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Relationship Between Teacher's Burnout, Occupational Stress, Coping, Gender and Age

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Abstract

Teachers make a great contribution to the academic formation, social and emotional development of children. However, teaching ranks among the most stressful professions. High levels of teacher stress and burnout cause serious damage to both students' academic achievement and development, as well as damage to relationships between teachers, students and parents. The main goal of this research was exploring the relationships between burnout, occupational stress, and coping strategies. This survey involved 721 primary education teachers (187 men and 534 women) who teach in public schools in different areas in Albania. To measure the levels of occupational stress, professional burnout as well as investigate how teachers cope with stress several known scales that have been translated in Albanian and adapted to this research were used. Results indicated that female teachers experience the lack of support from the administrators more than men. Men experienced depersonalization more than women. Older teachers reported a higher level of exhaustion and occupational stress than other groups, but they indicated higher personal accomplishment.

Keywords: occupational stress, burnout, gender, teachers' stress, coping

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, this profession has changed considerably in Albania for two reasons. Firstly, Albania went from a monistic political system, to a pluralist democratic system, and secondly because of the rapid technological development. Immediately after the collapse of the communist regime and the establishment of a democratic pluralist system, the entire Albanian society committed itself to the necessary transformations needed to accustom to the newly formatted regime, an open and democratic society. The country undertook reforms in all areas and directions. As a result of these transformative reforms, professionals from all fields faced various challenges. However, those who had the greatest challenges were teachers.

The main purpose of education before the 90's was to mould young people into the communist

ideal. Teachers of this time were authoritative and highly respected figures. Education was based on traditional teaching, where the reproduction of knowledge had an important place. Students were obliged to absolutely respect the teacher's word. They saw the figure of the teacher with fear and respect at the same time, as the main forms of education were based on the pedagogy of force. Education tasks were divided between the family and the school. The school had the main role in educating the young generation. While the family would ensure the strict adherence to school requirements, the child is close to the family (Kashahu-Xhelilaj, Zenelaga-Shehu, & Sotirofski, 2020).

The main purpose of education after the 90's was to invest in the formation of citizens of a democratic society who would be prepared for the global labour market, where technology advances day by day and therefore having the need to be equipped with a range of competencies. In these conditions, teachers needed to equip themselves with some professional and technological skills. Likewise, they had to transform their teaching from the traditional, to the student-catered one. Special attention was given to human rights education immediately after the change of the political system. The emphasis on recognizing children's rights somehow eclipsed the obligations of students. Inspired by rights, began to appear excessive and inappropriate behaviour or rejecting the authority of teachers. These behaviours in some cases were also supported by parents, and this made it harder for teachers to work. Legislation on pre-university education underwent continuous changes until Law No.69/2012 (amended 2015) defined the main competencies of the students and defined the parents as the primary school partner. Relationships between teachers, parents, students and the community were re-dimensioned. Situations changed in some aspects, by assigning new responsibilities and new roles to teachers.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the study of stress factors and burnout of teachers in the world has been brought to attention (Aluja, Blanch & Garcia, 2005; Antoniou, Ploumpi, & Ntalla, 2013; Antoniou, Polychroni & Vlachakis, 2006; Burchielli & Bartram, 2006; Burke & Mcateel, 2007; De Witt & Lessing, 2013; Klapproth, Federkeil, Heinschke, & Jungmann, 2020; Le Maistre & Paré, 2010; Szigeti, Balazs, Bikfalvi & Urban, 2017), and in Albania too (Cekani, 2015; Karaj, 2014; Zhilla, 2015). Reforms of education in Albania have led to an increased level of teacher stress (Kashahu-Xhelilaj, et.al, 2020). Various studies have shown that the school is a stressful work environment (Richards, Hemphill & Templin, 2018; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Teachers face physical fatigue and, in many cases, associated with health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Keita, 2010) and psychological problems (Klassen, Usher & Bong, 2010). They face different situations in their daily work that create high levels of stress associated with negative emotions (Klapproth, et al., 2020) such as fear or frustration leading to the "stress syndrome".

There are many definitions of stress from different authors at different time periods. For example, Selye defines stress as: "The non-specific response of the body due to the demands upon it" (Selye, 1974, p. 14). Another researcher explains that: "Stress is a non-specific response of the human body to any request addressed to it. The situation is considered to be stressful when the requirements go beyond the individual opportunities to meet the demand it has addressed" (Onchwari, 2010, p. 391).

Teacher's stress is defined as "psychological distress in response to a stressor" (Lhospital & Gregory 2009, p. 1099) and as "the entirety of negative emotions associated with psychological and biochemical changes … caused by aspects of the teacher's work" (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe 1978, p. 159). Teachers' stress is related to the teaching process, to their relationships with students, colleagues, parents, the community, and their investment in cases where there is no positive result (Hobfoll, 1989). School requirements and obligations often exceed the available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986) or the school lacks resources to support the work of the teacher. Scientific literature proves that teachers' stress has an organizational character (Kyriacou, 2001).

Even for burnout there are some definitions. They are based on two major theoretical camps; in the first group that perceives consumption at work as an internal individual process, and in the second group that perceives consumption as a dynamic process related primarily to interpersonal relationships

and, in particular, to the overall relationship of the individual with work (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter 2001). The study in question is based on the theoretical framework of Maslach & Jackson (1982). According to them, the three dimensions of occupational burnout are: Haemophilic fatigue - *Emotional exhaustion* resources and sensation that there is nothing left to give. *Depersonalization* - the development of negative and cynical attitudes, the departure from others, but especially from people who should be the beneficiaries of service and care. *Feeling of low performance* - general dissatisfaction with yourself, both in terms of professional skills and self-sufficiency.

But what is most stressful for the teachers in Albania? Researcher Cekani (2015) conducted a research on teachers' problems in Albania. Based on a sample of 803 pre-university teachers of all levels and stretched out almost all over Albania, discovered that teachers' stress in this country is mainly related to: insufficient financial resources for necessary materials; shortage of equipment and classrooms; surrounding noise; non-existing or non-functioning heating/ventilating structures; lack of sanitary conditions and safety, are only a few of the inappropriate conditions. These are associated with the lack of time and caseload beyond the real-time potential, excessive documents and administrative duties, lack of staff, and a strong administrative hierarchy with no support for teachers. Combining these factors causes stress because these feelings are in conflict with teachers' personal aims and ambitions for fulfilling their work in an effort to ensure a qualitative education. So, teachers are left in inappropriate and unsupportive conditions.

The teachers' stress consequences are related to physiological, behavioural and psychological indicators. European teachers, among long-term stress, list health problems with various diseases (ETUCE, 2003, p. 13). Teachers also experience psychological problems such as depression, frequent interpersonal conflicts and behavioural problems, such as lack of employment and dependence on alcohol, tobacco, or drugs (Billehøj, 2007). However, one of the leading perils of stress is the declined quality of education and the reduce effectiveness of teachers. It is therefore crucial in understanding the elements that combine in order to cause stress and job burnout in the teachers' work.

Studies on teacher consumption from work show that the product combines a variety of factors ranging from individual teacher characteristics such as personality and demographic factors such as gender, age, etc. (Ho, 2017; Cekani, 2015; Zhilla, 2015; Karaj, 2014; Zabel & Zabel, 2001; Maslach, et al., 2001), and environmental factors related to the conditions in which they work (Zhilla, 2015; Cekani, 2015; Karaj, 2014; Landeche, 2009; Haberman, 2004; Maslach et al., 2001). Consumption from work pushes the teacher towards an unhealthy life, especially in nutrition as they use coping strategies such as alcohol and caffeine consumption etc. (Omdahl & Fritz, 2006). As a result of work-related consumption, they distance themselves from the students physically and emotionally and do their job unwillingly and mechanically (Zhang & Sapp, 2008). They are characterized by lack of interest and commitment, (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; 2017) poor quality of work (Herman, Hickmon-Rosa & Reinke, 2018; Ho, 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; 2017) and lack of tolerance (Herman, Hickmon-Rosa & Reinke, 2018; Ho, 2017; Karaj, 2014; Zhang & Sapp, 2008; Zhilla, 2015).

Work-stressed teachers tend to suffer from consumption from work (Cekani, 2015; Karaj; 2014; Maslach et al., 2001; Zhang & Sapp, 2008: Zhilla, 2015) they often present health problems that are mainly related to cardiovascular diseases, digestive system and mental health. Oppositely, studies show a positive relationship between job absences, transfers from one school to another and the abandonment of the teacher's profession, with the consumption of teachers from work, causing considerable damage both to educational institutions, but also financial damage to society (Omdahl & Fritz, 2006). So work consumption is related to the physical and mental well-being of teachers by looking at it from an individual, organizational and social aspect (Farber, 1991; Maslach et al., 2001).

The ever-growing economic competition in a globalized labor market has prompted the study of the relationships between the economic level and the level of education of the different countries from which it results to be a positive relationship (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2007). Meanwhile, studies show that the quality of the education service is also positively linked to the quality of the educators (OECD, 2016). Under these conditions the study of stress from work and stress management strategies becomes extremely important.

3. Methodology

The study aims to identify the correlation that exists between burnout, occupational stress and coping strategies, in addition to exploring if there are differences in burnout, occupational stress, and coping strategies according to gender and age. Because of correlational nature of this study we decided to use quantitative approach which is considered appropriate for this kind of research in educational research (Cohen et al, 2018, p.765).

3.1 The participants

This study used convenience sample of 721 primary education teachers (187 men and 534 women) who are public schools' teachers in different areas in Albania. Participants taught in schools in Berat, Dibra, Durrës, Fieri, Korça, Saranda, Shkodra, Tirana, and Vlora. Regarding age, 30% (144 teachers) belong to the group under 30 years old, 33.4% (141 teachers) are between 31 and 40 years old, 28.4% (138) belong to the group from 41 to 50 years old and 17.6% (127 teachers) are above 51 years old.

3.2 Measurements

The scales of the questionnaire package were translated from English into Albanian by bilingual speakers (and translated back into English) and factorial analyses were performed as reported below. All participants completed the following measures:

1. Teachers' Occupational Stress Scale (Antoniou et al., 2006). Factor analysis with method *principal axis factoring* was used to verify scale construction. Four factors were extracted:
    1. *Workload, 10 items, α = .81* (Continuous Student Assessment, Loyal Tracking of the Program, Continuous Student Responsibility, Total Workload, etc.)
    2. *Interest in school (pupils, parents), 9 items, α = .63* (Lack of progress by some students, Major number of students in the classroom, Serious lack of tools and equipment, Imposition of Discipline, Noise in Class, Denial of my Contribution by Parents, etc.)
    3. *Working conditions, 5 items, α = .63* (Continuous criticism from my pupils, Integration of high school students, Non-attendance in school decisions, Lack of time to give attention to each student individually, etc.)
    4. *Support, 2 items, α = .54* (Disproportion of small salary related to my work, Lack of State Aid)
    Some questions, with the lowest eigenvalue, were excluded from the 30 items.
2. Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1982) states emotional fatigue, depersonalization and lack of personal achievement imposed by working conditions and other personal and social factors (24 items):
    1. *Emotional fatigue factor* is measured with nine questions like "I feel spiritually exhausted from my job", "I feel empty after my job", "It is a very tiring feeling for me to work all day with people". The reliability of this factor was Cronbach α = .75.
    2. *Depersonalization factor* contains five questions like "I feel like addressing some students indefinitely, as if they were objects", "I feel frustrated with my job" and so on. The reliability of this factor was Cronbach α = .70.
    3. *The Personal Achievement* factor is measured by eight questions like "I can easily understand how my students feel", "I deal with the problems of my students with great success". The reliability of this factor was Cronbach α = .79
3. Stress Coping Strategies Scale (Cooper, Sloan & Williams, 1988) with 28 items (& = .85), Factor analysis extracted three factors:
    1. *Self-controlling, 11 items, α = .83* (Reorganize my work, I try to make the job more interesting, I try to know my limits, I give time to my hobbies and entertainment activities, etc.)

2. *Distancing, 8 items, α = .74* (Set priorities and address problems under the circumstances, I try to draw my attention in avoiding thinking about my problems in my head, Purposeful division of "house" and "work", etc.)

3. *Escape-avoidance, 5 items, α = .60* (Forcing someone to interfere with his / her behaviour and lifestyle, I try to get away from the situation, I try to be indifferent and to think of any circumstance in particular). Some questions were excluded due to the lowest eigenvalue.

3.3 Procedures of data collection and analysis

The sample was selected by the convenience technique. The respondents filled the printed surveys in the premises of the schools. The data were collected during January – May 2017 by students of the Department of Pedagogy from Durrës University and Tirana University. Participants were informed regarding the nature and the purpose of this study. They were requested to take part in this study voluntarily and anonymously. Statistical data were processed through the SPSS program (version 22). For the purposes of this study, factor analysis was performed on all three instruments used to guarantee the suitability of the factors according to the original instruments. Correlational analysis to study the strength of a positive relationship between burnout, occupational stress and coping strategies and multivariate analysis to study mean differences of burnout, occupational stress and coping (dependent variables) according to gender and age were also performed. Furthermore, multivariate analysis to study interaction of age and gender in depersonalization and interaction of gender and age in workload were performed as well.

4. Results

4.1 Burnout, occupational stress and coping strategies

Correlational analysis was used to study the strength of a positive relationship between burnout, occupational stress and coping strategies. According to results, emotional exhaustion indicated positive correlation with occupational stress, workload (moderate correlation), interest about school, school conditions and support (low correlation). Emotional exhaustion indicated positive correlation with coping escape-avoidance and negative with self-controlling and distancing (low correlation). Depersonalization indicated positive low correlation with occupational stress, workload and school conditions. Furthermore, depersonalization indicated positive correlation with escape-avoidance and negative with distancing (low) and self-controlling (moderate). Personal accomplishment indicated negative correlation with workload and school interest (low) and positive with coping strategies (from low to moderate) (Table 1).

Table 1. Burnout, occupational stress and coping strategies

	Burnout		
	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal accomplishment
1. workload	.43**	.36**	-.26**
2. interest	.16**	- .004	- .08*
3. social conditions	.17**	.18**	.07
4. support	.16**	.03	-.07
5. self-controlling	- .29**	- .41**	.46**
6. distancing	- .20**	- .29**	.39**
7. escape-avoidance	.21**	.24**	.34**

Note: *p < .05 ** p < .01

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4.2 Burnout, occupational stress, coping strategies according to gender

Multivariate analysis was used to study mean differences of burnout, occupational stress and coping (dependent variables) according to gender and age (independent variables). Gender differences indicate that females referred to the lack of support as a source of stress more than males $F(1.444) = 4.87$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Furthermore, female teachers prefer distancing as a coping strategy. $F(1.444) = 5.36$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$ more than male teachers (Table 2).

Table 2. Burnout, occupational stress and coping strategies according to gender

	Gender		
	Male	Female	F-value (d.f.=1. 444)
1. emotional exhaustion	2.13	2.15	.03
2. depersonalization	1.22	1.00	2.77
3. personal accomplishment	4.82	4.89	.61
4. workload	2.95	3.12	3.29
5. interest	3.72	3.88	2.65
6. social conditions	3.31	3.34	.16
7. support	3.37	3.64	4.87*
8. self-controlling	4.57	4.61	.21
9. distancing	4.26	4.46	5.36*
10. escape-avoidance	3.27	3.25	.04

Note: *p < .05

4.3 Burnout, occupational stress, coping strategies according to age

Regarding age, differences were found in emotional exhaustion $F(3.444) = 3.04$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$ and escape-avoidance $F(3.444) = 3.30$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$. The older teachers expressed more emotional exhaustion and prefer escape avoidance more than the younger teachers. There were no statistical differences in other factors of burnout, occupational stress and coping regarding age (Table 3).

Table 3. Burnout, occupational stress and coping strategies according to age

	Age				
	30 years	31-40	41-50	More than 51	F-value (d.f. = 3. 444)
	M	M	M	M	
1. exhaustion	1.87b	2.12ab	2.29ab	2.36a	3.04*
2. avoidance	3.05b	3.22ab	3.22ab	3.51a	3.30*

Note: *p < .05

4.4 Interaction of age and gender in depersonalization

Interaction of age and gender in depersonalization indicated that male teachers between 31 – 40 years and male teachers of more than 50 years old reported higher depersonalization than female teachers of the same ages. On the other hand, female teachers between 41 – 50 years showed higher depersonalization than male teachers of the same age $F(3,444) = 3.15$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .020$ (Figure 1).
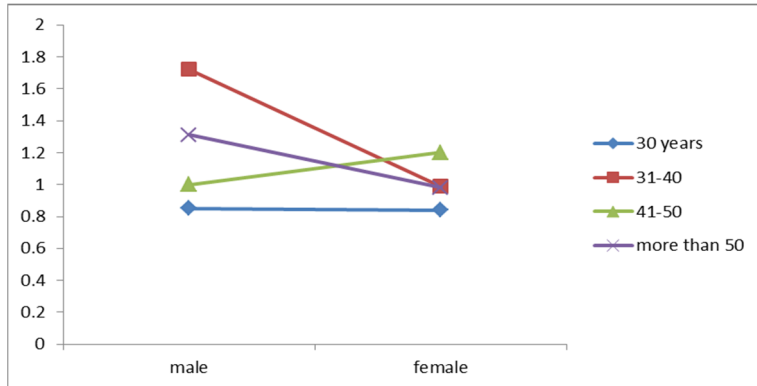
Figure 1. Interaction of gender and age in depersonalization

4.5 *Interaction of age and gender in workload*

Interaction of age and gender in workload indicated that male teachers of more than 50 years old indicated higher workload than female teachers of the same age. Oppositely, female teachers of 30 years old showed higher level of workload than male teachers of the same age $F(3,444) = 4.48$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .029$ (Figure 2).
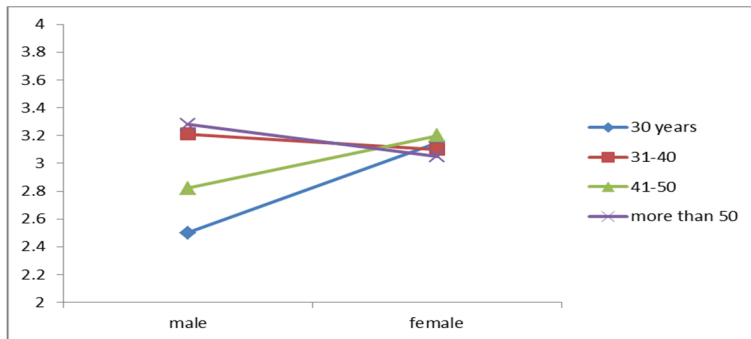

Figure 2. Interaction of gender and age in depersonalization

5. Discussion

This study addressed the concerns of current occupational problems in the Albanian school system, such as the level of burnout, stress dimensions, and the strategies facing it. The study was based on contemporary pedagogical and socio-psychological theories that describe the teachers' role in Albania, a role that derives from the school's *negotiating model*, according to which teachers are responsible for the academic achievements and the social and emotional development of the child in collaboration with parents (Kashahu-Xhelilaj, 2015, p. 174).

According to psychological theories that support workplace hygiene, burnout is not just a mental state, but a psychological and emotional state as well. The job-burnout teacher feels empty, tired, lacks motivation, feels out of health, sees no hope for a positive change in the situation, his emotions are bleak. Studies have shown that the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of teachers are related to personal accomplishment (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). In this sample it was noted that the

workload of teachers is positively correlated (moderate level) both with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization but negatively with personal accomplishment. This means that the overloaded teacher shows emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, but also reduces results.

The interest of students and their parents as well as the pedagogical factors related to the teacher's stress, *the conditions under which the learning process takes place*, the social factors related to the stress of the teacher as *the lack of social support* are positively linked to emotional fatigue (poor connection). It means that the lower the interest shown to their students and their parents at school, the fewer the conditions for the learning process and lonelier in their efforts to achieve the results of the work with the students, the more they will go to emotional fatigue.

Stress-protection strategies have a weak negative relation with emotional fatigue, depersonalization and a moderate relation with personal accomplishments, which indicates that stress management strategies help the wellbeing of teachers.

The study revealed that stress and occupational burnout are not equal for all teachers. In the study of Klapproth and his colleagues (2020) was found that stress level was higher in female teacher's. The findings in this study showed that female teachers experienced more lack of support from the government than males. Men experienced more depersonalization than women. The older teachers referred to more emotional exhaustion and occupational stress than other groups, but they indicated higher personal accomplishment. Thus, individual factors, such as gender and age, should be considered in increasing efforts to support teachers both for their psychological and social support.

6. Conclusion

Reforms, especially those concerning overloading curricula, should be applied in reasonable timeframes and accompanied by more training support, as the study found that overloading is linked with both emotional fatigue and depersonalization of teachers, but also overload showed negative links to personal achievements. Since the study found that the lack of interest and support of parents constitutes one of the factors stressing the teachers, it is suggested that the MAS (Ministry of Education and Sports) has to schedule a special budget to train the teachers in the engagement of parents in the framework of their continuous professional development. Teachers should try using various effective strategies to communicate with interactive and informative parents in order to promote parents' partnerships and, conclusively, to support student learning. MAS (Ministry of Education and Sports) must find forms to encourage more men in the teaching profession. Teacher education faculties are suggested to anticipate in their training curricula these teacher's needs and build on their students the skills and competences needed for young teachers to be able to effectively collaborate with parents and the community.

District Education Departments (DEDs) should take care of trainings that help in developing the competences for the curriculum application and adaptation to school changes nowadays. *School leaders* should provide more support to teachers with their training within the school as well as their counseling on different aspects of their work (especially for the younger teachers), and not only consider themselves as the leaders and evaluators of the work the teacher does.

Teachers are suggested to better co-operate with parents, which can play an important role in social support as a strategy to cope with the stress of the teacher. Considering the fact that parent-teacher communication practices are fundamental for involving the family in the educational process (Caspe, 2003), teachers are encouraged to follow *professional development program*s to actively promote the improvement of communication skills for parents.

School psychologist is given some suggestions based on the findings of Burchielli and Bartram (2006). When the teachers' stress is not treated, it can significantly affect his or her health. For this reason, it is suggested to work for the well-being of teachers with school psychologists (especially for women), where *different programs* are proposed both at an *individual* and *organizational* level, which can become functional depending on the working conditions and individual characteristics of teachers. Also, it is proposed to create *a supportive or assisting group* from a counselor who can help teachers improve relationships with their peers.

6.1   Limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies

This study is limited as all studies in the field of education are. Firstly, the study was based on the convenience sample, which therefore required even higher numbers of participants. Secondly, this study has a quantitative nature, and to understand better the relationship between the professional stress of teachers and their occupational burnout it would be good to combine it with elements of qualitative study.

Recommendations for future study: to study the teachers' stressors through qualitative forms; to study the impact of these stressors on occupational burnout; to study further the factors that increase teachers' well-being at work.

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