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Stress at the teacher's workplace – chosen factors

KEYWORDS

stress, burnout, teacher, school

ABSTRACT

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Stress aspects still remain as an existing problem, which requires further interdisciplinary studies. Considering the strong impact of chronic exposure to psychosocial stressors at a workplace in relational and incentives contexts of undertaking professional duties, those aspects gain in importance in teacher's work. A person stays in a continuous contact with a student, parent or another teacher, and their motivation seems to be a key aspect for the entire education process. The presented article is an attempt to capture stress indicators in a teacher's work, as well as ways of dealing with them in a school reality. The article begins by highlighting the most important stress definitions, followed by a brief methodology of self-research. Then the author describes stressors present in teacher's work, which were identified in empirical studies, and ways of dealing with stress used by tested teachers. The article ends with conclusions and recommendations for further representative studies.

Introduction

The issue of stress is a relatively frequent subject of interest of researchers in social sciences and humanities. However, it still remains a current problem that calls for

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further interdisciplinary studies. It is assumed that chronic exposure to psychosocial stressors at work leads to many adverse phenomena, such as mental health disorders, the development of psychosomatic diseases, and reduced job satisfaction (Merecz, 2010: 23–24). Individual negative emotional and health consequences further translate into social and economic costs – it has been proven that chronic stress makes it difficult to establish and maintain positive and satisfactory relations with other people, reduces work efficiency, leads to high staff turnover and losses caused by sickness absenteeism.

Let us note that the mental well-being of teachers is, in particular, in the public interest. It is directly linked to the quality of their work for their pupils and the local community as a whole. Even the best prepared teachers will teach and educate in a less effective way if their functioning at work is not optimal What is more, a teacher who suffers from psychological problems may have a negative impact on his or her pupils, building dysfunctional relations with them. On the other hand, a teacher who is committed and dedicated to his or her work can work very effectively and be quite successful even when he or she works in a difficult social environment, facing problems related to such phenomena as poverty or crime (Pyżalski, 2010: 45).

The submitted article is an attempt to capture predicators of stress in the teacher's work and the ways of dealing with it in relation to school reality. For the sake of clarity, the article will begin with a brief presentation of the basic definitions of stress.

Selected definitions of stress

There is no universal definition of stress in the psychological literature. The term was introduced to science in the 17th century in the works of the British physicist Robert Hooke (after: Mańkowska, 2017). In the 1930s, researchers began to analyse biological stress in the context of responses to stimuli. At that time, they considered that any symptom of maladaptation and/or non-adaptation was considered as an indicator of stress. At the time, Cannon defined stress as "the maintenance of the body's biological balance in the form of a strong stimulation of the nervous and endocrinologic system, appearing in response to a specific factor acting on the body" (Pyżalski, 2010: 22). Some of the first research on stress was initiated by Selye in the 1930s. The author described stress as an unspecific reaction of the body to all the requirements imposed on it (Trelak, 2001). The researcher noted

that the state of stress occurs relatively often in response to psychological factors, and described it as "an unspecific reaction of the body to all demands made on it, the demands of the surroundings, associated with both pleasant and unpleasant events" (Łosiak, 2008: 11).

Lazarus and Falkman have developed common definitions of stress, specifying that "stress occurs when a situation is perceived as thwarting the realisation of an incentive state (or potentially thwarting it), causing an intensification of the affect and triggering regulatory processes aimed at controlling the affect and optimal continuation of effective functioning" (Trelak, 2001: 40). According to P. Zimbardo (Zimbardo, Johnson, McCann, 2010), stress can be called a set of specific and non-specific reactions exhibited by the body as a result of the collision of stimuli disturbing the balance and exposing the body to a serious trial, often exceeding the individual's ways of coping with stress. R. Lazarus and S. Folkman (after: Trelak, 2001: 70) point out that "psychological stress is a particular kind of relationship between a person and his environment, which is assessed by the person as being taxing or exceeding his/her resources and endangering his/her well-being". Also noteworthy is the dictionary definition, which defines stress as "a psychological and physical burden or tension caused by physical, emotional, social, economic or professional circumstances, events or experiences which are difficult to cope with or which are difficult to endure" (Colmac, 2009: 710).

Briefly referring to theory, three basic approaches can be distinguished within the concept of stress in the literature (Heszen-Niejodek, Ratajczak, 2000):

– stress as a stimulus – an external event or a situation with specific characteristics;
– stress as an internal human reaction – emotional reactions (internal experiences);
– stress as an external reaction of the body.

When analysing the definitions, it can be noticed that they all refer to the human reaction to the external situation. It seems that it is precisely such a syncretic approach to this issue that gives an opportunity to capture the issue under examination in its entirety. Focusing attention on treating stress as a stimulus could determine the underestimation of subjective elements in the perception of these stimuli. On the other hand, the clear location of research on stress in the external world justifies the fact that although people understand events, certain types of events (e.g. the death of loved ones, wars) are of similar importance to very different people – regardless of their age, gender or education. Thus, it is possible to find

common points in both the description of reactions to stress and to identify factors predisposing its impact.

It can therefore be briefly concluded that stress is generally understood as the body's response or reaction to long-term emotional and/or environmental demands. It is a permanent part of every human being's life because it is a natural biological response to changes in human life and everyday challenges – both positive and negative (Heszen-Niejodek, Ratajczak, 2000).

When referring to the issue of stress in the school reality and the teacher's work, preliminary studies were carried out to identify stressors and styles of dealing with stress. An attempt was also made to pre-define stress levels in relation to specific outcomes of school reality. The results of these analyses will be presented later in the article.

Methodological basis for own research

The research was conducted in the school year 2018/2019. 110 teachers in schools in Małopolska were sampled, of which 90,9% were women and 9,1% men.

The analyses took into account the gender of the respondents, the degree of professional advancement and the type of school in which the teachers work. The distribution of these variables is as follows: 18,2% of the respondents are trainees, 27,3% are contract teachers, 27,3% are appointed teachers and 27,3% are certified teachers. The conducted statistical procedures showed that there is no statistically significant correlation between the degree of professional advancement and the style of dealing with stress. Similar results were obtained when checking the relationship between the type of school in which the respondent is employed and the style of dealing with stress – also in this case there was a lack of statistically significant results. For the purposes of qualitative analysis, however, it is important to cite the distribution of the sample by school type. Let us note that 27,3% of the respondents take up employment in primary schools, 13,6% in lower secondary schools, 9,1% in both primary and lower secondary schools, and 50% in upper secondary schools.

To assess the stress factors at school, the questionnaire "Subjective evaluation of pedagogical work" and excerpts from the "Inventory of Teachers' Burnout" by S. Korczyński were used (2014).

The Questionnaire for Subjective Evaluation of Pedagogical Work consists of 52 statements to which respondents answered against the key:

1. The feature does not occur in my work.
2. The feature occurs, but it does not interfere with my work.
3. It sometimes annoys or disturbs me.
4. It annoys or disturbs me quite often.
5. It annoys me all the time at work, and I even get nervous about it at home.

Examples of statements made in the questionnaire:

1. I am afraid of losing my job or being transferred to another position.
2. It is very easy to make a mistake when dealing with young people, which can have specific consequences.
3. Teachers are often surprised by changes and regulations.
4. The implementation of didactic tasks is difficult due to the large number of pupils in classes.

For the sake of transparency in the presentation of the research results, the results obtained have been divided into five areas: technical conditions, pedagogical supervision and educational authorities, emotional factors, rewarding of work, time pressure. The answers were also ranked in order of importance, specifying in turn: "The feature does not occur in my work" and "The feature occurs, but it does not interfere with my work" as a low level of a given stress factor in the teacher's work. The statement: "It sometimes annoys or disturbs me" is defined as a medium level, while the statements: "It annoys or disturbs me quite often" and "It annoys me all the time at work and I even get nervous about it at home" are defined as a high level in the perception of the importance of a particular stressor.

The fragment of on the "Inventory of Teachers' Burnout" complements the questionnaire described above, which allows for the initial determination of stress levels in relation to selected school situations.

The respondents were also asked to complete the "Multidimensional Inventory for Measuring Coping with Stress" test. It is a self-report tool consisting of 60 statements to which the respondent answers on a 4-level scale. It allows the assessment of 15 strategies for responding to stressful situations. These strategies are: Active Coping, Planning, Seeking Instrumental Support, Seeking Emotional Support, Avoiding Competitive Actions, Turning to Religion, Positive Re-evaluation and Development, Refraining from Action, Acceptance, Focusing on Emotions and their Discharge, Denial, Distraction, Abandonment of Action, Taking Alcohol or Other Psychoactive Substances, Sense of Humour.

The presented results cannot be generalized due to the way the sample was selected (targeted selection on the basis of volunteers' applications). They are, however, a pilot programme as a starting point for further analysis already carried out on a representative sample.

Stress predicators in the teacher's work

Stressors have a strong influence on the ways people deal with difficult situations. It undoubtedly also applies to the teacher's work, which is burdened with many situations that can strongly trigger specific psychological and biological reactions. In terms of stress predicators in general, we can distinguish between (Augustynek, 2009: 92):

– deprivation (deprivation of the possibility to meet vital biological, individual and social needs);
– threat (threat of loss of the possibility to meet essential needs);
– frustration (an obstacle on the way to meeting an important need or achieving an important goal);
– pain (physical and/or mental).

However, when specifying the factors that cause stress in the context of school work, it is important to determine whether the stress at work is actually strongly felt by the teacher. It is quite commonly accepted that the school environment is seen as "a diverse and comprehensive area of experience, as a pattern of action, activity, roles and interpersonal relationships" (Noelle, after: Smoter, Sury, 2017: 81–98), requires the teacher to confront what is "different", "difficult" or even "impossible" and enter in experiences that exceed their current capabilities and competences (Noelle, after: Smoter, Sury, 2017: 81–98). In this context, it is particularly worth noting the presence of stress in the teacher's everyday life.

Based on the results of the research obtained after applying the fragment of the "teachers' burn-out questionnaire", an attempt was made to determine to what extent teachers perceive issues present in their work environment as stressful. It is worth noting the distribution of the results obtained in the course of the conducted analyses.

Table 1. Selected symptoms of professional burnout

Statement	Categories of responses	% out of n = 110
Working as a teacher makes me feel emotionally exhausted.	very rarely/rarely	27,3
	very often/often	72,7
I feel tired before going to work.	very rarely/rarely	45,5
	very often/often	54,5
I perform many professional activities out of necessity.	very rarely/rarely	54,5
	very often/often	45,5

I have the impression that those with whom I have professional contacts are not enthusiastic about my work.	very rarely/rarely	54,5
	very often/often	45,5
I sometimes talk to children in a disrespectful or degrading way.	very rarely/rarely	100,0
	very often/often	0,0
Working with children (young people) is really stressful for me.	very rarely/rarely	18,2
	very often/often	81,8
At the end of a school day, I feel exhausted.	very rarely/rarely	54,5
	very often/often	45,5
I am less and less willing to work.	very rarely/rarely	63,6
	very often/often	36,4
I am reluctant to further professional development.	very rarely/rarely	36,4
	very often/often	63,6
I feel that I lack the strength to work effectively.	very rarely/rarely	54,5
	very often/often	45,5
After parent teacher meetings I lose energy and enthusiasm for work.	very rarely	100,0
	very often/often	0,0
I am afraid of unexpected reactions, pupils' behaviour.	very rarely/rarely	90,9
	very often/often	9,1

Source: own study.

Teachers very often or often pointed out that "Working as a teacher makes them feel emotionally exhausted" (72,7%); in addition, 81,8% of teachers considered work as a cause of stress for them. The remaining results are particularly interesting – worthy of verification on a wider sample – and demonstrate a high level of job satisfaction and a sense of quite strong motivation. Let us note that the surveyed teachers do not have a problem with talking to children with respect – 100% of the surveyed teachers declare that they do not refer to children in a disrespectful or degrading way. Also 100% of the surveyed respondents do not lose energy and enthusiasm for work after parent teacher meetings, and 90,9% of the respondents are not afraid of unexpected reactions and pupils' behaviour. In addition, 63,6% of respondents are still willing to work and enthusiastic. There is a reluctance to further professional development (63,6% of respondents) and fatigue before going to work (54,5%). It can therefore be concluded that teachers are generally satisfied with their work and feel motivated to do it, despite the emotional tension and stress they feel.

The next step of the analysis was an attempt to identify stress predicators in the teacher's work. Assuming that a stressor is any kind of stimulus or any situation

which, through psychophysiological processes, can lead to harm in the form of deteriorated well-being, deteriorated functioning and/or health, it can be considered that, in fact, a psychosocial threat is anything that worsens well-being or makes it difficult to function in a proper and effective way. This is a very broad category and it can be intuitively felt that an infinite number of situations fit the cited description (Merecz, 2010: 23–24). However, an attempt has been made to capture these special circumstances, which are strongly connected with the school reality. The first factor analysed is the control of work and how it is supervised.

Table 2. Pedagogical supervision and educational authorities

STATEMENTS	LEVEL	% out of = 110
Unrealistic requirements	low	27,3
	moderate	36,4
	high	36,4
Fear of losing or changing job	low	81,8
	moderate	18,2
	high	0,0
Frequent changes and amendments to legislation	low	36,4
	moderate	18,2
	high	45,5
Emphasis on formal accounting for the various forms of further development, without any real improvement in qualifications	low	36,4
	moderate	18,2
	high	45,5
Continuous monitoring and evaluation (by pupils, parents, superiors, educational authorities)	low	9,1
	moderate	45,5
	high	45,5
Excessive demands on the teacher by educational authorities	low	27,3
	moderate	27,3
	high	45,5
Unequal treatment of teachers in the allocation of tasks or availability of different resources, awards, incentives, etc.	low	27,3
	moderate	18,2
	high	54,5
Effects of work unnoticed by pedagogical supervision	low	72,7
	moderate	18,2
	high	9,1
Lack of information on the quality of the tasks performed	low	63,6
	moderate	27,3
	high	9,1

Limited influence on decisions of the school as a whole	low	18,2
	moderate	45,5
	high	36,4
No sense of independence	low	45.5
	moderate	9,1
	high	45,5

Source: own study.

The result indicating that teachers are generally not afraid of losing their jobs (81,8% of respondents chose the response indicating a low sense of threat concerning this aspect) is cognitively interesting. The feeling of not being rewarded for work does not interfere with work or does not occur (72,7% of responses), and the lack of information about the quality of work (63,6% of responses) is not a stress factor. As a problematic situation, potentially generating a feeling of strong stress, frequent changes in work and changes in legal regulations are mentioned (45,5% of responses indicating a high level of generating a frustrating, problematic situation). More than half of the teachers (54,5%) see a problem in the unequal treatment of teachers in the allocation of tasks or the availability of various resources, awards, incentives, etc. Teachers consider the "Pressure to formally account for different forms of further development without actually improving their qualifications" (45,5%) and "Continuous monitoring and evaluation by pupils, parents, superiors or educational authorities" (answer 45,5%) as strongly disruptive. Other factors have a relatively moderate impact on the level of teacher stress at work.

In the research results presented above, the factor of emotional exhaustion was strongly present, which was noted by 72,7% of the respondents. However, these statements do not confirm statements that take into account the emotional component. Considering the results obtained with the use of the "subjective assessment of pedagogical work" questionnaire, such an assessment was not emphasized strongly. From the questionnaire, the factors that may indicate an emotional component were selected. The results are as follows.

Table 3. Emotional factors

STATEMENTS	LEVEL	% out of n = 110
Lack of reaction to abusive statements by pupils in order to avoid conflicts	low	63,6
	moderate	9,1
	high	27,3

Serious educational problems, difficult to overcome	low	45,5
	moderate	27,3
	high	27,3
A feeling that work has a negative impact on family life	low	54,5
	moderate	9,1
	high	36,4
The work requires constant emotional commitment to the pupils	low	18,2
	moderate	54,5
	high	27,3
The feeling of an endless working day due to the increasing problems related to work after its completion	low	30,0
	moderate	40,0
	high	30,0
Presence of events that cause strong internal conflicts	low	54,5
	moderate	18,2
	high	27,3
A feeling of unfulfilled tasks after the end of the working day	low	27,3
	moderate	45,5
	high	27,3
The possibility of making a mistake when working with young people	low	54,5
	moderate	27,3
	high	18,2

Source: own study.

Teachers found that, in general, the following factors do not occur or if they do occur, they do not interfere with their work (low stress level): lack of ability to react to abusive statements made by pupils (63,6%); the impact of work on family life (54,5%); presence of events that may cause strong internal conflicts (54,5%); the possibility of making mistakes when working with young people (54,5%).

The feeling that the work requires constant emotional involvement in pupils' affairs influences the feeling of emotional tension in a moderate way (54,5% of responses indicating a moderate level of influence and 27,3% – high level of influence). Similarly, the feeling of an endless working day due to the growing problems related to work after its completion (40,0% and 30% of responses).

Table 4. A sense of being rewarded for work

STATEMENT	LEVEL	% out of n = 110
No opportunities for promotion	low	63,6
	moderate	9,1
	high	27,3
A feeling of being underestimated	low	63,6
	moderate	9,1
Low remuneration	low	27,3
	moderate	18,2
	high	54,5
Perceiving work as completed with the school bell	low	9,1
	moderate	36,4
	high	54,5
Low social prestige	low	36,4
	moderate	0,0
	high	63,6
A sense of not using one's qualifications	low	45,5
	moderate	18,2
	high	36,4

Source: own study.

When analysing further research results, it is noteworthy that teachers feel irritated by the feeling of low social prestige of their work (63,6% of responses indicating a high level of the problem) and more than half of the respondents (54,5%) – low remuneration. On the other hand, teachers do not perceive possible difficulties with promotion (63,6%) as problematic or perceive this only to a small extent; they do not feel underestimated at work (63,6%); they also do not feel that their qualifications are not being used (45,5%).

Table 5. Time pressure

STATEMENTS	LEVEL	% out of n = 110
Lack of time to solve individual pupils' problems	low	27,3
	moderate	27,3
	high	45,5
No possibility to relax even during the break	low	22,2
	moderate	33,3
	high	44,4

The need for rapid decision-making in educational matters and to respond to different signals	low	9,1
	moderate	27,3
	high	63,6
The number of teaching hours allocated exceeds the applicable working hours	low	72,7
	moderate	0,0
	high	27,3
The profession requires a lot of work outside school hours (organizing events, meetings with parents, consultations, additional activities at home, etc.)	low	0,0
	moderate	36,4
	high	63,6

Source: own study.

Compared to other factors, the pressure of time is felt relatively strongly by teachers. Respondents considered (63,6%) that the profession requires a lot of work outside school hours (organisation of events, meetings with parents, consultations, additional activities at home, etc.) and this fact potentially generates strong stress and tension. Similarly, the need to make quick decisions in educational matters and to react to various signals is marked in the opinion of respondents (63,6%) as strongly affecting their work quality. Relatively often (44,4%) they see a problem in the inability to relax during breaks, as well as the lack of time to solve problems of individual pupils (45,5%). Let us note that 72,7% of the respondents do not think that the number of allocated teaching hours significantly exceeds the applicable working hours.

Another area of analysis included relations among teachers and issues of relations with parents and pupils. The table below presents selected areas included in the conducted research.

Table 6. Relationship issues

STATEMENTS	LEVEL	% out of n = 110
Lack of motivation of pupils to learn and disregard for school duties	low	18,2
	moderate	18,2
	high	63,6
Parents' tendency to reveal demanding attitudes towards teachers and the school	low	0,0
	moderate	0,0
	high	100,0
Vandalism on school grounds	low	63,6
	moderate	27,3
	high	9,1

Lack of criticism on the part of pupils of the humiliating behaviour of some of their friends	low	72,7
	moderate	27,3
	high	0,0
Competition between teachers	low	63,6
	moderate	9,1
	high	27,3
The atmosphere among the teachers is not the best	low	81,8
	moderate	9,1
	high	9,1
In the case of difficulties or problems, a feeling of lack of support from colleagues	low	63,6
	moderate	27,3
	high	9,1

Source: own study.

In this area, teachers generally do not note any problems with vandalism on school grounds (63,6% of the respondents) and competition between teachers (63,6%) and possible lack of support in the case of difficulties (63,6%). In addition, 81,8% of the teachers do not think that students fail to react to inappropriate behaviour of their friends. Teachers also think that the atmosphere among the teachers is generally favourable (81,8%).

It is somewhat surprising that 100% of teachers consider the parents' tendency to reveal demanding attitudes towards teachers and school as a problem. The lack of motivation of pupils and in their disregard for school duties is also considered problematic (63,6%).

The above summary of research results shows that the group is quite heterogeneous in its statements. The idea that what is a source of professional stress for one employee may not be a problem for his or her colleague is very strong. Psychologists emphasize that in the case of most situations faced by a person in professional or non-professional contexts, whether they are perceived as stressful depends primarily on their interpretation. Therefore, the majority of researchers dealing with psychosocial risks in the work environment are of the opinion that they result from the interaction of conditions, requirements, organisation and content of work and individual needs, preferences and characteristics of an employee (Merecz, 2010: 42). For the sake of clarity, however, it was decided to cite those factors that were assessed by respondents as the most disruptive in their work. These include:

1. Parents, tendency to reveal demanding attitudes towards teachers and the school – 100%.
2. Low social prestige – 63,6%.

3. Large amount of work outside school hours (organization of events, meetings with parents, consultations, additional activities performed at home, etc.) – 63,6%.

4. Lack of motivation of pupils to learn and their disregard for school duties – 63,6%.

5. Low remuneration – 54,5%.

6. Society's perception of their work as completed with the school bell – 54,5%.

It therefore seems that a positive attitude to work and commitment in the case of a teacher is quite complicated, at least when it comes to analysing the factors that affect them. It may be that teachers poorly asses the formal world of the institution, and much better, the informal world of personal relationships at school or the sense of doing the teacher's work. Similar results were also obtained in a study by J. Pyżalski (2010: 31–46), in which 78% of the surveyed teachers would choose the teaching profession again. So how do teachers cope with stress? Attempts were made to answer this question in the further part of the article.

Styles of dealing with stress

The definition of the style of dealing with stress is: "a relatively constant tendency to use, in various individual situations, specific coping methods to remove or reduce stress" (Łosiak, 2008: 79). It may be: a psychophysical state, socio-economic status, demographic factors or personality traits (Strelau, Jaworska, Wrześniewski, Szczepaniak, 2005). Generally, the styles of dealing with stress can be presented and considered on three levels: process, strategy and style. The process is understood as the overall activity of a person undertaken in a stressful situation. It influences the initial assessment of the situation and is a complex and dynamic process. Strategies are parts of the process, understood as minor activities that differ in quality, creating specific strategies (styles) for dealing with stress. Style is therefore seen as a kind of scheme of action which, when confronted with a stressful situation, is automatically activated (Bargiel-Matusiewicz, Podbielski, Klasik, 2004: 3–4).

Based on the results of the "Multidimensional Inventory for Measuring Coping with Stress", 15 styles of stress management are listed. The styles have been divided based on N.S. Endler and J.D.A. Parker (after: Popiel, Pragłowska, 2008), distinguishing:

– task-focused style – it is about taking up a task; those who use this style tend to make efforts to solve the problem by cognitive transformation or attempts to change the situation; the main focus is on the task and/or planning of solving the problem;

- emotion-focused style – it consists of making an effort to eliminate or reduce the emotional tension that is associated with the stressful situation experienced; what is characteristic is that a person concentrates on their own emotional experience, e.g. guilt, anger, tension; there is a tendency to fantasize and/or wishful thinking;
- avoidance-oriented style – it is about making an effort to avoid thinking, experiencing and experiencing stressful situations.

It can take two different forms:

- engaging in replacement activities, e.g. playing on a computer, sleeping, listening to music, thinking about pleasant things from the past, etc.;
- seeking social contacts, e.g. spending time with friends, meeting new people.

Analysing the strategies identified by COPE, we can include the following styles among the "problem-focused" strategies: active coping, planning, seeking instrumental support, seeking emotional support, avoiding competitive social activities and positive re-evaluation. Within the strategies focused on seeking support and focusing on emotions, we can distinguish another five styles of dealing with stress, i.e. turning to religion, development, refraining from action, acceptance, focusing on emotions and their discharge. In the third group of strategies, the so-called evasive behaviour, another five styles of dealing with stress can be distinguished: denial, distraction, abandonment of action, consumption of alcohol and sense of humour. The distribution of the results obtained during the research process is as follows.

Table 7. Styles of dealing with stress

Styles of dealing with stress	Category	Average	Overall average
Task (problem)-focused style	Active coping	3,18	3,04
	Planning	3,30	
	Seeking instrumental support	3,09	
	Seeking emotional support	2,82	
	Avoiding competing activities	2,82	
Emotion-focused style	Turning to religion	2,82	2,80
	Positive re-evaluation and development	3,18	
	Refraining from action	2,73	
	Acceptance	2,44	
	Focusing on emotions and their discharge	2,82	

Avoidance-orien-ted style	Denial	1,64	
	Distraction	2,27	1,86
	Abandonment of action	2,20	
	Consumption of alcohol or other psychoactive substances	1,45	
	Sense of humour	1,73	

Source: own study.

Analysing the average scores obtained on individual scales, it can be concluded that teachers most often use the most constructive style of dealing with stress, namely they are task-oriented in their remedial actions (average scores are 3,04 for this style), most often they declare planning in difficult situations (3,30 of the responses), then looking for instrumental support (3,09); emotional support (3,82), and avoiding competitive actions during periods of increased stress.

Relatively high results were also obtained on the scale of emotional style. Here, the respondents particularly pointed to the need for a positive re-evaluation of the stressful situation (3,18), as well as a turning towards religion (2,82). There was also a tendency to focus on difficult emotions and their discharge (2,82), less often refraining from action (2,73) and accepting a difficult situation or event (2,44).

Least frequently the surveyed teachers declare that they take evasive actions in a stressful situation. They do not use alcohol or psychoactive substances (average score of 1,45), generally they do not use defensive reactions such as denial (1,64), they do not turn difficult situations into a joke (1,73), they rarely refrain from taking action to resolve the situation (2,20), and generally do not try to divert their attention from the problem (2,27).

It can therefore be considered that teachers use constructive methods to deal with stressful situations. Hence, it can be argued that, despite the emotional tension and stress experienced in the workplace, teachers are able to maintain a positive attitude towards their duties and motivation to remain in the teaching profession, precisely because of their constructive methods of dealing with stressful situations.

Conclusions and recommendations for further studies

As shown earlier, the teacher's working environment is an important element that positively or negatively affects the psychological well-being of the teacher. It is worth taking two types of action: actions where the focus is on negative factors, and those where the focus is on positive factors. In the case of the first type of

action, it is possible to try to reduce the negative (aggravating) factors or to make them less intense. Of course, depending on which factors are taken into account, they can be easier or more difficult to remove. When it comes to actions focusing on positive factors, the essence of these is to initiate or support solutions that have a positive impact on the teacher: they give him or her satisfaction, build a sense of commitment to his or her work and a sense of meaning of what he or she does. This approach is different from the one in which the workplace is treated exclusively as a stressful place, against which school employees have to defend themselves. In this perspective, work is a potential source of many positive experiences which, in turn, are a source of value for the person performing it. Therefore, it makes the most sense to carry out activities aimed at both groups of factors – stressors (threats) and salutogenic factors (Pyżalski, 2010: 45).

Man and his workplace are interdependent. How a teacher feels at work depends on what happens to him or her in the workplace, both in a positive and negative sense. On the other hand, what a person brings to work – personality, commitment, knowledge and experience – translates into the quality of his/her work as well as the institution in which he/she works. In this context, it is worth quoting two fundamental approaches to preventing professional burn-out, usually caused by severe and prolonged stress and emotional tension. One is called an individual-oriented approach, and the other is called a situation-oriented approach (Pyżalski, 2010: 45).

The individual-oriented approach implies that if we want to prevent or deal with the harmful effects of work on people, the employee himself must change. This approach assumes that the organisation (e.g. the school where the teacher works) has limited influence on what will happen to the teacher. Thus, those who manage the establishment are, in this perspective, largely relieved of responsibility for such management, that the working environment has as little negative impact as possible on the people employed in the place. In an extreme situation, this can mean an attitude assuming that a person who is not able to cope with the workload should change professions or intensify his or her efforts on his or her own and "pull themselves together" in a way that would allow everything to go back to normal. Even if some external actions are taken, their primary goal is to change the teacher and not his or her environment (Pyżalski, 2010: 45).

The situation-oriented approach is different. It is not the individual that is to change, but the organisation that employs the workers. Of course, these changes focus on the modification or complete elimination of professional stressors. However, the latter is rarely possible, because some of the stressors (e.g. contact with

pupils showing inappropriate behaviour) are permanently inscribed in the profession (Pyżalski, 2010: 45).

Focusing on individual-oriented strategies, while neglecting organizational-oriented strategies, is undoubtedly a bad solution. An approach in which all attention is focused on organisational factors without taking the individual level into account also has serious limitations. All modern approaches focus on both areas outlined above. Impacts and changes should take place both at the level of the teacher himself/herself and at the level of his/her workplace (e.g. school or other educational institution). These approaches are not only about acting in both areas. A necessary condition is to integrate them so that the implemented actions are coherent and thus more effective (Pyżalski, 2010: 45).

However, in the light of the presented studies, the focus on a situation-oriented strategy can be considered. Teachers show a relatively high degree of ability to cope with stressful situations. They do not show a lack of motivation to work or a low level of interest in the pupil and his or her affairs. In the current social situation, therefore, it is worth emphasising the change in social awareness concerning the importance and responsibility of the profession, as well as considering appropriate organisational changes, concerning working time or remuneration adequate to the effort and commitment.

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