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## PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF PROFESSIONAL STRESS ON TEACHERS

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### **Abstract**

*In this paper we describe some theoretical perspective in the study of professional stress, professional stress in educational environment, causes and forms of manifestation of teacher's professional stress and a study on the association between professional self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and teacher's professional stress.*

**Keywords:** *professional stress, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence*

### **INTRODUCTION.**

#### **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL STRESS**

Contemporary psychologists Kobasa (1982), Nathan (2002), Pargmam (2006) have emphasized the fact that professional stress is a common element in the life of any individual, regardless of race or cultural context.

Stress is a complex psycho-social phenomenon that arises from the person's confrontation with requirements, tasks, situations that are perceived as difficult, painful or of significant importance for the person concerned.

Nathan argues that prolonged stress can cause psychological distress, which can affect a person's ability to engage in effective behaviour. 'Stress' is defined by Parma (2006) as an "uncertain reaction to internal or external factors", which means a positive or negative reaction to environmental stimuli.

Psychologists Selye (1976), Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll (2001) identify two complementary perspectives in addressing stress: stress as a reaction, and stress as a stimulus.

#### **a) stress as a reaction**

The origins of defining 'stress' as a reaction can be identified in medicine, and, usually, stress is studied from a physiological perspective. Hans Selye's research in

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the 1930s and 1940s marks the beginning of this approach. Selye introduced the notion of stress-related illness in terms of general adaptation syndrome, suggesting that stress is a nonspecific response of the human body to the demands made on it (Selye, 1976). The emphasis is obvious, a medical one: generic illness was characterized by loss of motivation, appetite, weight loss and lack of energy. Animal studies have also revealed internal physical deterioration and degeneration. It has been considered that the responses to stress do not depend on the nature of the stressor and that, consequently, universal model.

### **b) stress as a stimulus**

Identifying potential sources of stress is the central theme of the **stress stimulus model**, as stimulus. The rationale for this approach is that external forces act on the body in a destructive manner (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001).

If one's body's tolerance is exceeded, temporary or permanent conditions may occur. The individual is constantly bombarded with potential sources of stress (usually called 'stressors'), and a seemingly minor event can break the delicate balance between stress control mode and complete cancellation of stress control behaviours. In conclusion, this model considers stress to be an independent variable.

Both definitions of 'stress' are conceptually framed in the relatively simple stimulus-response paradigm. Today it is considered that both neglect the individual differences and the perceptual and cognitive processes that generate these differences.

Because stimulus-response definitions each focus on a single aspect of the relationship, we may consider that an event is 'potentially stressful' or that a response may be a reaction to stress. We thus consider that a stimulus or a response can be declared as "stressful", respectively "stress response" only if these two components are considered to be related and if the impact of one on the other is determined (Cooper, Dewe and O'Dr 2001).

Another problem that arises when we define stress as a stimulus or reaction is that we do not capture individual differences. Knowledge of the stimulus does not necessarily allow accurate estimation of the reaction, the probability that the stimulus will produce a response being moderated by individual differences (personalities, characteristics, expectations, values, goals). As we have shown before, stress presupposes both a stimulus and a response, both of which are related. Studies have shown that stress is a normal reaction of the body to external demands and is manifested by an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, intensifies respiratory rate and increases glucose levels. These compensatory reactions provide the oxygen, nutrients and energy needed for vital muscles and organs to cope with challenging situations (Nathan, 2002).

Lazarus (1990) defined stress as 'a particular interaction between the individual and the environment'. This interaction is perceived or evaluated by him as exceeding the resources at his disposal and which disrupt his daily routine. Among the effects of occupational stress, we mention: increased blood pressure, immune

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disorders, decreased testosterone, depression and sleep disorders (authors cited by Theorell) Regarding the risk of myocardial infarction, it can occur in men in 40% of cases of occupational or professional overload lasting 5-10 years.

***A synthesis of the psychosocial factors that contribute to professional distress***, made by Theorell (22), indicates the following conditions:

- excessive demands (quantitative and qualitative);
- lack of decision autonomy;
- lack of social support from superiors and colleagues;
- reduced material, psychological and social rewards.

According to the authors, when an individual is confronted with an unpleasant situation, he engages in a primary evaluation process, the event being perceived as stressful or not depending on the individual or even the situation itself. In the next phase, the person will engage in a process of secondary assessment (cognitive assessment) that involves the appreciation of personal or environmental resources available to deal with the stressful event.

These two types of assessments are dependent on the psychological characteristics and personality of the individual.

***Coping strategies*** used by people facing a stressful event are:

- problem-focused coping strategies (coping and problem solving), and
- emotion-focused coping strategies (positive reassessments, comparisons or avoidance, minimization and distancing). Individuals resort to one of two ways depending on how they perceive the situation.

▪ ***There are three key characteristics that cause stress:***

- the presence of stressors;
- personal resources for dealing with stressors;
- the type of reaction to stress.

Stressors are harmful factors or stimuli with strong emotional significance.

▪ ***Types of stress:***

- Positive stress or “me-stress” acts as an energizing factor, helping the person to approach situations as challenges, in a more effective and focused way;
- In the case of negative stress or “distress” the over mobilized body refuses to return to normal, the individual being nervous, ready to react, with tense muscles and facial expressions suggestive.

▪ ***Form of stress:***

***Everyday stress*** can make its presence felt in different forms:

- ***Mental stress*** – the combined action of several stressors;
- ***Professional stress*** – the concomitant action of physical (noise, vibration, temperature variations) and chemical stressors (volatile, irritable substances);
- ***Overload stress*** – characteristic of people with tasks of great diversity and with an extended work schedule;

- ***Underload stress*** – is determined by the modification of certain professional activities;
- ***Situational or cultural stress*** – is caused by recent changes in the way of life of individuals.

### III. PROFESSIONAL STRESS IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT.

#### CAUSES AND FORMS OF MANIFESTATION OF PROFESSIONAL STRESS

***Professional stress*** is a psychological trait frequently observed among teachers. Its frequency and manifestations can have effects both on students' professional performance, but especially on teacher-student interpersonal relationships.

*The main stressors* felt by teachers in the school environment:

- Financial restrictions on pay;
- Teaching difficulties due to too busy curriculum;
- Difficulties in time management;
- Educational policies and fluctuating regulations;
- Failure to meet professional expectations;
- Number of students in the class;
- Indiscipline of some students;
- Student evaluation;
- School climate;
- Relationships with parents of students;
- Financial restrictions on school material resources;
- Autocratic school leadership;
- Verbal violence of some students;
- Material violence of some students;
- Physical violence of some students.

Teachers' stress was defined as a negative response or affect accompanied by potentially dysfunctional psychological changes. These result from aspects of the profession and are mediated by the perception that the requirements of the profession represent a threat and by the coping mechanisms used to reduce the threat.

#### **Emotional distress of teachers**

Research in the field of teachers 'emotional distress' has aimed to identify the stressors that teachers face, the individual characteristics that contribute to the onset of stress, and coping strategies associated with teachers' stress.

According to the ABC model (rational emotional and behavioural therapy), the sources of emotional distress (stressors) represent the activating event (A). Bora C.H. (2010, apud Turk, Meeks and Turk (1982) examined 49 studies on the causes of teacher stress and identified seven categories of stressors. In order of impact on teacher stress, they include: (a) poor school environment, (b) student indiscipline, (c) inadequate working conditions, (d) personal problems, (e) relationships with parents, (f) time pressure, and (g) inadequate training.

*The poor school environment, identified as the most important stressor*, concerns the superficial relations between teachers and school administration, conflicts with parents, poor relations with colleagues, lack of public support for schools, student apathy, job insecurity and role conflict.

Tuettemann and Punch (1993) talk about five stressors that activate distress:

- lack or difficult access to material resources,
- undisciplined behavior of students,
- the extent to which society's expectations of teachers are perceived to be high,
- overtime dedicated to school-related tasks and
- high workload.

Ross, Neibling and Heckert (1999) have identified several reasons that contribute to increased stress in the academic environment. Teachers are forced to adapt to the academic environment and due to the daily pressure to adapt to educational policies and strategies, there are tensions within interpersonal relationships. Many of the physical and emotional symptoms that appear in the majority of teachers, such as headaches, fatigue, depression, anxiety, inability to cope with challenges, have been exacerbated.

*Burnout.* The concept of burnout refers to the situation in which a person loses its interest or motivation to continue a certain particular task, as a result of the influences of internal and external factors. Skills and expertise in the field is active, but the desire to perform is extinguished, so that the learning activity becomes very difficult and does not produce any joy. Burnout destroys any motivation an individual has, and can diminish the initiative to engage in study and learning.

#### **IV. STUDY ON THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL SELF-EFFICACY, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL STRESS**

The hypothesis from which we started in our study was to show if there is a significant link between the level of professional stress of teachers and their professional effectiveness. The hypothesis was studied on a sample represented by 75 teachers from pre-university education.

The tools applied were:

- Self-efficacy scale (SES), Ralf Schwarzer and Mattias Jerusalem (1955)
- The Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (Schutte et al., 1998), which measures emotional intelligence based on the model developed by Salovey and Mayer.
- Perceived stress scale (PSS 14), Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983).

Below, the descriptive indicators and the matrix of correlations are presented for the association between professional self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and professional stress.

Table no. 1. Descriptive indicators and matrix of correlations for the association between professional effectiveness, emotional intelligence and professional stress

Variable	M	SD	Auto-proficiency	Emotional Intelligence	Professional stress
Proficiency	32.44	3.91	1	0.206	-0.267*
Emotional Intelligence	151.4	17.6		1	-0.537**
Professional Stress	7	2			1
	25.60	5.77			

\* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01

According to correlation analyses, professional stress negatively influences the professional effectiveness of teachers. In this sense, professional self-efficacy correlates significantly negatively with occupational stress: [r (75) = -0.267, p = 0.020 <0.05]. Also, an increased level of emotional intelligence causes a decrease in the level of professional stress [r (75) = -0.537 p <0.001].

### CONCLUSIONS

From a practical point of view, the data obtained are relevant in the elaboration of prevention and intervention strategies in the prevention and reduction of professional stress and of the teachers based on the knowledge of the individual characteristics.

In conclusion, emotional intelligence and professional self-efficacy are skills that are absolutely necessary in a world that is constantly changing and that requires continuous adaptation to the demands and challenges that appear daily. It is also necessary to develop stress management skills and to adopt healthy coping strategies in order to successfully meet the demands of the academic environment.

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