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**STRESS, COPING AND WORK PERFORMANCE**

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*Abstract*

This study aims at analysing a few aspects related to teaching associated stress issue. These refer to the stress sources typology, stress level perceived, coping methods and teaching performance as seen from a behavioural point of view, under coping or stress influence, the research importance being revealed especially from the organizational perspective and for the school managers who desire resilient employees, able to fulfil their duties. For the research to be done there was drawn a questionnaire, applied on 105 teachers from the primary and gymnasium levels from Suceava. The results from the descriptive, correlational statistical analysis and the tests for independent samples, analysed in SPSS Statistics 20, proved a medium to increased level of stress for the teachers, a coping style based on active coping, planning, searching for social support but also on the orientation towards religion, a significant correlation between the stress level perceived by the gymnasium and primary learning teachers, their coping style and the teaching performance. This study's conclusion is that the diminishing of the professional stress by some stress management courses at organizational level can increase teaching performance.

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**Keywords:** Stress, coping, work performance.

## 1. Introduction

The concepts that are the basis for our research are teaching related occupational stress, coping and work performance. Stress became an inevitable and dreadful aspect of the daily life, and may affect performance, thus, there is a need to adopt some efficient coping ways.

Stress phenomena is related to different factors as the individual particularities, environment, work overload, the power of decision within different theoretical stress models, detailed in the literature (Capotescu, 2006; Clipa, 2017; Iancu, Rusu, Măroiu, Păcurar, & Măricuțoiu, 2018; Ursu, 2007; Preda, 2010). In different theoretical models of occupational stress, this is seen as a dependent variable, as a person's reaction to stressors, or an independent variable, thus, after all, stress is a transactional process, which highlights the person – environment conflict (Ursu, 2007). All these models and studies are of interest in our research which will take into account both personal characteristics and the social or professional environment factors (overload, relationships with the colleagues, management and decisional authority). The literature approaches the workplace stress from two perspectives: organizational and professional or occupational stress. Occupational stress is approached in the literature in close connection with performances decreasing at the work place and from the work and organizational psychology perspective (Sava, 2004). Professional stress was approached in researches by reference to the person, environment or to both aspects. Ursu (2007) defines occupational stress as a state of imbalance between demands and the employee's ability to perform them, in the context of the importance of the consequences resulted from not performing them, the author highlighting the relation between professional environment and individual's personal traits. This author uses the concept in order to underline the important relationship between the stressor and the work he does with negative effects on the employee.

## 2. Problem Statement

Educational professional field is considered in the literature to be one of the most stressful fields (Clipa & Boghean, 2015). The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (Podosu, 2012) highlights as a major risk factor for the individual's health in education, stress, identifying a few stress sources for teachers: wage; law and teaching-learning-assessment model changing; pressure from the ones to be educated; the poor school – family relationship; social and personal pressures; poor planning and programs; school as a stressful agent. In European recent reports it is indicated that teaching is a job with a high level of stress and this determines burn out phenomena (Iancu et al., 2018) and a great number of teachers who are leaving the educational system (The Teaching Profession ..., 2015; Teaching Careers ..., 2018).

Other studies add to this stress sources inventory the low motivation for performance in the context of the almost inexistent chances to tenure and the low possibilities of a career development (Sandilos, Goble, Rimm-Kaufman, & Pianta, 2018), children with special needs integration (Clipa, 2017), training courses (Masari, Muntele, & Curelariu, 2013). In an article that has as samples of teachers from secondary school highlight variables that influence the teachers' stress and are strictly related to the profession or are associated to the individual and organizational differences. Thus, there were identified stress sources in the educational environment: the pressure to read, prepare and permanently update the lessons taught in the classroom, spaces related deficiencies, teaching materials, pupils attendance to classes, establishing a coherent working program, large amount of administrative responsibilities, more, sometimes, than the teaching ones, editing and multiplying on their own expense the materials for the classes (Clinciu, 2011). With respect to teachers' individual traits, we can consider aspects such as personality, gender, demographic environment, the ability to establish and maintain relationships, and to live up to the expectations (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998) but also the matching between the personal and professional values, the ambition to succeed, the competitive spirit or perfectionism (Bachkirova, 2005), self-confidence

(Păsălu & Chraif, 2011), negative affectivity, optimism or pessimism (Capotescu, 2006), poor job satisfactions and low classroom climate and the poorer student achievement (Iancu et al., 2018).

The coping theories existent in the literature highlight the relationships between stress – coping - anxiety (Preda, 2010), pointing out the defence resources mobilization along the three phases of stress, alarm, resistance and exhaustion illustrating the fact that stress is an environment condition and the relationship between stimuli and reaction is unilateral and unidirectional or bring out the way in which stressors can appear in the context of the person – environment transactions, suggesting the means to cope with them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The most commonly used within professional environments are the employees assistance and stress management training programs, aiming at reducing the employees vulnerability to the effects of the stress and the development of a complex of abilities which could efficiently support them in front of the stressors.

Anandasayanan (2013) point out, in a study regarding the stress effects on teachers performance from Jaffna, Sri Lanka, the fact that the teachers with a high stress level often complain about health, physical, psychological problems, have a poor work performance and the behaviours associated to this aspect are absenteeism, mistakes done in the teaching process and even violence.

### **3. Research Questions**

In order to achieve the goal of the study we are going to try and answer a series of questions which become our research objectives: How stressful do primary and secondary school teachers consider the teaching profession? To what extent does professional stress affect other dimensions of life? What is the level of stress perceived in their professional activity? What measures taken by competent institutions could diminish teachers' professional stress? What are the main sources of stress and ways of coping identified in their professional experience? How does the level of stress and coping style affect teaching performance?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Our research project aims at identifying, in a transversal quantitative endeavour, if there is a significant relationship between occupational stress in education, coping approached in terms of actual actions and strategies and individual teaching performance.

Thus, the present research aims at identifying information on the stress level of primary and secondary school teachers in the selected sample, identifying information on the sampled teacher's coping style, comparing the level of professional stress of primary school teachers with that of gymnasium teachers, to identify the relationship that exists between demographic variables and the level of perceived stress, to identify the relationship that exists between the coping or stress level and the individual work performance.

### **5. Research Methods**

The sample was formed of primary and secondary school teachers from the six schools in which there are primary and secondary levels, from Suceava County. The demographic characteristics taken into account in this sample's description were age, gender, marital status, studies graduated, teaching cycle, seniority and teaching degree. Thus the average of the individuals age in the sample is 39.17, the minimum age being 22 years old while the maximum was 69 (SD=10,41). The distribution according to the gender within the sample is not uniform, comprising 21,9% men and 78,1% women. With respect to the marital status, 70, 5% of the subjects are married while 29, 5% are single. 59 % from the subjects were university studies graduates while 33,3 % had a master degree, 8 % being high school or college graduates. The distribution regarding the teaching level is balanced, 48,6 % from the subjects teaching in primary school and 51,4 % in secondary school. In terms of seniority in work, the subjects fit predominantly in the 2-10

and 11-20 years. Most of the teachers of primary and secondary levels have earned their teaching degree I in education and a significant number of them had earned the second degree or permanent teacher degree. Only 9,5% of these are beginners. The variables involved in the research are: independent variables: the teachers perceived stress level and the adjustment coping style; dependent variables: individual performance in work; the co-variables: the teaching cycle, teaching degree. Through the first questionnaire, the one regarding Opinions about Stress in Teaching Profession (Kyriacou & Chien, 2004), comprised of five items, we studied the primary and secondary school teachers perception regarding the emotions related to work stress (I1), the estimated professional stress degree (I2), the possibility to give up education (I3), the current stress level at the job (I4) and the relationship between different existence dimensions and the professional stress (I5) on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, adequate for each item.

## 6. Findings

Data processing and analysis revealed interesting and relevant aspects for the study sample, regarding the opinions of the individuals about the professional stress perceived and the frequent resources of professional stress, the perceived stress level, coping style and the coping forms preferred by the employees in the educational system that were enquired, the individual work performance and the most appropriate steps to be done by the authorized institutions to reduce professional stress. The analysis of these aspects through preliminary descriptive statistics has as a goal the creation of a clear and coherent, well documented informational basis, based on which there could be sustained the hypothesis of our research. In addition, the detailed information is transformed in answers for the formulated research questions, revealing some of the research objectives presented above.

How stressful do the teachers in primary and secondary school consider teaching profession?

The first questionnaire studies the teachers' opinions about professional stress. Starting from the ideas of some researchers that investigated the role of certain emotions in the stress process (Lazarus, 2006; Capotescu, 2006) and from the fact that the studies regarding the organizational environment approaches more and more aspects related to employees emotional intelligence and the negative emotions effect on their health, we studied the frequency with which the individuals from the sample relate emotions such as pressure, frustration, uncertainty, constraint, demand with professional stress.

The results, revealed that a high percentage of 62,9 % of the respondents chose to relate stress with solicitude, 18,1 % associated stress with pressure at the job and 9,5 % with uncertainty, 6,7 % with frustration 2,9 % with the feeling of constraint. Thus, we can draw the conclusion that the majority of the members in the sample are significantly affected from an emotional point of view and feel demanding and pressure as a result of the tasks and attributions which they have to fulfil according to the job description. Uncertainty with which some respondents associated stress can be caused by the numerous changes from the educational system level in the last years, which sometimes are confuse and even contradictory and determine teachers to feel uncertain.

As far as the perception of the teaching profession goes from the stress level point of view, 47,6 % of the individuals in the sample consider teaching profession somewhat stressing, 13,3 % think of it as very stressful and 3,8 % consider it extremely stressful. Thus, the results matched with what the researches in the field revealed (Campbell, McCloy, Oppler, & Sager, 1993) the fact that teaching profession is considered very stressful, may be one of the most stressful jobs at international level.

Very interesting is the fact that from 105 participants in the study, 51,4% assert that they never thought of abandoning teaching, 16,2 % recognize the fact that they rarely thought about this, 28,8 % thought sometimes of giving up, 4,8 % were often tempted to do it and only 2,9 % have this permanent impulse. These numbers make us believe that teaching is still, in the respondents' point of view, one that gives satisfaction and we can talk of a certain stability of the human resource in schools in Suceava. In

terms of stress level in nowadays professional activity, 66, 7 % from the respondents consider it as being from *moderated* to *very high*.

Professional stress influence on different life dimensions manifest itself differently, the subjects considering themselves significantly influenced (namely from *to some extent*, up to *a very large extent*), as it follows: 30,5 % - the quality of the relationships with the ones around them; 36,2 % - professional performance; 37,1 % - the degree of work satisfaction; 40 % - family; 58,1 % - health. Thus, the most affected by the stress at the job are health and family life but there is a significant influence on the level of satisfaction at the job on professional life and the quality of the relationships with the others.

Identifying the stress level perceived by the teachers from the sample under specific stressors influence was done in the second questionnaire of this study. Thus, the average of the stress level perceived in the used sample is 2, 4735 (SD=.72233), existing a variance between minimum=1,00 and maximum=4,16 and a number of 53 averages from 105 comprised between 2, 52 and 4,16. These results indicate a stress level perceived as medium to high at the level of the sample in which there still are high scores too. *There are differences regarding the stress level perceived between the secondary and primary school teachers?*

The T Test was used for independent groups which targeted the identification of some differences regarding the stress level perceived, between the secondary school teachers (mean=2,3852; SD=.79425) and the ones teaching the primary school (mean=2,5671; SD=.63183). Levene Test was not statistically significant, the variance between the two groups being homogenous:  $F(103)=3,182$ ;  $p=0,07$  ( $p>0,05$ ). The test's result is not significant either:  $t(103)=1,294$ ;  $p=0,19$  ( $p>0,05$ ). Thus hypothesis 1 does not confirm, since from the analysis results that there are no significant differences statistically speaking regarding the stress perceived between the teachers in primary and secondary school. The trust interval of 95 % for the difference of the stress level perceived by the teachers in secondary and primary school was comprised between -0,09 and 0,46.

## 7. Conclusion

Associating stress with the teachers' workload highlights the danger of the professional exhaustion especially since the studies in this field revealed the teaching profession as being one of the most stressful. Teachers consider teaching stressful although they assert in a large number that they never thought of giving up (51,4%) even if stress influences their health, quality of the relationships with the others and the satisfaction degree in work or family. The stress level perceived at the teachers in Suceava County is medium, having a high coping and significantly great work performance. At the sample level we used there are no significant differences regarding the stress level perceived between secondary and primary school teachers. The most frequent stress sources identified in our study are the rapid and frequent changes in the educational system, wage, exaggerated demands regarding the documents, extra administrative work, and work load, insufficiency of material resources, children's aggressive behaviour and poor communication with the parents. The teachers preferred coping ways are active coping, planning, positive reinterpretation, orienting towards religion, instrumental social support, acceptance, the elimination of competing activities and the social emotional support. The significant relationship between these detailed aspects in the study by means of a series of descriptive statistical analysis was materialized in significant correlation between the study's variables: stress, coping, teaching performance. Thus, the teachers with a low level of stress perceived have a high individual work performance, which was proved in the study. A high coping positively correlates, of course, with high performance. As a conclusion, the general hypothesis of the study that teaching performance is significantly influenced by the level of stress perceived and the teachers' coping style was confirmed and the present paper is an useful and accessible research, as we think, to the researches in this field, teachers and school managers, even for the decision makers of the hierarchical

institutions (schools inspectorate) in order to communicate and implement some management and stress reducing strategies for the teachers in order to improve their professional level of performance.

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