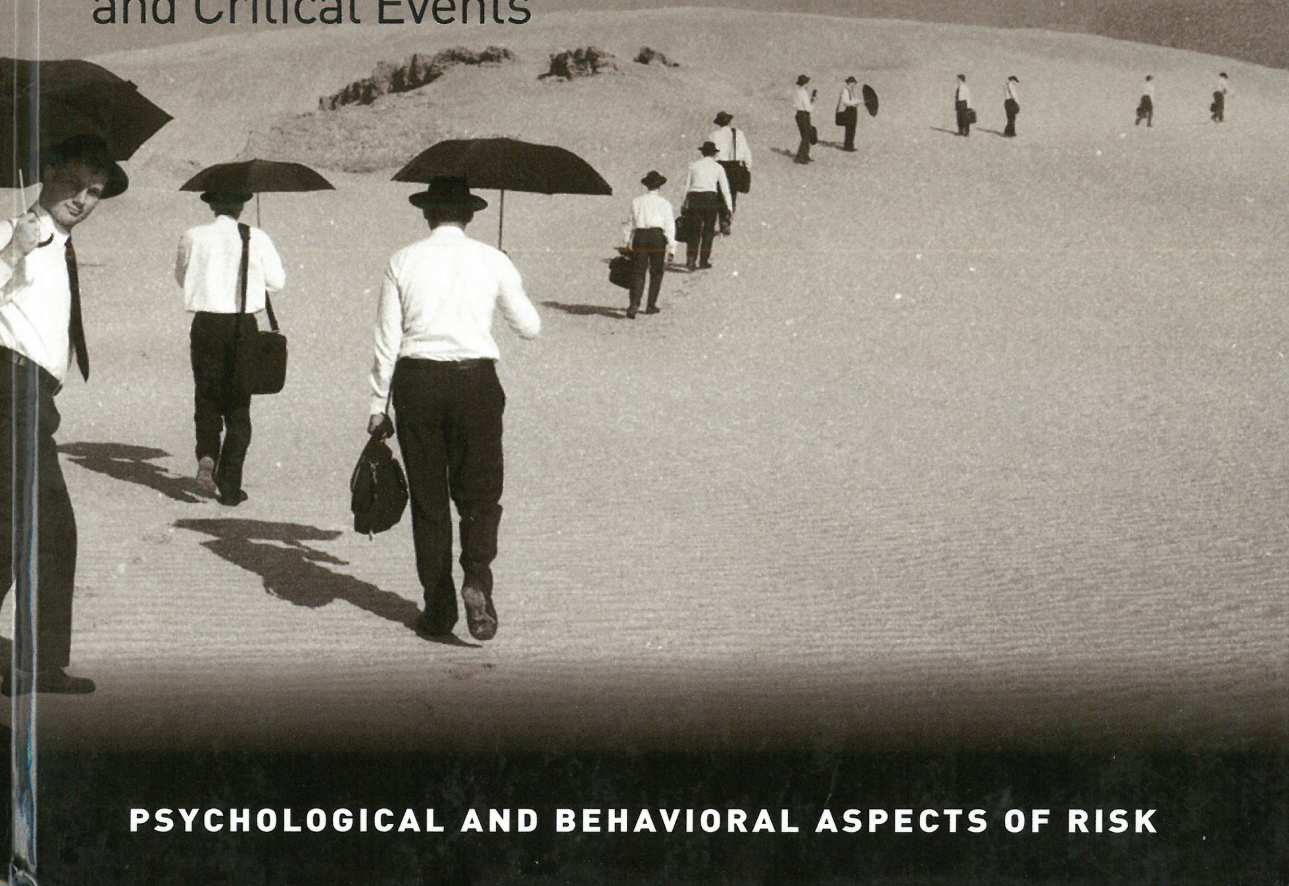EDITED BY
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Coping, Personality and the Workplace

Responding to Psychological Crisis and Critical Events

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS OF RISK

Coping, Personality and the Workplace

Responding to Psychological Crisis and Critical Events

Edited by

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Coping Strategies and Personality Dimensions of Teachers in Primary and Secondary Education

Alexander-Stamatios Antoniou and Eftychia Mitsopoulou

Introduction

During the last decades, there has been a shift of research in occupational and organizational psychology that is focused on the work conditions that affect the organizational environment of employees, as well as the factors that either facilitate or hamper their performance. The success of an organization may depend, in part, on whether employees feel engaged and committed to their profession, if they are satisfied with what they are doing, if this satisfaction derives from their sense of belonging and if the service that they are offering is appreciated. Nevertheless, there are some professions that are considered quite stressful for those who practice them and these employees may not perceive their profession as a satisfying part of their lives. As such, their profession may leave them feeling frustrated and disappointed. Among these professions, teaching is considered to be one of the most demanding and challenging.

According to Thornton, Peltier and Hill (2005) 50% of new teachers in Great Britain leave their profession within the first five years. This alarming rate may raise questions as to the reasons for this turnover. It seems that teaching is considered to be a 'high stress' profession, with approximately one-quarter of schoolteachers finding their work extremely stressful (Kyriacou 2001). It is not difficult to imagine the scenario of children wandering around in class, and a desperate teacher trying to calm them down. But, is this what constitutes a key source of stress for a teacher, or do other sources occur? Do the same sources of stress apply to all teachers indifferently or is it a matter of personality? What coping strategies do teachers use in order to overcome the burdens they face in their everyday professional life? These questions form the subject matter of the current chapter.

Stress and Burnout among Teachers

On a global scale, teachers struggle on a daily basis with a variety of problems and challenges in their profession. Students with special needs, pressure from parents, workload, low salary, classroom

management, student absenteeism, lack of support from peers, administration, state, etc. are some examples of the problems faced by teachers. Their job is challenging, multifaceted and diverse. As the society changes, so do the responsibilities teachers have. Teachers have a multidimensional role in schools: they are professionals, listeners, practitioners, colleagues, subordinates, experts and so on. They have to combine a variety of skills in order to respond to the differential needs of their students, and to balance between what they can do and what others expect them to do. The above places a heavy load onto them, which can in turn result in stress and, in some cases, professional burnout. According to Markham (2000) it is necessary to identify the factors that are stressful to teachers and try to alleviate some of these factors, in order to prevent talented teachers from abandoning their career and pursuing an occupation that is less stressful, as high levels of stress can disrupt teachers' homeostasis (Gloria, Faulk and Steinhardt 2013).

While stress refers to the temporary adaptation process that is accompanied by mental and physical symptoms, when the individual is imbalanced between job demands and his/her response capability, burnout is a final stage in a breakdown in adaptation that results from the long-term imbalance of demands and resources and is accompanied by chronic malfunctioning at work (Storm and Rothman 2003). Both stress and burnout include emotional elements of work including face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction. This is why employees who have occupations that involve display of emotion are likely to be more vulnerable than employees whose occupations do not require this type of emotional openness (Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor and Millet 2005).

Burnout has been identified as a type of chronic response to the cumulative and long-term negative impact of work (Tatar 2009). Teachers' burnout is characterized by three interrelated components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson and Leiter 1996). Emotional exhaustion occurs when the individual reports overwhelming feelings, frustration, irritability and emotional strain. Depersonalization is described as feeling cynical and negative towards others (Gloria, Faulk and Steinhardt 2013), while reduced personal accomplishment is the feeling that the person cannot respond to the expectations of others, and experiences a decline in feelings of being competent, thus feeling defeated and incapable.

Burnout and related stress are correlated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, as well as feelings of little professional accomplishment (Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donell and Wang 2009; Stoeber and Rennert 2008). Stress is a situation that is more common among teachers, than burnout, which is a much more extreme form, when frustration reaches a final end and the person feels that they have no more to offer, they cannot struggle on anymore and they feel that they have nothing to invest in their professional life. Stress at work is associated with unpleasant experiences such as anger and depression (Hamama, Ronen, Shachar and Rosenbaum 2013), while long-term stress may affect teachers' health, both physically and mentally, leading to them showing signs of depression, feelings of resignation and inferiority, as well as helplessness (Wisniewski and Garguilo 1997).

Forlin, Hattie and Douglas (1996) and Forlin (2001) made a distinction between stressors among teachers and classified these into three general clusters: (1) administrative; (2) classroom-based; and (3) personal. Administrative stressors include heavy workload and time resources, while classroom-based stressors refer to classroom management and climate and lack of support. Lastly, some personal stressors are low salary, low professional and unsuccessful collaboration and relations with colleagues and administration. The above distinction is detectable in many studies, such as Tatar's (2009) who, in a study with 281 teachers in Israel, found that they reported various concerns in their work, such as the emotional difficulties of their students, discipline issues and misbehaviour, learning and social problems of the students, didactic and pedagogical topics and curriculum issues.

Heavy workload is considered to be an administrative issue and serves as a predictor of stress (Boyle, Borg, Falzon and Baglioni 1995), while it is positively correlated with burnout, as workload at home for teachers may result in cynicism, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of students (Lewis, Roache and Romi 2011). Another administrative challenge for teachers includes demands such as testing and paperwork (Lambert et al. 2009). Teachers devote many hours, on a daily basis, preparing for the next day and this is considered not only time-consuming, but also something that affects their personal lives.

Moreover, concomitant poor quality relationships between teachers and students may contribute to teacher stress (Mintz 2007), while disciplinary problems in the classroom predict higher emotional exhaustion (Klusmann, Kunter, Trautwein, Lüdtke and Baumert 2008). According to Brenner (1985) it is the daily interaction with students in the classroom that determines the flow of teacher stress. Teachers' collective efficacy as a means of affecting group performance and influencing students is positively related to job satisfaction (Spilt, Koomen and Thijs 2011), while coping with threatening or uncontrollable classroom events and students' interactions sets the level of strain or misfit. If these problems are mastered, they may become controllable but if control over the situation is lost then it is quite impossible to improve the situation.

With this in mind, these authors suggest that it is within the first months of the school year that all key work should be addressed. If the start of the school year sets the tone for the rest of the school year, then experience of the teachers is highly significant. Nevertheless, although higher levels of stress may be expected in new teachers, it seems that this is not always the case, as data show that experienced teachers often report more stress. However, experienced teachers have higher levels of self-efficacy to help them to cope with this stress (Akpochafo 2014).

Problems occurring among students, such as bullying and aggression, may become overwhelming for new teachers who are not sufficiently trained to deal with this type of behaviour and who may perceive such behaviour as an additional stressor for them (Kahn, Jones and Wieland 2012). Students who exhibit disruptive behaviour or academic and emotional needs are likely to increase distress for a teacher, as well as frustration and sense of incompetence over time, as this behaviour requires significant time and attention from the teacher (Lhospital and Gregory 2009). When conflicts are encountered in schools, the teacher is the person who can direct treatment of conflict situations into a culture of discussion (Maslovaty 2000) and if he/she permits stress to intervene then there will be no ease of the conflict.

For some teachers, the social character of their profession, including communication with parents, may be quite stressful for them. Stoeber and Rennert (2008) in a study with 80 German teachers found that these teachers perceived the highest pressure to derive mainly from parents of the students, rather than from colleagues or students. Dealing with parents, such as contacting them through phone or email and being questioned by them as to how their children were assessed in the behavioural and academic field was a significant concern for novice teachers (Rieg, Paquette and Chen 2007). Perhaps, however, this may not be the case for experienced teachers who have established relationships with parents throughout the years and who know how to evaluate, assess and communicate their ideas about the students. Moreover, anxiety for children to do well in tests due to the fact that student performance is a reflection of the teaching has also been reported (Rieg et al. 2007), while teachers felt pressure from parents who wanted their children to get better grades and excel academically (Hung 2011).

Rieg et al. (2007) identified four themes in connection with concerns regarding self among pre-student teachers. These were: content knowledge, pedagogy, workload and relationships. Content knowledge was concerned with the feeling that they were not fully capable to teach in class as they thought students would know more than them. Some of them were also afraid that they could not manage the classroom effectively, they would not succeed in discipline, while they questioned their abilities to apply and implement their lessons and pedagogical theory with

success. Workload was related to time, changing requirements, having professors adding to their workload, and activities leading to lack of sleep. Lastly, relationships were concerned with the type of relationships that they may have with their students, and whether they would be liked and at the same time respected.

While the pressure from parents may be quite high for the majority of teachers, this is not always the case when children with disabilities are involved. Forlin, Keen and Barrett (2008) found that contact with parents was not a major issue of concern among Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers even when they had excessive meetings with them. Rather, the inadequate social skills of the child appeared to place more pressure on them, as issues such as poor communication skills and limited speech seemed to be of high concern. According to these researchers most teachers thought they had insufficient pre-service training to cater adequately for a child with an intellectual disability within the classroom and this introduced a further obstacle to the teaching process, as they felt they had a reduced ability to teach all students in an effective way and they were unable to effectively monitor all students at the same time. Furthermore, depersonalization was found to be higher among teachers of special education compared to elementary and secondary teachers who work in mainstream schools, something which led to less satisfaction from their work and, thus, acting neutral or with apathy (Antoniou and Ntalla 2010).

Children with problem behaviours are also considered a challenge for teachers (Lambert et al. 2009). Pupil misbehaviour may serve as a stressor for a teacher, while the way this stressor is appraised may even lead to the selection of coping strategies that are sub-optimal, e.g. the adoption of an aggressive or over-dominant classroom management approach (Mintz 2007). Teachers working in special schools, which included students who had dropped out of or were expelled from other educational day or residential frameworks within the community, felt fear, anger, guilt and stress and at the same time they felt happiness, energy and joy (Hamama et al. 2013). These contradictory feelings may be due to the fact that these teachers were facing many challenges with these types of students and although they were perhaps poorly trained, they felt at the same time that they had been given the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of these children.

Teaching may also be stressful for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. In a study by Markham (2000) ESL teachers mentioned how stressful it was to work with Limited-English Proficient (LEP) students who were struggling with many subject matter areas. In addition, other stressors included: serving too many LEP students, not having the support of non-ESL faculty and administrators and not coordinating with non-ESL teachers and administrators. Another concern for elementary teachers is students who come from diverse backgrounds, e.g. ethnic, religious, racial, etc. (Rieg et al. 2007).

The age of the teacher as well as type of class within which he/she teaches represents another variable for stress. Forlin et al. (2008) found that teaching a student with an intellectual disability was a concern for teachers who were 36–45 years old, while those who taught older classes were less concerned about classroom issues compared to those who taught kindergarten, 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade. Klusmann et al. (2008) found that teachers who were older were less engaged than their younger colleagues. Furthermore, primary teachers seem to have higher levels of perceived stress than their secondary colleagues (Jepson and Forrest 2006), while married individuals report low levels of burnout as compared to their single colleagues (Kantas 1996). These findings are quite interesting as for some teachers family may serve as a way of relaxation from the everyday stress.

Gender also plays an important role, although studies seem to reach contradictory results. In some studies, male teachers were more stressed than their female counterparts, less engaged and more emotionally exhausted (Akpochafo 2014; Klusmann et al. 2008), while, in others, females reported greater work stress (Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntalla 2013; Gloria, Faulk and Steinhardt 2013). There are also studies reporting no significant differences in stress between men and

women (Jepson and Forrest 2006), which, according to Eichinger (2000), may be attributed to the fact that it is not the biological differences that have an effect on job stress and satisfaction, but, rather, the social role orientation of both genders.

Further interesting research includes that of Miller and Travers (2005) who found that minority ethnic teachers in the UK experienced stress due to ethnic discrimination, believing that they worked within an environment with signs of institutional racism and this is a field of research that would provide very helpful information in the future if studied thoroughly. What is of major importance in this study, according to its authors, is the poor mental well-being of these teachers, with a large number of both female and male teachers experiencing high-to-severe mental distress.

Data reveal that some teachers feel stressed due to the low status of the teaching profession (Litt and Turk 1985), while it is held in low public esteem compared to other professions (Jarvis 2002). This may lead to reduced personal accomplishment which includes feelings of ineffectiveness and a lack of productivity and achievement at work (Gloria, Faulk and Steinhardt 2013). Poor salary, poor opportunities for advancement and role overload, such as too much work or too little time to accomplish, are issues of concern for teachers (Litt and Turk 1985; Miller and Travers 2005), with a lot of them leaving teaching due to dissatisfaction. It is possible that these teachers do not feel that they are paid according to their skills, knowledge and role, and that in the public view teaching is not considered a profession with status, compared to professions such as doctors or lawyers. Still, those teachers who feel that what they are offering is appreciated, for example, when they receive awards, report greater positive affect, greater resilience and less burnout (Gloria et al. 2013).

In many countries teacher surplus serves as a stressor, due to the fact that teachers are afraid that they will lose their jobs. For example, in a study in Taiwan, due to teacher surplus, teachers mentioned being stressed and that this stress derived from their increased teaching load as well as from educational policy reform (Hung 2011). This finding has many implications, because if teachers constantly feel threatened that they will lose their job, then they may not be committed to their profession and to their responsibilities. Occupational commitment is negatively correlated with perceived stress, something that shows that teachers who are committed to their profession may face less stress (Jepson and Forrest 2006) and vice versa.

As far as head teachers are concerned, there is little research concerning them. In a study by Cooper and Kelly (1993) it was found that British male head teachers had significantly higher mental ill health scores than the normative population, while work overload and handling relationships among staff proved to be dominant stressors for them, thus, causing them to make use of palliative coping strategies such as smoking and drinking. However, female head teachers used diversionary coping strategies, such as exercising and engaging in relaxation techniques. Apart from workload, work–life imbalance is also identified as a main stressor for head teachers, with female head teachers being significantly more stressed than males by overload and control issues (Phillips, Sen and McNamee 2007). On the other hand, there is data showing that compared to head teachers and teaching assistants, teachers experience higher stress levels and lower job satisfaction levels (Johnson et al. 2005). According to these authors, this may be due to various reasons such as the fact that teachers work very closely with children, while head teachers and teaching assistants do not take charge of the class for a long period of time, if at all, and head teachers engage in a more managerial position.

As far as head teachers in special educational settings are concerned, data provide evidence that they feel less personal accomplishment than special school teachers and display high depersonalization, but, nevertheless, they appear to have higher job satisfaction than their teacher colleagues (Sari 2004). In general, it seems that declared sources of job satisfaction for head teachers are the quality of relationships within school, enjoying the support of colleagues and a shared focus (Chaplain 2001). Lastly, early retirement of school principals seems to be associated

with prychiatric/psychosomatic disorders, such as depression, exhaustion, cardiovascular diseases and muscular/skeletal diseases (Weber, Weltle and Lederer 2005). Health issues among head teachers are not thoroughly studied, thus leaving a lot of unanswered questions as to which factors may lead them to face different types of disorders.

Teachers' Coping Strategies

In order for individuals to try and restrain the factors that lead them to stress and, in some cases, burnout, they use a variety of coping techniques. This is also the case for professionals whose stress factors undermine their performance. 'Coping is typically referred to as the cognitive and affective responses used by an individual to deal with problems encountered in everyday life' (Lewis et al. 2011, p. 55) while Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as 'constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person' (p. 141).

Usually coping is multifaceted and versatile. When the stressful situation occurs, the individual attempts to evaluate the problem, to appraise and implement possible courses of action, and, lastly, to regulate emotional responses (Parker 1986). Due to the fact that stress has to do with feelings, the individual must be able to monitor, discriminate among them and label them accurately, in order to employ strategies that will alter these feelings, as well as find ways to evaluate if these strategies are effective or need alteration (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes and Salovey 2010). According to Endler and Parker's (1999) Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS), there exist three styles of coping: task-oriented, emotion-oriented and avoidant. Task-oriented coping is characterized by an active problem-solving approach to stressful situations, while emotion-oriented coping is characterized by use of maladaptive, ruminative or emotional reactions in response to stressful situations. Lastly, avoidant coping is characterized by behaviours aimed at avoiding the stressful situation.

Each person uses different ways of coping that adjust according to the conditions, but at the same time derive from their personality traits. According to Lazarus (2000) people can cope with stress in an effective manner if they use suitable strategies which are adjusted to different situations and stress stages. Coping style is a significant construct for understanding individual differences in vulnerability to mental and physical health problems, and this also applies in the case of teachers (Jang, Thordarson, Stein, Cohan and Taylor 2007).

According to the 'Transactional Model of Stress and Coping' of Lazarus (1991) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984), an individual reacts to stress according to his/her subjective interpretation or appraisal of an external stressor which asks for an emotional response. Whether the stimulus is judged as threatening or challenging will be appreciated by the individual. If the incident that is happening is closely connected to the person's goals, needs and values then it is considered relevant. Otherwise, it may lead to the person feeling fear or anger.

Coping behaviour that is interpreted as signalling an emotionally stable and conscientious person is beneficial at a large grade to the individual's social functioning, mainly because such an impression signals reliability and mastery (Geisler, Wiedig-Allison and Weber 2009). We can assume from this how important it is for teachers to cope with stressful events in school, in order to establish positive social interactions with others. Two very important studies on teachers' coping strategies were those of Kyriacou (2001) and Tatar (2009). According to Kyriacou (2001) coping strategies among teachers are dichotomized into direct action and palliative techniques. Direct action refers to strategies teachers use in order to eliminate sources of stress, while palliative techniques focus in reducing the feelings the person has when the stress occurs. Direct actions techniques aim to rule out the source where stress comes from such as seeking support

from colleagues and prioritizing work tasks, while palliative techniques are concerned with finding ways to reduce the impact of the stressor, such as avoiding the fact or drinking (Howard and Johnson 2004).

Tatar (2009) suggested mapping teachers' coping strategies into three broad realms:

1. Individual coping strategies. With these strategies teachers try to empower themselves in order to overcome difficulties by acquiring and assimilating the necessary skills.
2. Group-mediated strategies. These are used by teachers in order to reduce their feelings of isolation by discussing their problems in professional life and exchanging ideas about arising issues with colleagues through support groups.
3. Turning for help strategies. These refer to the individual's attempts to seek help from teacher colleagues, school counsellors or psychologists, principals, etc.

One coping strategy used by some teachers is denial. In a study by Kahn, Jones and Wieland (2012), preservice teachers who dealt with incidents of bullying refused to believe the stressor occurred, denied the fact when they encountered problems with bullying among students and were less likely to report that relational aggression involving boys required teacher intervention. Others blamed themselves for the incident, and, probably, underestimated the role of the student during the incident. Apart from denial, self-blame is another way for a teacher to cope with a stressful event (Lewis 1999), while keeping others from knowing how bad thing really are has proven to be a non-helpful technique (Forlin et al. 2008). Denial, self-blame and keeping others from knowing how difficult a situation is, could be considered maladaptive strategies, mainly due to the fact that the individual does not let others engage in the problem and help. This is also the case with suppression and rumination, as they reduce an individual's capacity to process incoming events (Brackett et al. 2010).

When teachers are open to discussion with others and ask for support, then their stress is lessened. Schonfeld (1990) found that teachers in primary and secondary education showed higher levels of job satisfaction and increased motivation to remain in the profession, due to the use of advice seeking, positive comparisons and direct action as means of coping and, thus, showed lower levels of stress. Collaboration with colleagues or professional personnel as well as receiving support from peers or leadership facilitates teachers to engage in discussions with pupils when a dilemma is encountered (Forlin et al. 2008; Maslovaty 2000). This serves as a way to relax the stressor. Moreover, when at a school there is a strong sense of collegiality and good communication among staff, then teachers feel more committed, are more satisfied with their job and express lower levels of stress (Kyriacou 2001), and they are even more engaged when they have a supportive principal (Klusmann et al. 2008).

Lastly, lower work engagement is indirectly associated with poor job resources, such as job control, social climate and innovativeness (Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli 2006). It seems that when teachers have feelings of belongingness, they are work engaged and satisfied with their job, then they are not motivated to leave the teaching profession (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2011), as job burnout and intention to quit are negatively related to work engagement (Høigaard, Giske and Sundsli 2012).

Social support including peer support works as a moderator for stress and negative emotions, as this support, mainly from peers, whether this is instrumental, appraisal, emotional or informative, may increase their positive affect and life satisfaction (Hamama et al. 2013). Still, teacher burnout is negatively correlated with turning for help to internal sources of support, e.g. colleagues, which may be attributed to the fact that these teachers may be pessimistic or frustrated, something that impedes them from making any attempt to seek help (Tatar 2009). On the other hand,

maintaining a sense of humour is crucial for a teacher to overcome stressful situations (Forlin et al. 2008), as perceiving life and work optimistically may lessen concerns of any kind.

In a study by Antoniou, Polychroni and Kotroni (2009) with 158 Greek teachers who worked in special needs classrooms and experienced potential sources of stress, it was found that these teachers used coping strategies which were loading onto the involvement factor (i.e. finding ways to make the job more interesting), the task strategies factor (i.e. setting priorities in their duties) and the social support factor (i.e. maintaining stable relationships). The social support factor may craft coherence in schools, and, due to the fact that strong coherence has a protective effect and is correlated with average levels of coping (Brown, Howcroft and Jacobs 2009), then the reduction of stress is feasible.

Middle school teachers who worked in schools with incidents of community violence used a variety of coping strategies, including the following: praying, emotional withdrawal, professional counselling, sharing stressful events with teachers, communicating with family and friends and separating work and personal life (Maring and Koblinski 2013). According to these researchers, such strategies helped teachers to somehow reduce stress but they did not equip them to implement problem-focused solutions.

From the above study, praying proved to be a very important source of emotional balance for these teachers. Praying as a coping strategy among teachers is infrequently identified in the literature, and it was interesting to see that some teachers used this type of strategy in order to face problems within schools. Religion as a coping resource is not studied in reference to teachers, and, turning to God is a positive religious coping strategy that may result in beneficial outcomes, and is clearly differentiated from negative religious coping such as disconnecting with God (Schottenbauer, Rodriguez, Glass and Arnkoff 2006).

As far as gender differences are concerned, it seems that female teachers turn more frequently for help to both internal resources (within the school), e.g. teacher colleagues, school counsellors and psychologists for consultation, and external resources (out-of-school), e.g. web-based resources, than their male colleagues (Tatar 2009). According to Tatar (2009) 'the consultation strategy has been found to be very productive in school systems: it allows teachers to apply (and generalise) the fundamentals learned in the process behind the specific case and to broaden their knowledge and professional behavioural repertoire when dealing with psychological and didactic problems' (p. 110). In a study by Stoeber and Rennert (2008) female teachers showed higher levels of active coping, such as planning, than their male counterparts, while Akpochafo (2014) also found that female teachers had higher levels of self-efficacy than their male colleagues. Finally, Antoniou et al. (2009) found that while female SEN primary school teachers used predominantly social support as a coping method, their male colleagues looked for ways to make their work more interesting, while, in another study, males reported feeling less satisfied, more depersonalized and lower levels of personal accomplishment than their female counterparts (Antoniou and Ntalla 2010).

Personality and its Relation to Coping

According to Hambrick and McCord (2010) personality is fundamental to helping us understand coping ability. If coping differentiates individuals then this means that each person uses coping strategies that are not universal. In most studies that examine the correlation between coping and personality, the Five Factor Personality Traits model (McCrae and Costa 1987), commonly referred to as the 'Big Five', is used, as this model, for many reasons, serves as a fruitful basis to examine job satisfaction (Judge, Heller and Mount 2002). In a meta-analysis by Connor-Smith and Flachsbart (2007) concerning personality as indicated by the 'Big Five', it was found that

Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience and Agreeableness were positively associated with coping strategies, such as problem solving, while Neuroticism was positively related with coping behaviours that were considered as disengagement, mainly withdrawal.

Fontana and Abouserie (1993) who studied teachers in Wales found that there was a positive correlation between levels of teacher stress and neuroticism, introversion and psychoticism. Teachers with high scores in conscientiousness and extraversion and low scores in neuroticism are more likely to feel increased personal accomplishment and therefore low burnout, while they are highly motivated to achieve and accordingly obtain gains of performance.

Individuals who are open to experience might be expected to be effective copers (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen and DeLongis 1986), while people who are emotionally stable rather than neurotic, extraverted, open to experience and conscientious use constructive coping strategies, such as problem-solving and seeking social support, while they accept the stressor and reinterpret a stressful situation (Storm and Rothman 2003). O'Brien and DeLongis (1996) found that those individuals who scored higher on agreeableness were seeking support and were less confronted than those who scored lower, while those higher on conscientiousness used less escape-avoidance and less self-blaming strategies in coping when faced with stressful situations and engaged in problem-solving than those who were lower on this trait.

Using the Lazarus and Folkman (1984) ways of coping with students and prospective teachers, Baloglu (2008) found that teachers dealt with stressful situations using an emotion-focused coping strategy, by exhibiting a helpless approach to stress. On the contrary, a person with a strong character who implements strengths of his/her character in his/her profession will be much more satisfied and happy, than someone who does not invest his/her signature strengths in such tasks, and, accordingly may experience burnout and lowered job satisfaction (McGovern and Miller 2008).

Personality dispositions seem to influence choice of coping and, in this case, dispositions such as hope and optimism are significantly differentiated from pessimism and anxiety (Schottenbauer, Rodriguez, Glass and Arnkoff 2006). This is also the case with positive and negative affect, as higher levels of stress are correlated with higher levels of negative affect (Hamama et al. 2013).

Another personality trait that characterizes teachers is perfectionism. For perfectionists striving for flawlessness, trying to excel and setting high performance standards is stress correlated, as perfectionists feel the pressure to excel because they feel that they have to live up both to their standards and those set by others (Stoeber and Rennert 2008). Workers who tend to have more expectations from themselves may be prone to professional burnout, as perfectionism and extreme confidence as personality traits may cause unpleasant impacts to their professional and personal life (Antoniou and Ntalla 2010).

Ngidi and Sibaya (2002) performed research based on the Big Five personality traits among 444 black teachers from South Africa and found that those teachers who were introverted were susceptible to stress caused by changes in the education system, while those who were extraverted were not influenced by that. Moreover, teachers who manifested a tendency towards neuroticism and were pressured by time, pupil misbehaviour and administrative problems, were more prone to stress.

Conclusion

Reaching the end of this chapter the most important thing to conclude is the fact that teachers do not experience stress in a similar way and that the level of stress that a teacher experiences will depend mainly on the stressors he/she faces, e.g. class management, workload, pupil misbehaviour, etc., and his/her personality traits. Stress is not a generalized concept, due to the fact that it is an individual process, it may vary from one individual to another. The way people react to life

situations or social conditions depends upon the way in which they attribute meaning to these experiences, they way they appraise them (Jepson and Forrest 2006), the way they value them. Although researchers are knowledgeable about teachers' stressors, it is not useful to assume that there is a universal formula to prevent these stressors from occurring, as, according to Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntalla (2013) the sources of stress experienced by teachers are unique to each individual and depend on the interaction between personality, values and skills.

Personality is pivotal to help us understand why working in the same environment and facing similar stress and demands, does not necessarily mean that all individuals will suffer the same levels of stress (Furnham 1992). According to Jang et al. (2007), 'a clearer understanding of personality and coping style is essential because it will impact the approach taken to interventions for stress-related disorders' (p. 18). Insight into teachers' well-being is crucial as it adds to the understanding of teachers' careers, thus, knowing what factors are of concern for teachers helps in creating school contexts that prevent teachers' dropout and foster their commitment to their job (Spilt et al. 2011). Investigating teachers' feelings while teaching is very important as teachers who experience high rates of stress and burnout may not be as capable as they should be in order to create a supportive and positive social environment for children, particularly when they feel emotionally exhausted and perceive their students as objects, thus, becoming role models for negative social behaviours (Lambert et al. 2009).

Environmental factors also play a significant role in coping, due to the fact that the nature of the environment in which a particular stressful episode occurs may influence the types of coping used, as it can be regarded as a potential source (Parker 1986). This has many implications in schools as the work environment may either be supportive or the opposite. According to Jepson and Forrest (2006) individual differences play a significant role in understanding teachers' stress, due to the fact that although teachers are exposed to similar environmental stressors as well as intrinsic job factors, still, not everyone suffers high levels of stress, as some teachers are more susceptible than others and only a small percentage reach the burnout stage.

In a study by Battle and Looney (2014), involving secondary school teachers in the United States, it was found that the teachers' intention to continue working and remain in teaching was positively correlated with how much they felt enjoyment, found their job interesting, viewed it as useful and saw it as a salient aspect of their self concepts, while only their perceived psychological and financial costs were reasons to quit. It is, according to Hargreaves (2000), the relationship with students that serves as a source of enjoyment and motivation to teachers both in elementary and secondary education. Teachers attach value to personal relationships with students in their classroom and this illustrates how their professional and personal well-being is threatened by conflictual or alienated relationships (Spilt et al. 2011).

The percentage of teachers who do not experience symptoms of burnout, rather, they adapt to stressful situations and due to their positive affect prove to be more resilient than expected, thus, coping with adversity and balancing their needs and desires with those of their students (Gloria, Faulk and Steinhardt 2013), is an issue that is not thoroughly investigated. Some teachers adapt to stressful situations in a successful manner and they do not perceive them as threats, but rather as challenges (Brunetti 2006). This is the case of proactive coping as proposed by Schwarzer and Taubert (2002) where people, instead of viewing stressors as setbacks, are motivated to succeed. Thus, people who consistently cope in a proactive manner are likely to be endowed with personality traits that allow successful cooping, while they prevent their emotional distress when encountered with a stressful situation (Hambrick and McCord 2010). Further research is needed in the relationship between coping and personality as boosters of resilience among teachers.

According to Curtis (2012), 'the illusion of what teaching entails is drastically different than what teachers find when they step into the classroom' (p. 787). That is why it is important for teachers to have the sense of belonging, as this is positively correlated with job satisfaction and

negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and motivation to leave the teaching profession (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2011). Being a teacher is not an easy task, but it can be one of the most inspiring, and it would be sad if teachers' needs and aspirations were not considered and no measures were taken in order to prevent the turnover of this part of the population that shapes the consciences of children all over the world.

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