

Self-Perception of the Burnout Syndrome Symptoms on Mainstream and Special Education Teachers

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Abstract

Introduction: *The interaction of teachers with students, their parents, peers, professional activities of teaching-learning-assessment, practical training and methodological-scientific training can become sources of professional stress and burnout. The emotional tension of working frequently and intensely with other people, the working conditions specific to the teaching profession have a significant impact on students, a negative influence on their behavior and thus on the educational system, ultimately leading to consequences that will damage the stability of the educational environment and society.*

Objectives: *The objectives of the study focused on the comparative analysis of how the professional stress and burnout level is perceived by mainstream and special education teachers, both from the perspective of the intensity of stress and the frequency of stressful situations. The influence of teaching experience, age and teacher certification were taken into account.*

Methods: *The research was cross-cutting, the tests, scales and questionnaires were applied to a group of subjects consisting of 300 teachers working in mainstream education, special and inclusive special education, by convenience sampling. The main selection criterion was the status of teaching staff. The tools used to collect quantitative data were: Knowledge Sheet, JSS Test – Job Stress Survey, and questionnaires to assess the level of professional burnout – Maslach Burnout Inventory and Perceived Stress Scale Questionnaire – SP-93.*

Results: *Self-perception of professional stress and burnout were significantly more intense in the case of special and inclusive special education teachers, compared to mainstream education teachers.*

Conclusions: *The consequences of professional stress and burnout on the behavior of both teachers and students have particular influences on the quality of teaching activities and involvement in working with students. The conclusions of this investigation suggest the importance of developing projects in the field of educational management, especially those that give priority to understanding this phenomenon.*

Keywords: *professional stress, professional burnout, teacher, education, special education*

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I. Introduction

Recent European and national reports indicate that being a teacher is becoming a job with high demand on the labor market, despite the fact that teaching activities of teaching-learning-assessment and practical training, the methodological-scientific training activities, educational activities, complementary to the educational process involve interaction with people in training and can become sources of stress (Kitchen, 2017).

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work considers that there are fewer people in the field of education who choose a teaching career and a future crisis of teachers in the education systems could be created. The level of stress related to the teaching profession is well above the average in industry and society in general (Rotaru, 2015).

The International Labor Organization, in 2016, showed that stress caused by work organization, work planning and labor relations, which sets in when job requirements do not match or exceed the employee's abilities, resources or needs, or when the knowledge or skills of an employee or a group do not match the expectations of the organizational culture of an organization, is the professional stress. The term has evolved over the years referring to stressors, stress factors, psychosocial factors, psychosocial hazards or risks.

The emotional tension of working frequently and intensely with other people leads to stress reactions that, continuing to be carried out and to gradually develop, after a period of time, turn into burnout syndrome. Burnout is also defined as a reduced personal accomplishment among people who work with other people (Maslach, 1993).

In particular, human services professionals, for example nurses, doctors, social workers and teachers, are vulnerable to burnout (Maslach, 1982, 1993).

Burnout occurs frequently among teachers, the specialized literature suggesting that low teacher self-efficacy leads to burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Evers et al., 2002). Professional burnout prevents teachers from doing their job successfully and has a significant impact on students, a negative influence on their behavior, negatively impacting on the educational system and ultimately leading to consequences that will damage the stability of the educational environment and society (Dworkin, 1987; Farber, 1991; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991).

Among the negative results that led to a high level of wear and tear in the teaching profession, we can identify a decrease in the quality of teacher activities and employment of inexperienced or unsuitable teachers in

the system, a phenomenon that creates instability in schools and inability to plan and manage the educational system (Sperling, 2015).

These pressures are much stronger when it comes to special education teachers. Teaching activities for students with special needs causes, for the most part, mental exhaustion due to the fact that students with special needs do not change/ adjust quickly or easily, which could develop a feeling of depression, inefficiency and disappointment among special education workers, which feeling, by itself, it is a source of professional pressure.

Numerous factors can lead to burnout and many teachers are not prepared to manage the daily stressors that come with employment. Special education involves working with students with special needs who often require additional support, activities for which teachers are not prepared or trained.

Special education teachers have a distinct and different role compared to mainstream education teachers, meaning that they are responsible for providing specific teaching-learning-assessment and practical training activities to ensure a safe environment for all these students. There are differences between teaching activities: using permanent diversification of the type of individualized instruction, which teachers provide to students with special needs, planning, adapting and presenting them in order to meet the needs of each student, working either with one student separately or in small groups of students.

The tasks of special education teachers vary depending on the work environment, their specialties and the students' disabilities. Thus, in this category are also teachers who belong to special education but work with students with disabilities included in mainstream education next to the teachers in this system, their role being to present information in a way that students with disabilities are able to understand it more easily. They also help mainstream education teachers to adapt their lessons in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Special education teachers work with students who have a wide variety of problems, from intellectual disabilities and sensory impairments, to emotional, learning, and autism spectrum disorders, and physical disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

The main function of a special education teacher in Romania is to accept students with special needs and give them equal learning opportunities. They are also obliged to monitor the implementation of special education programs and to provide regular reports on the

status of these programs and services, to participate in meetings, training courses, workshops and special activities aimed at improving the quality and delivery of special education programs and services.

At the same time, a special education teacher is expected to conduct assessments to determine the level, psychodiagnosis, type and degree of disability for each student and to coordinate meetings with parents, school principals, other specialists, other teachers, to identify the needs and necessity of joining a special educational program.

In recent years, professional stress and burnout of special education teachers have been increasingly recognized as widespread problems and have become a global concern (Borg & Riding, 1991).

The development of children in need of special education is very slow and difficult, which is why teachers in this education system feel less successful in their teaching activities and experience few professional achievements.

Burnout can be a major problem in special education, teaching activities in this environment being identified as generating stressful situations. Recent developments in the field of special education have led to a renewed interest towards stress and exhaustion to which teachers are exposed in their professional lives.

II. Objectives and hypotheses of the study

The aim of the research is to identify differences in the level of professional stress and burnout in mainstream and special education for a deeper understanding of how educational activity involving children with special educational needs influences teachers.

Objectives:

Objective 1 is the comparative analysis of how the professional stress level is perceived in mainstream and special education, both in terms of stress intensity and frequency of stressful situations, in order to identify how the two categories of teachers relate to work in mainstream schools and work in special schools.

Objective 2 implies the comparative analysis of the level of professional burnout of mainstream and special education teachers in order to examine the level of professional exhaustion generated by the activity in mainstream schools and special schools.

Objective 3 is to investigate the variables that can influence professional stress and burnout in mainstream and special education; we will consider the analysis of the influences of teaching experience, age and teaching certification.

Hypotheses:

1. It is presumed that professional stress is more intense and felt to be stronger in special education compared to mainstream education.

2. It is presumed that the professional burnout of teachers is more intense in the case of those in special schools compared to mainstream schools.

3. It is presumed that professional stress and burnout are more intense for younger and less experienced teachers, both in special and mainstream education.

III. Research methodology

Independent variables

- a. form of education:
 - mainstream education (teachers);
 - special education (teachers);
 - inclusive special education (school counselors);
- b. age – the average age of the subjects in the investigated group has the value 42, so that two experimental groups were defined:
 - younger teachers (including those under 42 years old);
 - older teachers (those over 43 years old);
- c. experience in teaching – the average of seniority (in work) of the subjects from the investigated group has the value 18, being defined two experimental groups:
 - less experienced teachers (seniority in work less than 18 years);
 - more experienced teachers (seniority in work over 18 years);
- d. teaching certification (degree) (*hierarchical order from the lowest to the highest*):
 - beginning or full registered teachers;
 - 2nd degree teachers;
 - 1st degree teachers.

The research does not consider the identification and analysis of the interaction between independent variables, but only the separate analysis of the impact of each independent variable on dependent variables. After identifying these influences, a continuation of this research can lead the analysis to a greater degree of complexity by investigating the interaction effect.

Thus, the research was conducted according to a factorial model, but without analyzing the interaction effects.

Dependent variables

- a. the level of professional stress, operationalized by:

- stress level at work;
- level of stress attributed to the work itself;
- level of stress attributed to the lack of organizational support;
- b. perceived professional stress level;
- c. level of professional burnout, operationalized by:
 - level of emotional exhaustion;
 - level of depersonalization;
 - level of reduced personal accomplishment.

Instruments

The techniques used to collect quantitative data were: tests, scales, questionnaires, knowledge sheet.

a. Knowledge sheet

Author: Maria Comăneanu, 2019.

The knowledge sheet includes 5 sections: Identification Data (Name/ Surname; Date of birth: Place of birth, Sex; Age; Permanent domicile – City, County, etc.); Family (Marital status; No. of children; Family problems: economic, personal, etc.); Professional Situation (Occupation; Holder – Substitute – Auxiliary teaching staff – Management staff; Seniority in work; Teaching certification or degree, etc.); Self-assessment (Medical problems; Appreciation of professional results, etc.); Interests, free time (Passions; Participation in professional competitions/ communication sessions, etc.); Remarks; Informed consent form to perform a psychological assessment, with offline and online processing of personal data.

b. JSS – Job Stress Survey

Authors: Charles D. Spielberger, Peter R. Vagg, 2010.

The test was purchased under license from the consulting company specialized in the adaptation, calibration, publication and distribution of psychometric tools: Central Test. The test is accredited by the Romanian College of Psychologists for an indefinite period.

Job Stress Survey was designed to assess the general sources of occupational stress of people of both sexes having over 18 years old who work in a wide range of work environments in the field of business, industrial, educational and others.

JSS focuses on work situations that can generate psychological stress. Each of the 30 items describes a work situation having potential to generate stress and assess both its perceived severity and its frequency of occurrence. In addition to providing information about stressors that have a negative impact on individual employees, JSS also helps identify sources

of occupational stress specific to employee groups and allows comparison of stress level of employees in various departments of the same organization.

JSS offers scores for a number of 3 scales and 6 subscales:

1. Job Stress Index (JS-X): provides an estimate of the global level of occupational stress felt by the employee at work.

2. Job Stress Severity (JS-S): indicates the average assessment of the perceived severity of the participant for the 30 stressful situations included in the JSS.

3. Job Stress Frequency (JS-F): refers to the average frequency of the 30 stressful situations during the last 6 months.

4. Job Pressure Index (JP-X): assesses the level of occupational stress felt by the person being assessed, which can be more directly attributed to the pressures of work itself, such as overtime, deadlines and excessive bureaucracy. The 10 sources of stress contained in the JSS reflect stressful aspects of the structure, profile or tasks of the workplace.

5. Job Pressure Severity (JP-S): assesses the average level of perceived severity for the 10 stressful situations in JSS that are most directly correlated with workplace pressure.

6. Job Pressure Frequency (JP-F): assesses the average frequency of the 10 stressful situations in JSS that are most directly related to workplace pressure.

7. Lack of Organizational Support Index (LS-X): assesses the degree of occupational stress (severity combined with frequency) that can be attributed to lack of organizational support, such as difficulties in relationships with superiors, poorly motivated colleagues and lack of opportunities for advancement. These 10 stressful situations reflect situations that involve other people (namely difficulties with superiors or colleagues), organizational policies or procedures, rather than specific aspects of the work itself.

8. Lack of Organizational Support Severity (LS-S): assesses the average perceived severity level of the 10 stressful situations in JSS that are most strongly correlated with the lack of organizational support.

9. Lack of Organizational Support Frequency (LS-F): assesses the average frequency of occurrence of the 10 stressful situations in the JSS that are most directly correlated with the lack of organizational support.

c. MBI Questionnaire – Professional Burnout Assessment Questionnaire – Maslach Burnout Inventory

Authors: Christine Maslach and Susan E. Jackson, 1981.

The Professional Burnout Assessment Questionnaire – Maslach Burnout Inventory has 3 scales: Emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization, Reduced personal accomplishment.

Maslach Burnout Inventory assesses three aspects:

- emotional exhaustion: waste of emotional energy and perception of the inadequacy of one's emotions with the situation created, when the individual manifests a low emotional tone, indifference or emotional supersaturation. Emotional exhaustion manifests as a feeling of mental and physical waste, lack of energy and fatigue or as a feeling of helplessness in gathering the resources needed to overcome a problematic situation;

- depersonalization: cognitive and emotional distancing from others, especially from those with whom the person must interact in the performance of work tasks, deterioration of interpersonal relationships within the reference group and negative attitude towards their own accomplishments. Depersonalization is usually manifested by an alteration of the professional ability to communicate with others, manifesting as cold, cynical or ironic behavior or indifference to the emotional needs of others;

- reduced personal accomplishment: results from a reduced sense of effectiveness and devaluation of work. It is manifested by the decrease of personal performance, low sense of personal accomplishments, negative attitude towards one's own accomplishments, low labor productivity; the person concerned is perceived as professionally incompetent and unable to achieve his professional goals. Decreased perception of personal accomplishment involves reduced feelings of accomplishment in the field of activity, the existence of feelings of uselessness, decreased self-confidence, professional failure and demotivation.

The questionnaire includes 25 items and assesses the burnout syndrome that is achieved by analyzing the three dimensions of the scale labeled as: Emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization and Cognitions of efficiency and professional accomplishment.

d. Perceived Stress Scale Questionnaire – SP-93

Authors: S. Levenstein et al., 1993.

This form is developed by Levenstein and colleagues for measuring the perception of stress, the degree to which situations in a person's life are considered stressful (low stress; moderate stress; intense stress). It explores the individual experience of stress, the subjective feeling of stress felt and how an individual assesses it.

The items were designed to reveal how unpredictable, difficult to control and overloaded are the lives of the subjects, described by themselves. The scale questions are of general nature, therefore they can be applied to any subgroups of the population, and refer to the feelings and thoughts experienced by the participants in the last 6 months. It has been developed as a tool for assessing stressful life events and circumstances that tend to trigger or exacerbate stress symptoms.

The purpose of the scale is to allow comparisons between the level of stress perceived by individuals in relation to objective situations/ events in their lives.

The scale comprises 30 items and the interpretation, by the score between 30 and 120 points, allows the classification into one of the 3 categories: low stress, moderate stress and intense stress.

Carrying out the research

The research is a cross-cutting one, the tests, scales and questionnaires being applied in the period November-March of the school year 2019-2020, the objective being to analyze the situation existing at the time of assessment, without considering the analysis of some changes in this situation over a longer period of time. The group of subjects was constituted by convenience sampling, the main selection criterion being the status of teaching staff.

The tests, scales and questionnaires were administered to the respondents in paper-and-pencil format, on groups of subjects composed of teachers from the same school unit.

Participation in the investigation was voluntary and unconditional, and the selection of participants was based on the principle of informed consent: each participant was informed about the purpose and objectives of the research, as well as on how the data will be processed and had the option to participate or not in the research, without rewarding in any way the participation or without sanctioning in any way the non-participation in the research.

The tests, scales and questionnaires were administered without time limit, according to the methodological recommendations of the authors, and the completion of the questionnaires took approximately 40-60 minutes.

The database was made only for the tests, scales and questionnaires that contain all the requested information (answers to all questions from all applied tools).

At the end of rendering the tests, scales and questionnaires was checked the extent of filling out and

the subjects were asked to fill out the missing answers or to withdraw from the research.

When scoring, interpreting and reporting to standards the results of these tests, questionnaires and psychological scales, were excluded subjects who proved lack of accuracy in the answers that were given only to cover the spaces.

Participants

The group of research subjects includes 300 teachers:

- from the perspective of the type of education in which they carry out their activity, 129 work in special education, 45 in inclusive special education (school counselors), and 126 carry out their activity in mainstream education;

- from the perspective of age, 147 teachers are between the ages of 19 and 42 years old, while 153 teachers are between the ages of 43 and 66 years old;

- from the perspective of professional experience, 155 teachers have seniority in work between 1 and 18 years, while 145 teachers have seniority in work between 19 and 45 years;

- from the perspective of the teaching certification (degree), 61 are beginning or full registered teachers, 55 are 2nd degree teachers and 184 are 1st degree teachers;

- from the perspective of professional status, 272 are tenure teachers and only 28 are substitute teachers; the small number of substitute teachers makes it impossible to refine the analysis and investigate the influence of status on the professional stress felt.

IV. Results

1. Self-perception of teachers' professional stress

1.1. Perceived professional stress level in mainstream and special schools

The assessment index of the perceived professional stress level has significantly higher average values in special education compared to mainstream education ($p < 0.001$). The average values obtained concerning teachers in inclusive special education do not differ significantly, neither from special education ($p = 0.330$), nor from mainstream education (0.067).

The self-perceived professional stress level is significantly higher in special education compared to mainstream education.

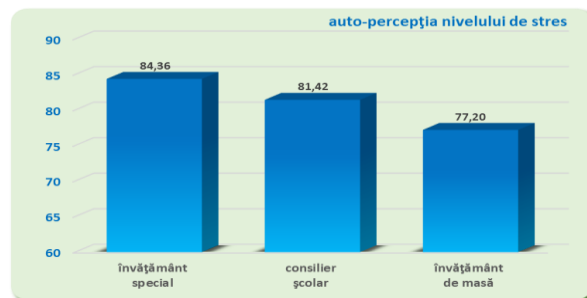


Chart no. 1: Self-perceived stress level in mainstream, special and inclusive special education

1.2. The influence of age on the teachers' perceived stress level

The assessment index of the perceived professional stress level has similar average values for younger teachers (between 19-42 years old) and older teachers (between 43-66 years old) and in special schools ($p = 0.144$), and in mainstream schools (0.308).

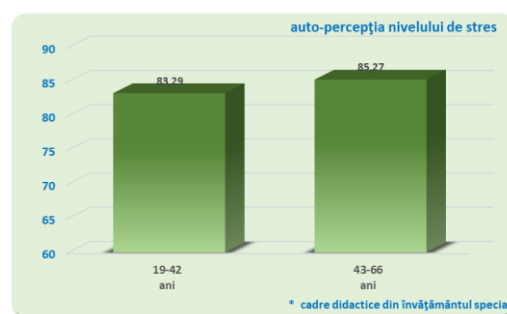


Chart no. 2: Self-perceived stress level according to the age of special education teachers

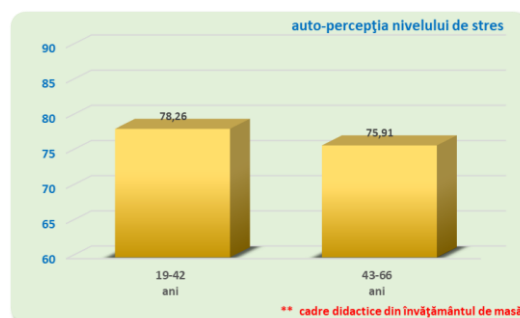


Chart no. 3: Self-perceived stress level according to the age of teachers in mainstream education

The self-perceived professional stress level is not significantly influenced by the age of teachers in either special or mainstream education.

1.3. The influence of professional experience on the teachers' perceived stress level

The self-perceived organizational stress level is assessed similarly by less experienced teachers and more experienced teachers, both in special schools ($p = 0.435$) and in mainstream schools ($p = 0.098$).

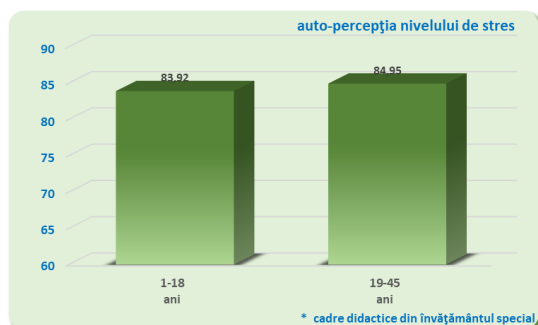


Chart no. 4: Self-perceived stress level according to the professional experience of teachers in special education

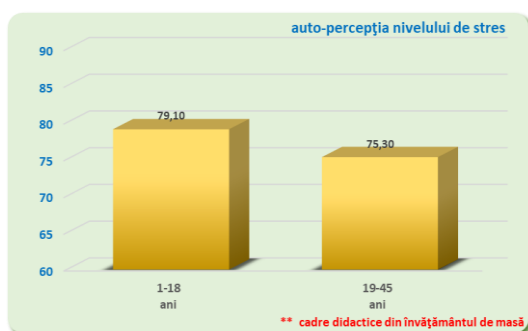


Chart no. 5: Self-perceived stress level according to the professional experience of teachers in mainstream education

Teachers' professional experience does not significantly influence the self-perceived professional stress level either in special schools or in mainstream schools.

1.4. The influence of the teaching certification (degree) on the teachers' perceived stress level

The teaching certification (degree) significantly influences the self-perceived professional stress level in special schools ($p = 0.024$, the significant difference being between 1st degree teachers and beginning or full registered teachers: $p = 0.022$), but does not significantly influence the self-perceived stress level in mainstream schools.

In special education, 1st degree teachers feel a higher stress level compared to beginning or full registered teachers, while in mainstream schools the self-perceived professional stress level is independent of the teaching certification (degree).

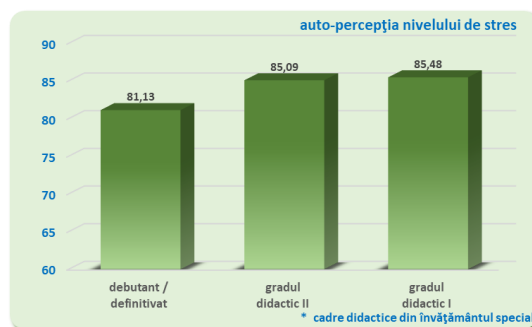


Chart no. 6: Self-perceived stress level according to the teaching certification (degree) of the special education teachers

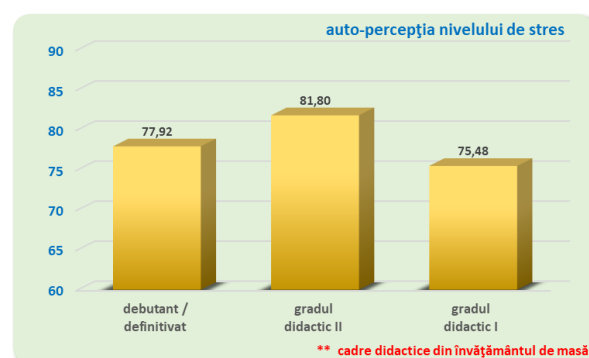


Chart no. 7: Self-perceived stress level according to the teaching certification (degree) mainstream education teachers

2. Teachers' professional burnout

2.1. Professional burnout on special and mainstream school teachers

The professional burnout assessment index has significantly lower average values in the case of mainstream education teachers, compared to special education teachers ($p < 0.001$) and inclusive special education teachers ($p = 0.011$), without significant differences between these last two groups mentioned ($p = 0.106$).

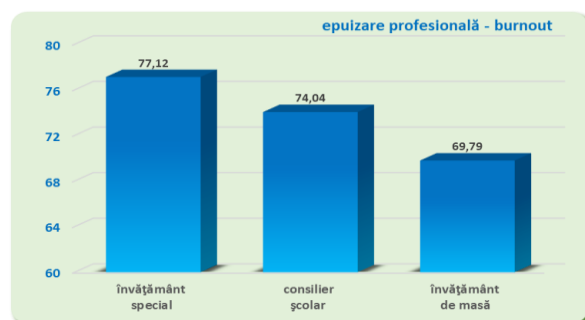


Chart no. 8: Intensity of professional burnout in mainstream, special and inclusive special education

The burnout level is significantly higher in the case of special education teachers and inclusive special education teachers compared to teachers within mainstream education.

2.2. The influence of age on the intensity of teachers' professional burnout

Younger teachers (of 19-42 years old) and older ones (of 43-66 years old) have similar assessments on the professional burnout level, both in special schools (p = 0.804) and in mainstream schools (p = 0.108).

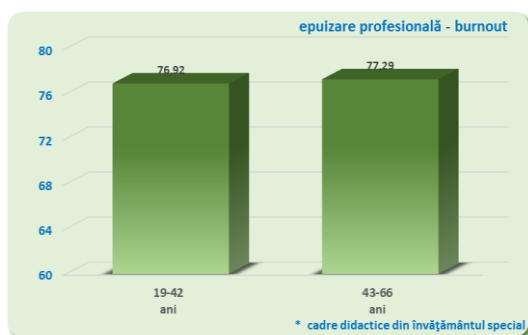


Chart no. 9: Intensity of professional burnout depending on the age of special education teachers

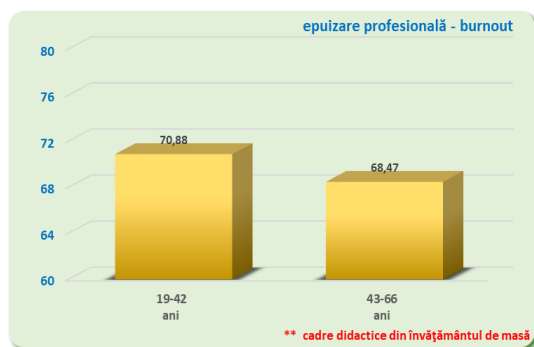


Chart no. 10: Intensity of professional burnout depending on the age of mainstream education teachers

The teachers' professional burnout is independent of age, both in special schools and in mainstream schools.

2.3. The influence of professional experience on the intensity of teachers' professional burnout

In special schools, the less experienced teachers and more experienced teachers similarly assess the burnout level (p = 0.409).

In mainstream schools, the burnout level is higher in less experienced teachers compared to more experienced teachers (p = 0.003).

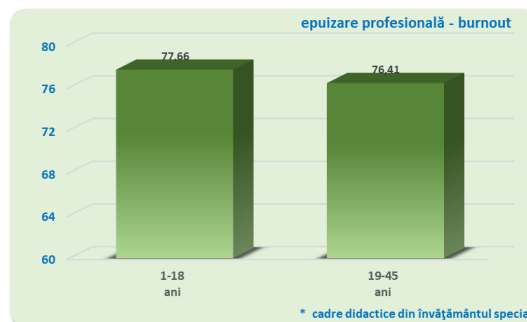


Chart no. 11: Intensity of professional burnout depending on the professional experience of special education teachers

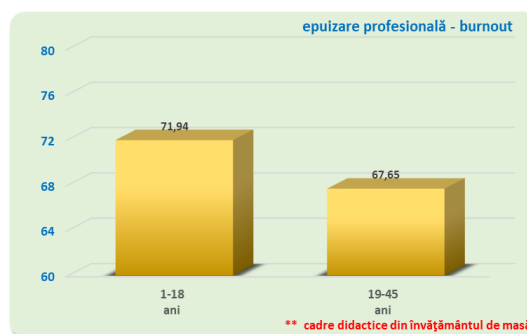


Chart no. 12: Intensity of professional burnout depending on the professional experience of mainstream education teachers

The professional burnout is independent of teaching experience regarding teachers within special schools, but is significantly higher for less experienced teachers in the case of mainstream education.

2.4. The influence of the teaching certification (degree) on the intensity of the teachers' professional burnout

In special schools, the intensity of teachers' professional burnout is similarly assessed by beginning teachers, 2nd degree and 1st degree teachers.

In mainstream schools, the intensity of teachers' professional burnout is assessed differently depending on the teaching certification/ degree (p = 0.024), the significant difference being between 2nd degree teachers and 1st degree teachers (p = 0.037).

The professional burnout level is assessed independently of the teaching certification (degree) in special schools, but, in mainstream schools, it is higher in the case of 2nd degree teachers compared to 1st degree teachers.

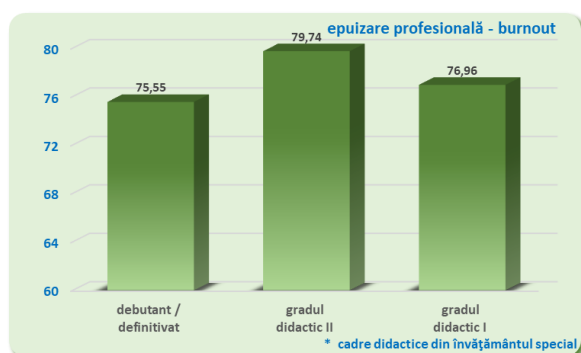


Chart no. 13: Intensity of professional burnout depending on the teaching certification (degree) of special education teachers

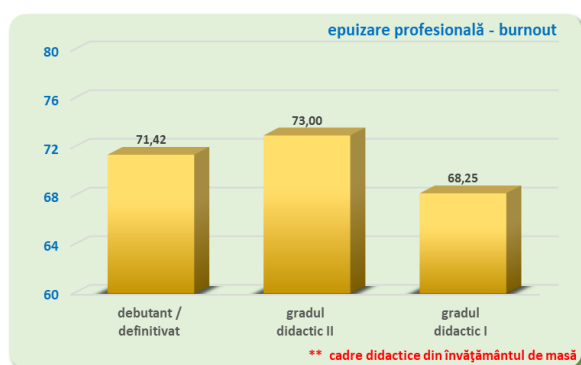


Chart no. 14: Intensity of professional burnout depending on the teaching certification (degree) of mainstream education teachers

V. Discussions

Self-perceived professional stress in special and mainstream education

Regarding how teachers perceive their own stress level, the self-perception of professional stress is significantly higher in the case of special education teachers compared to those within mainstream education.

Teachers' perception on the fact that their profession is very stressful was significantly appreciated by them.

From what has been assessed, we can state that teachers within special education perceive as being extremely stressful the following: rapid changes in the special education system, salary, overtime, preparation of attending courses, continuing vocational training programs, regular assessments, participation in meetings, methodical commissions, meetings dedicated to discussions regarding the granting of teaching certifications (degrees), merit gradations, activity with children who, as time goes on, come with more and more special educational requirements.

The large number of possible sources of stress identified, following the analysis of the results of the assessment questionnaires administered in this study, allowed to draw the conclusion that those teachers who begin to perceive themselves as ineffective reach a faster burnout. This view is supported by the conclusions of the research according to which it was noted that when a teacher develops self-perceptions of inefficiency and considers that his work environment is full of dissatisfaction, they focus on their inefficiency to solve the problems or the sources of potential dissatisfaction. This pattern of cognitive and emotional responses increases emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Similarly, other studies have explained that regarding teachers, self-perception of effectiveness affects burnout levels and how they will structure their attitudes toward teaching (Bandura, 1997; Evers, Brouwers & Tomic, 2002).

If the intensity and response reactions to problems or potential sources of dissatisfaction differ from one teacher to another, then we refer to the individual nature of reacting to stressors and describe the individual particularities of reacting to stress, stating that there are individual differences, including of gender and age, in reactions to stressful situations. Career, family, ambitions or health are possible stressors for some people, and for others are factors of satisfaction (Legeron, 2001). The reaction to stress is subjective and depends on the assessment of the person, giving a certain meaning to the interaction with the stressor (Bogathy, 2007).

The self-perceived teachers' professional stress level is independent of age and professional experience, both in special and mainstream schools.

Regarding the ways in which special education teachers react when exposed to situations and events that determine the staging of professional stress and burnout symptoms, were drawn conclusions also formulated by other specialists who, following the studies carried out, have shown that all these are highly dependent on the self-perceptions they develop about their causes (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1980).

An argument for the conclusion showing that self-perceived professional stress level is independent of the age and professional experience of teachers, both in special and mainstream education, may be that, in case the requirements for the employee constantly exceed their resources, the working conditions and/ or school climate are assessed by the employee as unfavorable. This aspect has been noticed in the literature through

conclusions that are similar to those of our study: teachers of different ages and at different stages of their careers, because they spend a lot of time in this field of work, end up establishing a direct relationship with work satisfaction (Berry, Rasberry & Williams, 2007; Gavish & Friedman, 2010; Aloe et al., 2014).

Professional burnout in special and mainstream education

Teachers' professional burnout is significantly more intense in the case of special and inclusive special education teachers compared to mainstream education teachers.

Burnout is a syndrome that manifests in teachers gradually and, as a result of individual experiences (Peeters & Rutte, 2005) they begin to feel emotionally exhausted and adopt a way of distancing themselves from students, their parents and colleagues, they end up feeling inefficient and stop doing important or meaningful things at work (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003).

The explanation for the occurrence of burnout can be given by the permanent changes at the level of school institutions, the perpetual crisis in the education system, which results in leaving the profession or the professional reorientation of teachers.

Expectations related to the teaching profession may not be met from the beginning for young people who choose this profession. Previous studies have shown that the institutional environment thus becomes a source of pressure for them, soon failing to understand their role, and in the absence of social support from management and colleagues, they can no longer clarify their responsibilities and perform their professional duties (Eastburg et al., 1994; Bährer-Kohler, 2012; Brock & Grady, 2000; Matheny, 2000; Deelstra et al., 2003).

The causes are related to a multitude of situations that start from the complex work carried out in a short time, too much paperwork to fill out, tasks with fixed deadlines, inadequate working conditions, many students in a class, inclusion in these groups of children with special educational needs, neglect of personal needs, these being listed in many studies that have established a direct relationship with stress and burnout syndrome on mainstream education teachers (Avargues-Navarro, 2010; Teven, 2007).

With regard to special education teachers, we believe that the high level of burnout can be explained by their working conditions, greater exposure to problematic and aggressive behaviors of students with

special educational needs, by role conflict and limited administrative support, aspects highlighted by other similar studies in the field (Hastings & Brown, 2002; Mircea, Rojahn & Esbensen, 2010; Ko et al., 2012; Brunsting, Sreckovic & Lane, 2014).

Professional burnout is independent of the age of teachers, both in special and mainstream education.

Another variable investigated in this study was the chronological age of teachers in both special and mainstream education, taking into account the results of studies that related it to burnout syndrome.

Our results are consistent with specialized studies that have confirmed that burnout is present among teachers of different ages (Aloe et al., 2014; Gavish & Friedman, 2010; Department for Education, 2016).

However, most studies remain divided into those whose results have shown that young age is a major factor in the occurrence of burnout syndrome (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Rudman & Gustavsson, 2011; Stoica & Mihai, 2014), and those attesting that along with aging the burnout level is higher (Kalimo et al., 2003; Schaufeli, Maslach & Marek, 2017).

Professional burnout is independent of professional experience in the case of special school teachers, but in the case of mainstream teachers, it is higher for less experienced teachers (the differences being significant in the case of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization).

Professional experience refers to the evolution in the teaching career expressed in the time spent by a person in the educational environment, from the employment that is usually done around 22-23 years of age, to the retirement, 61-65 years of age (Emergency Ordinance No. 10 of February 4, 2020, completion of the Law No. 263/2010).

This has become a variable in our study in order to find out the relationship between the number of years in which teachers carry out their activity and the symptoms of burnout syndrome, both in mainstream and special education. The hypothesis puts forward that professional stress and emotional exhaustion are more intense in the case of less experienced teachers, both in special and mainstream education.

The statistical results did not fully confirm this hypothesis, fact that was linked to the results of other research aimed at studying the relationship between teachers' professional experience and burnout and explained the contribution of seniority in work, both in terms of number of years spent in this profession, but

also in terms of meeting all requirements and criteria associated with remaining in activity.

To understand the significance of the conclusions of our research approach (professional burnout is independent of professional experience in the case of teachers in special schools, but in the case of teachers in mainstream schools, it is higher for less experienced teachers, the differences being significant in the case of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) we will present in a future article the results of other researches that focused on the same topic.

VI. Conclusions

The conclusions of this investigation may speak about the frustration at work and the negative emotional and professional consequences produced by the professional stress faced by teachers, until the occurrence and manifestation of the burnout syndrome symptoms.

Examining the results of this study, one can notice the consequences of professional stress and burnout on the behavior of teachers and students, with special influences on the quality of teaching activities and involvement in working with students. Also, teachers who showed a higher level of professional burnout are more likely to leave the profession. When teachers were given sufficient instructional support to ensure a high quality of teaching-learning-assessment and practical training activities, as well as emotional support, it was found that they experienced work-related stress for a shorter period of time and at lower intensities (Wong et al., 2017).

From this study it emerged that the way in which professional stress and burnout are perceived by mainstream and special education teachers can be adequately discriminated by the work-related stressors: time pressure, inappropriate behavior of students, unsupportive colleagues, aspects related to welfare, low salary, poor preparation/ training, crowded classrooms, discipline problems, lack of resources, lack of teaching and learning materials, lack of a well-designed program, bureaucracy, social and political pressures on educational organizations, insufficient reward and lack of participation in decision-making are some of the reasons for teachers' burnout.

On a larger scale, the growing number of teachers with psychological health problems (e.g., burnout syndrome) led to the publication of this study that considers as main themes the causes and consequences of these complaints.

The study examined the phenomenon of burnout among teachers working with students with

special educational needs and how this phenomenon is related to their perception on the positive and/ or negative aspects of working with this category of students. Comparing their professional burnout level with that of mainstream education teachers, the main findings showed that the two groups do not share similar perceptions regarding the aspects of teaching students with special educational needs.

While the results showed that workplace stress and professional burnout are significantly higher in special and inclusive special education compared to mainstream education, at the same time they suggested the importance of developing projects, especially some that give priority to understanding this phenomenon.

Based on this study, it can be said that teachers' professional stress and burnout are derived from the fact that they do not have enough knowledge about emotional labor that becomes an inherent part of their work. As the teachers' professional burnout has become a phenomenon that is not mentioned, we found it particularly useful to demonstrate that it affects the quality of educational services over a period of time and influences the behavior of the teacher in the classroom and, in the end, the teacher profession.

We note that by informing all teachers, and particularly those who decide to become special education teachers, about the phenomenon of professional burnout and the work specific to professional overload, their emotional work and burnout levels remain moderate.

Thus, the professional organizations and educational institutions should impose the optimization of classroom management, school management and school climate and should provide opportunities for teachers' professional growth, by offering, among others, specific initial vocational training programs and free continuing vocational training programs, aiming at more intensive psycho-pedagogical formation in the field of educational management, student behavior management and conflict management.

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