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HOBFOLL'S RESOURCES AND THE TEACHER'S STRESS

A multidimensional identification of the concept of stress and different approaches to the problem are related to the fact that the perception of the issue changes both with time, and as a result of cultural transformations. One of the most popular concepts of stress, developed by Lazarus, says that it is the result of a specific transaction, the relationship of an individual and the environment, which is changeable (Grzegorzewska, 2006). Stress is associated with a subjective perception of this relationship, with the individual's judgment, whether it will be possible for them to cope with the challenges posed by the environment or not. Cooper and Payne (1987), in turn, define stress as a requirement that necessitates the use of adaptive resources or as a result of the dynamic mismatch of an individual to their physical or social environment, or as an effort to maintain basic functions at a required level. As far as work-related stress is concerned, Siegrist proves that the source of stress is the lack of balance between an employee's effort and rewards received at work (after: Dudek, Koniarek, Szymczak, 2007). Stress affects both mental and physical condition of a person, shapes the way they function in the society and in the professional environment, regulates health, therefore it should be studied in a holistic way.

The phenomenon of stress plays a vital role in the teaching profession. The article attempts to evaluate the interaction between Hobfoll's resources, job satisfaction and social support modifying the perception of stress. However, to understand its background, it is necessary to analyze many different factors that can constitute the cause of stress. In order to determine the psychological model related to teachers' work, a group of 132 ($n = 132$) primary and secondary school teachers aged 26 to 63 were evaluated. The second group (a control one) was constituted by people not related to education ($n = 132$). The research was anonymous and random. The essence of the study was to determine the impact of Hobfoll's resources (i.e. the resources being objects, conditions, personal characteristics and energies).

The aim of the research was to check whether there is a relationship between the level of professional burnout, stress and social support in the group of teachers in comparison with other professions. To measure the variables, the Occupational Burnout Questionnaire by Christina Maslach was used, as well as the Social Sup-

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port Questionnaire by Krys Kaniasty and Stevan Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources-Evaluation Questionnaire.

In order to examine the impact of professional burnout on the level of the perceived social support and the stress level of the respondents, based on the theories relating to stress, social support and burnout in the context of Hobfoll's Theory of Resources, research hypotheses were formulated. The thesis which the present paper was focused on assumed that there would be differences between the group of teachers in comparison with the control group in terms of the level of occupational burnout, social support and stress.

To verify the above-mentioned research hypothesis, a Multidimensional Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was carried out. The results of the analysis show that for at least one analyzed parameter there is a significant difference in mean values for teachers and for the group performing other professions. The statistics values are: Wilks's lambda = 0.61 $F(7.118) = 10.6$, $p = 0.00$, $\eta^2 = 0.39$.

The complexity of the concept of stress gives every reason to elaborate on it, including all the determinants of an individual's life. All the fields that study the background, sources, and effects of stress, present separate discourses, which, however, treated only inclusively and comparatively, can give a complete overview of the phenomenon and its significance. It is no coincidence that for centuries the issues related directly to human health have been analyzed on the basis of the theoretical coexistence of medicine and philosophy (Głowacki, 2009).

Currently, stress shaped by the work environment constitutes a multilaterally analyzed subject, which is associated to the awareness that any negative effects of this environment affect both the employee and the institution they work in. This influence is becoming stronger and stronger. Dudek, Koniarek and Szymczak (2007) present Spielberg's research proving that within five years, between 1985 and 1990, twice as many employees in the US began to find their work stressful. In 2015, the Polish National Labor Inspectorate issued a special publication for employees, being a kind of compendium of knowledge about stress, differentiating between positive and negative stress and explicating the mechanisms of stress formation. The relationship between stress and health were indicated, too, and individual features that increase vulnerability to stress were characterized. In practical terms, it was recommended that the processes taking place in the work environment and in the employee should be observed in order to shape the ability to recognize symptoms of stress and indicate ways of dealing with it.

For many years, when mentioning professions particularly exposed to stress, the focus was primarily put on healthcare, jobs related to social assistance, and lawyers. Business development in the second half of the twentieth century influenced a large increase of the number of managerial positions in this group. It was much too late that the profession of a teacher began to be perceived as being at high risk of stress.

According to Szczepankowska (2007), a British psychologists from the University of Cambridge – C. Kyriacou and J. Sutcliffe have a significant contribution to

the analysis of teachers' stress. The researcher states that teacher's stress is "generating negative emotions (such as anger or depression) in teachers, which are usually accompanied by pathological biochemical and physiological changes (such as cardiac acceleration, the secretion of adrenocorticotrophic hormones or increase in blood pressure), which are the result of the performed profession and conditioned by the perception of the set requirements as threatening their self-esteem and good well-being, as well as a coping mechanism to reduce the perceived threats" (Tucholska, 1999, p. 227). The authors also draw attention to the intrapsychic features in the formation of occupational stress, which include patience and the ability to show emotions that affect how the stressor is perceived and the way of reacting to it (Szczepankowska, 2007).

It should be noted that in the case of, for example, businesspeople, the increase of stress related to their work is a derivative of the rapid development of this area of human activity, whereas the paradox referring to school as a workplace lies in the fact that it is difficult to consider it in the context of rapid progress. Since the 1990s, numerous reforms have been introduced in Poland, but teachers' opinions clearly indicate that they are not associated with the improvement of the situation. Each reform aroused controversy in the teaching community and reservations from the teachers' trade union. There were many voices criticizing the use of the school as a tool to implement the assumptions of the successive political groups (Grzegorzewska, 2006). Regarding the 1999 reform, for instance, attention was paid to the rush in its implementation and the desire to achieve numerous goals, many of which difficult to reconcile. As Zahorska points out (1999), the reform was to satisfy the aspirations of the parties that introduced it – parties distant from each other, i.e. the conservative and the liberal one. The objectives that the reform was supposed to achieve were a compilation of aspirations based on contradictory values. In the face of such a reform mechanism, what cannot be ignored is the fact that it was the teachers who turned out to be in the most uncomfortable situation, as they were the party to implement the assumptions, ill-considered in terms of both logistics and their purposefulness. Subsequent attempts to introduce change in the Polish school system also seemed to concern all the aspects of school functioning, except for positive changes improving the teachers' working conditions.

Teachers' situation is very difficult. They are subject to pressure from the authorities, whose recommendations they implement, constituting a link in the system built completely regardless of them. They also feel the pressure exercised by the school leading bodies and parents who treat teachers as first-contact persons regarding the education and upbringing of their children. Finally, there is pressure from the students themselves, who are more and more aware of their needs, have their expectations towards the school, which often – just for the reasons of systemic solutions – simply cannot be met. Being situated in the very central position in this chain of pressure is a sufficient argument for teachers to be indicated as a professional group that is threatened by work-related stress. It affects not only the teacher directly, but

above all the students, as it is extremely difficult to separate the sphere of duty from the teacher's internal condition. It should also be noted that the evolution of the school is not parallel to the evolution of pedagogy as a field of study. Thus, from the perspective of the research into teachers' stress, herein lies the most serious problem.

Referring to Suchodolski's reflections on the education and upbringing, Kujawiński (2010) draws attention to the area of educational activity, to perfecting the pupil, motivating him or her to change, to develop and even to create their attitudes, which are the result of pedagogical interactions. The author emphasizes the importance of the transformations that have occurred as far as the tasks of pedagogy are concerned, being at first the art of leading a pupil – without a theoretical basis or assumptions, then becoming the creator of education and upbringing, finally concentrating on the values, goals and the contents of care and education in every period of a person's life (Suchodolski, 1993).

Taking into account the systemic circumstances, which every teacher is well familiar with and can evaluate, referring to individual feelings and needs, it can be stated that the school as an institution employing workers – the teachers – can be a source of numerous stressors. However, in the face of new responsibilities and challenges and a novel approach to stress, apart from the traditional understanding of the issue, e.g. according to Lazarus, it is reasonable to reflect on teachers' stress through the prism of the Conservation of Resources Theory by Stevan Hobfoll.

What is characteristic of Hobfoll's theory is the fact that stress is the result of a situation in which a person is faced with the risk of losing the resources he or she needs to survive. These resources are related to the person's functioning in a group: the family, the community. What can be considered a valuable resource for an individual is subjective – resources are invested by people – employees – with a view to generate profit. When what the employee receives in return for what he or she gives does not satisfy them, they suffer loss, which becomes the source of stress (Hobfoll, 2001). A typical school situation can serve as an example, in which a teacher increases their skills and qualifications through lifelong learning in order to improve the quality of work, they engage in the development of their knowledge and skills, but do not receive the expected gratification, neither from pupils (in the form of involving in classes, receiving good grades, achieving successes in competitions, etc.), nor from systemic solutions (financial gratuities, improvement of working conditions, social prestige, etc.). Tucholska (1999) confirms that the sources of teachers' stress are as follows: inappropriate student behavior, noise, difficult students, naughty behavior, too many students in classes; time pressure (concerning mainly the lack of time for individual work with students), poorly designed textbooks, insufficient school supplies and equipment; the need of work satisfaction (especially little chance of promotion), insufficient salaries, the lack of recognition for a properly performed job; bad relationships among colleagues, behaviors of the teaching staff. The threat of losing one's resources, which Hobfoll refers to, is very real; the loss occurs frequently,

which, in a subjective perception, has a greater impact on the individual's well-being than the gain (Ennis, Hobfoll, Schroder, 2000).

In recent years, the problem of teachers' stress has been considered more frequently from a scientific perspective, which can be confirmed by an increasing number of publications on the subject, but it is worth realizing that teachers' stress is also influenced by their social perception, which is not based on researchers' investigations. As far as teachers are concerned, the loss of resources, i.e. objects, conditions, personal characteristics and energies necessary to survive or to realize one's objectives, occurs under the influence of the environment whose judgments and attitudes are based on subjective feelings and common opinions. This can be pointed out as a serious problem: the research of teacher's stress and its results still remain in the narrow sphere of theoreticians' interest, their practical implementation is not sufficient enough, so teachers might find themselves isolated and left to deal with their problems on their own, whereas the public opinion, shaping the teachers' status after all, reaches for the knowledge unfrequently, too. The result is that, in many cases, a teacher who puts a lot of passion and commitment to his or her work, but at the same time has a low resistance to the criticism they face, starts to lose their resources. According to Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory, some people are more likely to lose resources than others – it depends on how much they possess (Hobfoll, 2006). Character or personality traits are an individual matter. It is crucial that teachers are perceived as a group, the representatives of an institution which the society has many reservations about. It goes as far as to say that they must work twice as hard to earn their authority, which itself might also constitute a source of stress.

What proves to be of great importance is stress appraisal, which Hobfoll devotes a lot of attention to. Describing factors that cause stress, he uses an iceberg metaphor whose top symbolizes the appraisal of stress (Dudek, Koniarek, Szymczak, 2007). However, achieving the goal is not easy – it requires a lot of self-awareness and special competences. In this respect, it should be noted that there are large deficiencies when it comes to coaching or other forms of acquiring knowledge on the subject. The emphasis is on improving the teaching skills related to sharing knowledge and achieving the school's goals, but not on strengthening the teacher's awareness of stress. How amazing it is – if the publications on teacher's stress emphasize the significance of such internal reinforcement, there should be found a place for such training in the teacher's work organization system, especially taking into account the assumptions and visions of a modern school. If the ultimate goal of education in such a school is "comprehensive and harmonious development of the integrated personality of students" (Kujawiński, 2010, p. 38), it seems obvious to take care of the harmonious development of the integrated personality of the teacher.

School reality (as regards the system) is variable and it is difficult to count on the fact that without support, basing only on internal predispositions and personality traits, teachers will handle it well. The importance of employee support regarding

their internal integration is evidenced by the popularity of training courses dealing with: assertiveness, coping with stress, communication in a team, etc. The J. Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine in Łódź, one of the most important scientific and research institutions dealing with the environmental health determinants, among others, addresses the subject of improving working conditions. An important example is a publication – a guidebook for social workers having a significant title: *A workplace that meets expectations*. In the introduction the authors describe the deteriorating situation of employees of all occupations exposed to stress: “The psychosocial factors present in the workplace and the stress associated with them have been recognized as a significant threat to the health and safety of employees in many countries around the world. This is due to the fact that stress has considerable effects on employees, businesses and the state alike. It contributes to the formation and exacerbation of many disorders and health problems, is conducive to the occurrence of accidents at work and reduces productivity, which disrupts the functioning of a company and brings it to significant material losses. As a result, the state incurs costs related to the treatment of employees and sickness benefits due to their health deterioration. The situation raises an increased concern and interest of both governments and non-governmental organizations appointed to work for the safety and health at work, as well as employers and employees. Therefore, international and national organizations established to take care of the working conditions and health of employees, also include this aspect in their activities” (Waszkowska, Potocka, Wojtaszczyk, 2010, p. 3). It seems that the attention paid to teachers in terms of the aforementioned problems is still too small.

Hobfoll’s theory is one of many that indicate the path of action to fight against stress and to learn how to both combat and prevent it. In the teaching profession stress prevention is extremely important, as the main goal of the job is to act for the benefit of another person. Teachers’ work is based on interpersonal contacts, in which empathy, openness, and proper communication are crucial (Sęk, 2004). It is by no means a revelatory statement that a stressed teacher will not be able to fulfill this vocation – for it cannot be forgotten that the task of the teachers is primarily to accomplish the mission. They must be unconditionally convinced of its advisability, but can a teacher, whose resources are neither appreciated nor properly remunerated (in the material, spiritual and intellectual dimensions), be unconditionally convinced that the mission makes sense? Hobfoll’s factual analyses constitute a scientific basis for the negative answer to this question.

The results of own research presented above confirm the hypothesis that there are differences between the group of teachers and the control group concerning the level of occupational burnout, social support and stress. The main result is important at the statistical level. The results of the research have their justification in Hobfoll’s concept (2006), which assumes that there is a link between occupational burnout and the loss of resources. The result of poor resource distribution is the intensification of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, while experiencing negative

emotional states and failure at the same time. The reason for the aforementioned problems is a situation in which the loss of teachers' resources results in life failure and the lack of professional success. Moreover, according to research, social support also constitutes a significant moderator influencing the phenomenon of burnout and stress. Due to low social support level, teachers are exposed to various stressors, which in turn may lead to the occurrence of the occupational burnout syndrome.

The article has attempted to evaluate the interaction between Hobfoll's resources, job satisfaction and social support modifying the perceived stress. In conclusion, it should be stated that there is an occupational burnout model in terms of depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and the sense of achievement and sources of tension. Determining the factors that constitute the cause of teachers' burnout allows establishing a final model indicating the risks and opportunities in preventive actions reducing stress and teachers' professional burnout. The problem of burnout will never be avoided, by implementing a good psychological model, however, it is possible to minimize it by avoiding factors responsible for its occurrence.

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Keywords: Hobfoll, theory of resources, teacher, stress, school

Abstract: Stress, related to a work place, is gradually becoming a common scientific theme among specialists from different domains. It is quite important because that problem can be explained taking into consideration different perspectives. Basing on the effects of research, many sources, causes and symptoms of stress in different professions can be defined. Teachers, as an occupational group, are significantly exposed to stress because they have to work on system assumptions (which are not always a logical whole) and meet expectations of a leading authority and pupils. In the context of this complicated situation, the research on teachers' stress, in terms of the theory of Hobfoll's resources, is crucial.



ZASOBY HOBFOLLA A STRES W ZAWODZIE NAUCZYCIELA

Słowa kluczowe: Hobfoll, teoria zasobów, nauczyciel, stres, szkoła

Streszczenie: Stres związany z oddziaływaniem miejsca pracy to coraz częściej temat badań i dociekań specjalistów z różnych dziedzin. Jest to bardzo ważne, bowiem pozwala na ujęcie tego tematu z wielu perspektyw. Analizując wyniki tych badań, można określić rozmaite źródła, przyczyny i objawy stresu w różnych zawodach. Nauczyciele są grupą zawodową szczególnie narażoną na stres, bowiem ich zadaniem jest realizowanie założeń systemowych (nie zawsze tworzących logiczną całość) oraz spełnianie oczekiwań zarówno organu prowadzącego, jak i wychowanków. W kontekście tej skomplikowanej sytuacji istotne jest zbadanie nauczycielskiego stresu w związku z teorią zasobów Hobfolla.



