

STRESSFUL SITUATIONS IN TEACHING PROFESSION – CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCESAnna Romanowska-Tołoczko
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Annotation. *Purpose.* Determination which areas of teacher's work are primary sources of stress, denomination of the extent to which disciplinary problems with students were stress inducing, and what was the frequency and intensity of these situations. *Material and methods.* The study involved 180 teachers from junior high schools, among which two groups were selected: physical education teachers (74 persons) and teachers of other subjects (106 persons). The reason for this division was the necessity of identifying the groups of teachers differing in specifics of school subjects, studies which they graduated from, and determine the typical areas of difficulty experienced. The research was based on a diagnostic survey and a questionnaire. *Results.* Teaching profession is considered as psychologically challenging occupation due to numerous occurrences of stressful situations. Yet it is not equally aggravating for everyone – there are well-functioning teachers who cope easily, but on the other hand, there are cases of serious psychosomatic consequences caused by frequent and prolonged pressures. Abilities of dealing with difficult situations largely depend upon one's individual predispositions, resistance to stress, way of assessing a situation and resulting type of action. *Conclusions.* The ability (or lack of it) of coping with range of educational activities may determine the intensity of experienced difficulties, and therefore the frequency of occurring stressful situations. Lack of skills in the area of interpersonal relations translates to inability to coping with problematic situations with pupils. This leads the teacher to awareness of own inefficiency and helplessness, which increases the intensity of experienced stress.

Keywords: teacher, stress, difficult situations, educational, skills.

Introduction

The occupation of a teacher bases on direct subjective relation which implies cooperation and emotional exchange. The role of pedagogue requires personal engagement, particular care and the ability of creating and sustaining interpersonal interactions [1]. Because of that, the role of a teacher is burdened with above-average difficulties [2].

To describe the modern profile of a teacher Konarzewski defines it as a vague, internally inconsistent, psychologically difficult and incompatible with other important roles [3].

The ambiguity of teacher's role stems from the fact that it is difficult to find consensus concerning the criteria for evaluating it. It is linked with the absence of predetermined and simultaneously measurable indicators of professional excellence in areas of didactics, education and care. The expectations towards a teacher are evidence of lack of integrity as they are often contradictory or very difficult to meet. Following factors influence the psychological difficulties of teaching profession: responsibility for the other person, relative irreversibility of the decision, the difficulty of correcting own mistakes, necessity to work at a pace and rhythm forced by specific conditions, need to constantly confront the expectations of students and readiness to respond quickly [1]. Inconsistency with other roles occurs when the meeting the expectations linked with given role impedes or prevents meeting the expectations imposed by other roles. In the case of a teacher conflict can occur in two ways - professional and non professional [3].

Another difficulty with the teaching profession is a requirement of having a broad spectrum of diverse competencies that should be continually developed and improved rapidly due to the cultural transformations taking place and changing social needs [4].

The teacher is expected not only to impart knowledge but also to possess educational, organizational and creative skills. The teacher is expected to not only imparting knowledge but also educational skills, organizational and creative, while the effects of his work are indirect, and gratuities usually very uncertain and deferred. In Polish conditions, there are additional factors resulting from the current socio-political and economic situation. For example: low wages, insecurity, underestimation of the teaching profession.

Consequently, teachers too often experience stressful situations, which are not without effect on their health, social relationships and careers. The stress connected with the profession of a teacher is of great interest of pedeutology, psychology and sociology. Borg's application of factor analysis led to the isolation of the root causes of stress in the teaching profession:

Factor 1 – incorrect behavior of students: difficult classes, arrogance and audacity of students, noise, difficulty in maintaining discipline, lack of sufficient interest in school work by students, too numerous classes.

Factor 2 – time pressure as a source of difficulties: lack of time for individual work with children, poorly designed textbooks, lack of adequate equipment and labor saving devices, the need to perform a variety of administrative work, numerous substitutions, the continuation of work at home (preparation for lessons, checking notebooks, tests).

Factor 3 – difficulties in achieving the needs of professional satisfaction: small chance of making a career, awareness of insufficient pay, lack of recognition and gratification for the work.

Factor 4 – insufficient collegial relationships as a source of bad relationships among teaching staff, pressure from the headmaster or education authorities, pressure from parents [5].

Purpose

Stressful situations occurring in the teaching profession have been discussed in many works devoted to the specifics of the profession and professional burnout, which is regarded as a consequence of the strong, chronic stress experienced in the context of their work [6,7,8]. In these studies, however, little space is devoted to the educational competence of teachers, who in their work primarily deal with the difficulties of educational nature. The ability or lack of ability to cope with this scope may be critical in severity of experienced difficulties, and thus the frequency of stressful situations.

The aim of the research was to pay particular attention to the sphere educational influence of teachers, and to determine to what extent the educational problems of the students lead to the emergence of a state of stress.

The research focused on the following issues: Which areas of teacher's work are primary sources of stress? What is the frequency of experienced difficult situations? How teachers define the intensity of experienced stress? Does professional stress have influence on family lives of the teachers?

Material and methods

The study involved 180 teachers from junior high schools, among which two groups were selected: physical education teachers (74 persons) and teachers of other subjects (106 persons). The reason for this division was the necessity of identifying the groups of teachers differing in specifics of school subjects, studies which they graduated from, and determine the typical areas of difficulty experienced. The study was conducted using a questionnaire, which was one of the research tools used in the comprehensive study carried out in terms of teacher professional burnout.

Results

Areas of the work of teachers which are the main sources of stressors

To obtain information relating to the stressors that are specific to individuals, examined teachers were asked open-ended question, not to suggest areas that could be a source of stress in their work. It was assumed that, in the first place frequently recurring, and most problematic situations will be listed. Through their annoyance they are the most vivid and settled in the perception of people experiencing them.

Among the stressful events mentioned by the teachers, the vast majority concerned educational situations. Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom repeated most frequently (73%), followed by rude (arrogant or disrespectful) behavior of students (61%). Physical education teachers equally often mentioned the noise in the classroom, and therefore the need for increased tone of voice (52%). A further, though at a much less mentioned source of stress was enormous amount of responsibilities and pressure of time to cope with them (29%). Few teachers have identified as stressful relationships with management (7%) and teaching staff (5%).

On the basis on the results of previously conducted studies, that showed significantly lower levels of educational competence of teachers in relation to their substantive and methodological expertise [9], it was assumed that the sphere of educational interaction may be the area most stressful for teachers, causing strong emotional reactions. Therefore, an attempt find out how often teachers react in a raised voice or shout to students hampering the lesson. It turns out that this phenomenon is quite common and frequent, because this type of reaction is admitted by 57% of teachers. A raised voice is on the one hand a way of intimidating the other person and exerting pressure, a sign of aggression. On the other hand it is an expression of helplessness. The above behaviors of teachers indicate some important aspects that could provide the cause of such proceedings:

- Teacher's lack of awareness of the impact of verbal aggression on their students, which triggers its further escalation,
- Ignorance of constructive supportive methods in the maintenance of discipline and proper relationship education,
- Too impulsive responding resulting from the inability to cope with emotions and lack of understanding of the essence of this mechanism.

The frequency of difficult situations and intensity of the experienced stress.

Difficult situations are perceived subjectively - what for one person is troublesome, annoying or threatening, for another may not be a problem. The evaluation of these situations and individual perception depends largely on personal predispositions and skills of coping with stress, which also determines its intensity.

To learn the specifics of difficult situations that cause stress reactions of varying severity, three levels of intensity of stress were adopted:

- a). low intensity - a short and moderate anxiety
- b). medium intensity - a nervousness persisting for about an hour, with a significant level of anxiety
- c) high intensity - a tension lasting a few hours, which is characterized by strong psycho physiological responses.

The determination of the frequency was also clarified: very rarely means once a month or less, rarely 1-2 times a week, often - once a day, very often - several times during the day. On the basis of obtained results it can be concluded that teachers often and very often experience stress of low intensity. They are somehow placed in vocational routine and relate to almost all teachers (90%). Stress of medium intensity, often and very often is experienced by nearly half of the respondents, which is already a concern. However, strong stress reactions are experienced (with varying frequency) by 1/3 of the study group (Table 1).

Table 1

The frequency and intensity of stress experienced by teachers

intensity of stress frequency of experience stress	low intensity	medium intensity	high intensity
very rarely	-	4%	13%
rarely	15%	48%	10%
often	53%	32%	7%
very often	23%	16%	3%

Some differences were noted in determining the intensity of stress among teachers of physical education and other subjects. Physical education teachers mentioned mostly low and medium level of experienced stress. What is more, there are none who would experience high level of stress in their work. This is important information that requires further steps of research, in order to determine the factors that determine the occurrence of these differences.

Occupational stress and the sphere of family life

The specificity of the teaching profession is the need to perform some of the related duties at home, i.e. preparing for lessons, checking and evaluating the tests, filling in school documentation. These activities reduce the time that could be devoted to the family. For some of the teachers working hours almost never end, which is an additional and significant source of stress. Among the surveyed teachers one third believes that professional duties take them a lot of time and cause a permanent state of tension. This problem generally does not apply to physical education teachers. Another important issue is the transfer of negative emotions from the work onto the ground of family life. Groups of teachers were distinguished for specific types of behavior in reaction to the psychological burden associated with work:

- Teachers, for whom work is not stressful - characterized by their inner calm in relations with students and family relationships.
- Teachers who suppress negative emotions and manage to respond in a calm manner to students, but after returning home, give vent to their tension accumulated at work.
- Teachers characterized by a certain impulsiveness of reactions in stressful work situations, but also in the family life. At this stage of research it is difficult to determine whether such behavior is conditioned by temperament, whether it is due to learned (habitual) ways of responding and low resistance to stress.
- Teachers who react in stressful school relationships both impulsively and calmly, but consciously try not to carry negative emotional states to the sphere family life; they control their reactions towards household members, as they realize that the source of their arousal are different people and situations.

Conclusions

The ability to cope with difficult situations largely is conditioned by individual predispositions of a person, one's resistance to stress and a way to assessing the situation and the consequent action. There are two typical patterns of addressing the stress: optimistic-realistic focused on the success, and the catastrophe pattern set to fail. The experience of stress is thus affected by subjective assessment of the situation. This evaluation may depend on the mood physical and mental forms, external influences and determinants of personality [10]. However, remember that you can also have an impact on the improvement of individual remedial measures and developing the skills limiting the frequency and intensity of the experienced stress, which means learn how to undertake preventive measures [11]. Therefore, in the teacher education system stress coping workshops should necessarily be included, which main purpose is to enrich the internal resources and improving the remedial skills of future teachers. Furthermore, it is essential to teach students relaxation techniques, assertiveness, social and emotional skills [12]. However, this type of course in Polish universities is not sufficient. This means that the development of personality predispositions of the students is neglected. Previous research conducted by the author of study showed that schools educating future teachers, prepare them for psycho-social performance in minimal extent, resulting in, among others, insufficient educational competencies that are necessary in this profession [13]. Moreover, other authors on the basis of the study concluded that greater importance in teacher training is applied to the substantive and methodical knowledge, while neglecting their training in parenting skills, which have a direct relationship with the social skills that are necessary for effective functioning in relationships with students [4,14,15].

As a result of these deficiencies in the competence, teachers encounter many educational problems to which they feel helpless, or act in an incorrect manner [16]. The result of such actions is the formation of abnormal and sometimes destructive relationships that are equally detrimental to the student and the teacher. A student subjected to an incorrect upbringing interactions react with aggression or withdrawal, whereas, a teacher not coping with difficult situations in the school is aware of its own inefficiency and helplessness which increases the intensity of experienced stress.

The teaching profession undoubtedly requires a certain personality predispositions that facilitate the exercise of the profession. According Tucholska [1] personal characteristics and social skills of teachers determine in a special way a proper fit to the profession and protect against excessive stress. However, their deficit carries the risk of exhaustion,

discouragement, disappointment, or excessive professional withdrawal, accompanied by the whole range of psychosomatic symptoms and consequences in social relations in different aspects of life.

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