognize that they may struggle with burnout, they do not decide to take any particular actions or undergo any treatment to cope with their stress.

The research shows that 62.3% of the participants think that work overload and time pressure are the most disruptive and oppressive factors creating stress. One should realize that teachers often have to work overtime, which may definitely lead to the feeling of exhaustion caused by too many obligations. Moreover, 50.9% of the participants claim that taking work home is a problem for them. But every teacher should be aware of the fact that this particular profession is strongly connected with working at home. Not only does the teacher have to create tests, grade them and prepare to the lessons, but she also carries a psychological burden in doing so. It is likely to happen that the teacher does not separate work from home, which may have an effect on the family life, as one cannot dissociate himself from problems occurring at school. The analysis has also concluded that almost one half of the teachers complain about students' lack of discipline and 37.7% of them do not approve of students' misbehavior. It is well known that in the absence of somebody's attention or concentration, the teacher is likely to get irritated much more easily and feel unappreciated. After many hours of preparation for classes, one is in need of at least a little attention from students. Nevertheless, many of them behave in a patently inappropriate way. Another disruptive factor concerning students is their lack of preparation. Some of the students tend to come unprepared to the exams or do not do their homework. These actions may greatly influence teachers' well-being at school and attitude towards their professional career.

The last question concerns actions that must be taken in order to deal with stress. It transpires that over a half of the participants are eager to plan in advance to reduce the level of stress. Thanks to that, the teacher is less likely to put herself at risk of being unprepared for classes or ill-equipped to deal with difficulties in the classroom. 47.2% of teachers claim that the support of their family and friends is a great help for

them. Being sure that they can have someone to rely on and appeal to for help if need be is an obvious morale-booster. Moreover, the research has shown that 41.5% of the participants frequently resort to their hobbies in order to reduce stress. This, in fact, seems to be a perfect getaway for everyone struggling with some problems. Hobbies actually bring many benefits as they help to recharge the batteries by doing something that one enjoys. To illustrate, a teacher may find it hard to carve out any spare time during her busy schedule but by taking a relaxing break, she will definitely have more motivation and a positive attitude. In addition, through various hobbies, the teacher is likely to experience eustress, which surely has a very positive influence on the mood.

Recommendations

According to Miller⁶⁴, the total elimination of stress in education can never be realized because a world free of stress would be one without achievement. Behind every human accomplishment lie worry, frustration, and discontent. Stress is therefore a powerful generator of productivity, motivation, and creativity, whereby teachers can give their best performance. However, if stress is not kept on a low level it can become counterproductive and limit the abilities of teachers. It is, then, rather clear that one cannot do away with stress but can only keep it in check. The following recommendations are therefore suggested to assist teachers in coping with stress in a productive manner. Smith and Bourke⁶⁵ suggest the following coping strategies for adoption by both school management and teachers:

- a) Rationalize or regulate work demands due to preparation, assessment procedures, resource distribution, clarify instructional goals and share the workload.
- b) Develop support structures such as time management courses, counseling services.
- c) Provide greater consideration of all teacher needs, through more flexible management structures able to provide recognition, rewards and collaborative decision making.

The initial important step in dealing with stress is to be more aware about what makes you feel stressed and how you react. Here are some hints that may help teachers to cope with everyday tensions and anxieties and reduce stress in their lives⁶⁶.

- Acknowledge stress more readily.
- Plan ahead and manage time.
- Set clear objectives.
- Know your personal limits.

⁶⁴ Miller (1979:7).

⁶⁵ (1992:208).

⁶⁶ Cole and Walker, 1989.

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- Question unreasonable demands.
 - Keep fit and exercise regularly.
 - Maintain a balanced diet.
 - Make time for leisure.
 - Network and develop support systems.
 - Share problems.
 - Get adequate rest and sleep.

Conclusion

The article briefly elucidates the term “stress” as well as its major causes, symptoms, and sources. Stress at school and specific stressful situations are outlined in detail, including teachers’ psychological and physical responses. Additionally, the article presents a set of different manners in which one may deal with stressful situations.

It is important to emphasize that, although stress seems to be associated with a negative feeling, it does not always have to be harmful, as long as one maintain the appropriate attitude and knows how to behave while experiencing it. Taking into consideration the information laid out above, the theoretical aspects of stress, and the conducted research, one should reach the conclusion that stress is a widespread phenomenon, virtually unavoidable in the language-teaching profession.

Looking at the findings of the study, it seems that stress and dissatisfaction are interrelated concepts, which means that occupational stress contributes to dissatisfaction, which, in turn, lead to high levels of stress. Therefore, improving work conditions is essential to increasing the level of satisfaction of teachers with their work and thus lowering the level of stress. In a nutshell, the findings of the study offer evidence that teachers work under stress caused by work-related demands, such as major restructuring of the teaching profession within a short period of time. This study therefore suggests that ways must be found to ease the work demands; otherwise, there may be serious repercussions for teachers’ productivity as well as their psychological and physical wellbeing.

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An Inside Look at Teacher Stress: Is Teaching (Un)stressful?

Summary: The article concerns stress as a factor influencing lives of many teachers. Teaching can be a stressful profession and stress may affect career motivation and diminish effectiveness and job satisfaction of many loyal and gifted teachers. They are facing many different sources of stress. It comes of no surprise that stress levels among teachers are still increasing. There are presented particular personality traits that are somehow related to different reactions on stress and the way people handle it. The study was conducted to illustrate the problems that teachers struggle with. The results of the questionnaire are supposed to show the advantages, drawbacks and consequences of stress occurring in the workplace.

Keywords: stress, sources of stress, stress prevention, positive stress, teaching