

Teacher stress in Albania: examining the role of students' classroom deviant behavior and other factors in the school context

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the students' disruptive behavior and other factors in the school context on the teachers' stress. For this purpose a survey based descriptive research was conducted with 540 basic education teachers. The instrument used was a structured questionnaire which was comprised of four scales for measuring teacher stress, students' disruptive behavior, time pressure and workload, relations with school principal and relations with colleagues. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the direction and the strength of the relationships between the teachers' stress and the stress related factors. Standard multiple regression was used to determine the amount of variability on teachers' stress explained by the independent factors involved in the study.

The study findings indicated low to substantial correlations between teachers' stress, students' disruptive behavior, time pressure and workload, relations with school principal and relations with colleagues. Students' disruptive behavior, time pressure and workload and relations with school principal were found to be significant predictors of teachers' stress. Relations with colleagues were not found to be a significant predictor of teacher stress.

Key terms: Teacher stress, students' disruptive behavior, time pressure and workload, relationship with school principal, relationship with colleagues.

Introduction

Stress is defined as "a process of behavioral, emotional, mental, and physical reactions caused by prolonged, increasing or new pressures which are significantly greater than coping resources" (Dunham, 1992, p.3). Despite the fact that cognitive response to stress might also be positive (Lazarus, 1966), the studies for teachers stress are focused mostly on negative reactions. Kyriacou (2001) defines teachers stress as an experience by teachers of negative feelings like anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, depression which are caused by different aspect in the teacher's job.

A vast body of research carried out in different countries convincingly demonstrate

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that teachers' stress is a widespread phenomenon (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Payne & Furnham, 1987; Borg & Riding, 1991; Manthei & Gilmore, 1996; Pithers & Soden, 1998; Abel & Sewell, 1999; Kyriacou & Chien, 2004; Geving, 2007; Antoniou, Polychroni, and Vlachakis, 2006; Betoret, 2006; Schwarzer and Hallum, 2008; Klassen, Foster, Rajani, and Browman, 2009; Zedan, 2012).

Numerous studies conducted with elementary and secondary school teachers have shown the time pressure and work overload to be one of the most stressful aspects of teachers' job (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Kyriacou, 2001; Thomas, Clarke & Lavery, 2003; Boyle, Borg, Falzon & Baglioni, 1997; Pithers & Soden, 1998; Abel & Sewell, 1999; Kokkinos, 2007; Kokkinos, Panayiotou, & Davazoglou, 2005; Zedan, 2012).

There is also a widespread consensus among researchers that students' disruptive behavior is among the most important sources of teacher stress. (Payne and Furnham, 1987; Borg and Riding, 1991; Borg, Riding, and Falzon, 1991; Byrne, 1994; Abel and Sewell, 1999; Friedman, 1995; Kokkinos, 2007; Antoniou, Polychroni and Vlachakis, 2006; Geving, 2007; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978; Otero-López, Santiago, Godás, Castro, Villardefrancos and Ponte, 2008; Grayson dhe Alvarez, 2008; Evers, Tomic, and Brouwers, 2004; Zedan, 2012)

Other significant potential stressors for teachers are: lack of support from the principals (Solman & Feld, 1989; Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986; Blase, Blase, & Du, 2008; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008); poor relations with colleagues (O'Connor & Clarke, 1990; Driscoll & Beehr, 2000; Kokkinos 2007); low social status and low salaries (Chaplain, 2001); role ambiguity and conflicting job roles (Kokkinos, 2007; Kyriacou, 1989; Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982); lack of esteem by society (Thomas, Clarke & Lavery, 2003; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008); lack of participation in decision making process (Manthei & Gilmore, 1996; Kyriacou, 2001); poor physical working conditions (Schonfield, 1991 Friedman, 1991; McCormick, 1997; Kokkinos, 2007).

Teacher stress has been linked to a numerous negative consequences ranging from burnout (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009); reduced job satisfaction (Kyriacou, 2001; DeNobile & McCormick, 2007; Aluja, Blanch & Garcia, 2005); low self esteem (Sarros, 1988); poor relations with colleagues (Muchinsky, 2000; Solman & Feld, 1989); poor relation with students (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Willey 2000); poor job performance and poor job commitment (Sarros, 1988; Kyriacou, 2001; De Nobile & McCormick, 2007; Jepson & Forrest, 2006; Kokkinos, 2007) and leaving the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

All of these factors have a negative effect in the teaching process (Wiley, 2000). Under these conditions studying stress experienced by teachers and school principals occurs to be a primary issue. Compared to other countries where many stress related studies are carried out, in Albania this field seems to be totally unexplored.

This study aimed at identifying the direction and the strength of the correlations between teachers' stress, students' disruptive behavior, time pressure & workload, relations with colleagues and relations with school principal. This study also aimed especially at determining the impact of students' disruptive behavior in teachers stress compared to three sources which have been proved as the most important ones in various teachers stress related studies: time pressure & workload, relations with colleagues and relations with school principal.

Methodology

Sample

The population in this study consisted of base education teachers in Albania. Out of this population were randomly selected 540 teachers in 25 base education schools in 5 districts, Tiranë, Vlorë, Shkodër, Elbasan, Korçë. Out of these counties were randomly selected five schools (3 elementary schools and 2 secondary) and interviews were later made to all the teachers of these schools. The questionnaire completion from the teachers was made following their teaching classes at working place beyond the presence of interviewers. Considering that the sample is heterogeneous to its characteristics it provides a standard deviation of $\pm 5\%$ (Yamane, 1967).

Instruments

The instrument in this study was a structured questionnaire. In the first part are included questions pertaining to the demographic characteristics of teachers. In the second part are included a scale for the measurement of the stress level adapted by Crank, Regoli, Hewitt and Culbertson (1995), three scales for the measurement of students' disruptive behavior, relations with colleagues and relations with school principal adopted by Skaalvik dhe Skaalvik (2011) and a scale for the measurement of time pressure and work overload with items taken from Skaalvik dhe Skaalvik (2011) and Osipov (1998).

The scale for stress measurement was comprised of these items: 'I am often angry and bored at my job as a teacher'; 'I am usually under a great pressure in my job as a teacher'; 'I am often tense and nervous at work'; 'At work I am usually quiet and relaxed'.

The scale for students' disruptive behavior comprised the following items: 'The lesson at my class is often interrupted by undisciplined students', 'Some students with deviant behavior make it difficult for me to follow my lesson plan'; 'The attempt to control students' disruptive behavior takes me a great deal of time and is very tiring'.

For the workload scale and time pressure are included these items: 'I think that I have a great deal of work to do'; 'In my job I need to do different tasks within a short period of time'; 'In my job as a teacher the acquirements are increasing thus I need to work fast to accomplish them'; 'I do more than I should normally as a teacher do'; 'I am charged to do tasks at school such as (assignment checking, fill in forms, statistics etc.) under very strict deadlines'; 'Work at school is as intensive that you do not have time to relax and feel at ease'.

The scale for the measurement of the relations with the school principal comprised these items: 'I can always ask for help and advices in the teaching processes'; 'relations with my school principal are characterized by faith and reciprocal respect'; 'The school principal is supportive and appreciates me for my achievement at work'.

In the scale used for the measurement of relations with colleagues are included these items: 'My colleagues always help me when i need them in issues related to lessons'. The relations with colleagues in my school are characterized from the friendship and care for each other'; all the scales are translated to Albanian by two free lance translators. The scales were later adopted into Albanian language and were then translated into English back again by native English speakers in order to guarantee they complied with the original scales in English. The factorial analysis confirmed the one dimensional nature of each scale.

To evaluate the internal consistency of each scale was used the Cronbach ‘Alfa coefficient (Cronbach, 1951). The reliability coefficient for each scale in the sample of this study was: stress level at work with four items ($\alpha=.67$); time pressure and workload with 6 items ($\alpha=.72$); relations with colleagues with three items ($\alpha=-.72$); relations with the school principal with three items ($\alpha=-.66$); and students’ disruptive behavior with three items ($\alpha=.77$). As it can be seen only the scales for the work stress measurement and relations with the school principal had a acceptable reliability coefficient, while the coefficients for all the other scales were good ($\geq .7$).

Data collection and data analysis

The data collection for this study took place during the school year 2012-2013. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the direction and the strength of the relationships between the teachers’ stress and the stress related factors. The description of correlation coefficients was made based on the Davis descriptors (1971). To determine at what extent the four factors predict the overall stress level at work was used the multiple linear regression. Before the regression was processed verification was made in relation to check if the assumptions were met for this analysis. The examination of the matrix of the inter correlations between independent variables (time pressure & workload, students’ disruptive behavior, relations with school principals and relations with colleagues) and the dependent variable (stress of teachers at work) showed that the relations are linear. Likewise the verification of correlations among the independent variables showed that the problem of multicollinearity does not exist. The correlation coefficients among the independent variables were weak to moderate (Davis, 1971). (See table 1). The examination of the plots of the residuals indicated that the distribution of residuals was normal and the variance was homogeneous. Durbin Watson test statistics of 1.72 reveals that autocorrelation is not an issue.

Results

Table 1. Correlations between teacher stress at work and independent variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Teacher stress at work	1				
2. Relations with school principal	-.307**	1			
3. Relations with colleagues	-.238**	.467**	1		
4. Time pressure & Work overload	.349**	-.101*	-.170**	1	
5. Students’ disruptive behavior	.583**	-.224**	-.139**	.400**	1
* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).					
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Correlations between independent variables and dependent variable (teacher stress at work) vary from low to substantial (Davis, 1976). The correlation between the relations with school principal and teacher stress at work is negative, moderate and significant ($r=-.307, p< 0.01$). The correlation between teacher stress and relations with colleagues is low and negative, but significant ($r=-.238, p<0.01$). The correlation between time pressure & work overload and teacher stress is moderate, positive and significant ($r=.349, p< 0.01$).

Meanwhile the correlation between students’ disruptive behavior and teachers ‘stress is substantial, positive and significant ($r=.583$, $p< 0.01$). (See table 1)

Table 2. Prediction of teachers’ stress at work by students’ disruptive behavior, relations with school principal, time pressure & work overload and relations with colleagues

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the estimate	F	Sig.
.647 ^a	.419	.414	2.98140	79.461	.000 ^a
	Un standardized Coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
	B	Standard deviation	Beta	t	Sig.(<i>p value</i>)
(Constant)	8.422	1.180		7.140	.000
1. Time pressure and workload	.079	.031	.102	2.550	.011
2. Relations with colleagues	-.113	.059	-.080	-1.923	.055
3. Relations with school principal	-.241	.063	-.160	-3.840	.000
4. Students’ disruptive behavior	.531	.042	.515	12.709	.000
a. Dependent Variable : teacher stress at work					

A standard multiple regression analysis was carried out to determine the extent to which teacher ‘stress at work was predicted by the independent variables (time pressure & work overload, students’ disruptive behavior, relations with school principal and relations with colleagues). The results are significant because independent variables explain about 42 % of the variability in the dependent variable ($R^2=.419$, $F(4,441) =79.46$, $p<.001$). Furthermore the overall correlation displays a significant figure ($R=.647$). Excluding the relations with colleagues which has a value $p= 055$, that is slightly higher than the accepted value of p ($\beta=-.080$, $p>0.05$), all the other independent variables are significant predictors of teachers’ stress at work: students’ disruptive behavior ($\beta=.531$, $p<.001$), relations with school principal ($\beta=-.160$, $p<.001$) and time pressure & work overload ($\beta=.102$, $p<.001$). (See table 2)

Discussions

The findings in this study proved that there are significant correlations between teachers’ stress at work and the four variables included in the study students’ disruptive behavior relations with school principal, time pressure & work overload and relations with colleagues. The strongest correlation was that between teachers’ stress and students’ disruptive behavior ($r=.583$). Regression results also indicated students’ disruptive behavior

is the best predictor of teacher stress at work ($\beta=.531$). This finding goes along with other stress related studies carried in other countries (Borg, Riding, & Falzon, 1991; Geving, 2007; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Otero-López, Santiago, Godás, Castro, Villardefrancos & Ponte, 2008; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Evers, Tomic, & Brouwers, 2004; Zedan, 2012)

The findings in this study also indicated that there is a positive moderate correlation between teachers stress and time pressure & work overload. ($r=.349$). This is consistent with other studies (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Thomas, Clarke, & Lavery, 2003; Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1997; Pithers & Soden, 1998; Kokkinos, Panayiotou, & Davazoglou, 2005; Zedan, 2012). However time pressure & work overload, though significant ($\beta=.079$, $p<.001$) appears to be a weaker predictor of teachers' stress at work compared to students' disruptive behavior.

Following the students' disruptive behavior, the relations with school principal appears to be the second significant predictor of teachers' stress at work. ($\beta=-.241$). This finding is confirmed by other results deriving from other stress related studies (Solman and Feld, 1989; Jackson, Schwab & Schuler, 1986; Blase, Blase, & Du, 2008; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008)

On the contrary to some other study findings (O'Connor & Clarke, 1990; Driscoll & Beehr, 2000; Jarvis, 2002; Kokkinos 2007) this study proved that the relation with colleagues is not a significant predictor of teacher stress at work ($\beta=-.080$, $p>0.05$). Meanwhile this finding goes in line with the findings of Boyle, Borg, Falzon & Baglioni (1997).

Based on the findings of this study suggestions can be made. The extension of teacher's knowledge related to the student's age characteristics, in all levels of teaching with main focus on adolescent age and extension of skills and knowledge related to the management of deviant behavior in classroom would reduce the stress level of teachers. This can be achieved by giving more space and emphasis to the syllabus of age psychology and the classroom management in higher education which prepare future teachers, as well as by organizing in service teacher training on these topics.

What could also reduce the amount of teachers' stress would be the identification and eradication of work overload sources and intervention for improvement in the system of school supervision, especially, with focus on teacher support.

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