

## **OBSZARY PRAKTYKI ANDRAGOGICZNEJ**

***Magdalena Zadworna-Cieślak***

ORCID 0000-0002-0585-019X

***Karolina Kossakowska***

ORCID 0000-0003-3618-1918

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION**

#### **Dobrostan psychologiczny w zawodzie nauczyciela**

**Słowa kluczowe:** dobrostan nauczyciela, zawód nauczyciela, profilaktyka, satysfakcja zawodowa

**Streszczenie:** Zawód nauczyciela postrzegany jest jako obarczony wysokim ryzykiem stresu i wypalenia zawodowego. Rzadko jednak pełnienie tej roli zawodowej analizowane jest przez pryzmat dobrostanu. Zarówno stres, jak i dobrostan psychologiczny nauczyciela mogą być istotnie powiązane z wypaleniem zawodowym, satysfakcją z wykonywania zawodu i osiągnięciami zawodowymi. W złożonej naturze tego zjawiska można poszukiwać czynników, które wzmacniają pozytywne aspekty funkcjonowania w roli zawodowej. Celem artykułu jest próba opisu teoretycznych aspektów zjawiska dobrostanu nauczyciela, jego wyznaczników oraz dostępnych narzędzi jego pomiaru. Podkreślano także działania profilaktyczne w zakresie wspierania dobrostanu psychicznego nauczycieli.

For teachers to be regarded as competent, they are required not only be effective tutors, but also display a high level of personal maturity and possess multidisciplinary expertise. These demands influence the stress level of the practicing teacher. Those within the teaching profession are burdened with a high level of social responsibility, and teaching itself is associated with a high risk of loss of both physical and mental health. In addition, tension in schools can interfere with the teaching and educational processes, thus undermining the efforts of both students and teachers. Furthermore, the impact of stressors, together with a lack of ability of teachers to cope with their effects, can also promote the development

of various types of occupational stress and burnout (Griffith, Steptoe, & Cropley, 1999; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Mareš, 2017). Various other risk factors related to work-life balance and individual characteristics have also been noted, such as physical condition, personality and intelligence or temperament, as well as several contextual factors such as time pressure, discipline problems, lack of resources, lack of professional recognition, lack of support and the diversity of tasks required (Kokkinos, 2007).

Although positive teacher-student relationships are known to be of great value in student learning, behavior and achievement in the modern school environment (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011), teacher wellbeing has a strong influence on a number of educational aspects, and is an important factor in the teacher-student relationship: Scott and Dinham (2003) also note that in return, teacher satisfaction is also influenced by student achievement and personal efficacy.

The quality of relationships in a school impacts on the wellbeing of teachers and their ability to cope with the many and varied stresses that are the hallmarks of the profession. Teacher attitudes have been found to make a difference to their ability to respond effectively to the challenges they face (Roffey, 2012).

The traditional aspects of any discussion regarding the specifics of teaching work are stress and burnout, as well as issues concerning job satisfaction. However, the concept of general teacher wellbeing is quite atypical. The present study investigates the significance of this wellbeing and how it relates to the specifics of the teaching profession. It also examines its constituent factors, its assessment and how it relates to the learning and teaching process. The study also examines how wellbeing can be enhanced.

### **Wellbeing – psychological, school and pedagogical**

A new field of Psychology, *positive psychology*, has arisen, whose aim is to define the characteristics associated with a „good life”, or a life of optimum quality; the name *wellbeing* has been given to these characteristics. The theoretical model of psychological wellbeing established by Ryff (1989) presents it as positive psychological health, including positive evaluations of oneself and one's past life, a sense of continued growth and development as a person, and the belief that one's life is purposeful and meaningful; wellbeing is also influenced by the quality of relationships with other people, the capacity to manage one's life and world, and one's sense of self-determination. Diener, Lucas and Oishi (2002) use the term *subjective wellbeing* to refer to one's affective and cognitive self-assessment of life in terms of emotional reactions and cognitive judgements of satisfaction, while Seligman (2012) proposes the term *flourish* to refer to a sense of engagement, positive emotions, meaning, achievements and relationships with others.

Developing socio-psychological wellbeing within schools can be seen as an active, collaborative process in which the relationship between individuals and their environment is constantly constructed and modified. In their School

Wellbeing Model, Konu and Rimpela (2002) define wellbeing as a four-dimensional phenomenon, associating it with teaching and education, learning and achievements. They divide school wellbeing into four conditions: school conditions, connected with „having”, social relationships, connected with „loving”, means for self-fulfilment, connected with „being”, and health status.

In accordance with Soini, Pyhältö and Pietarinen (2010), the enhancement of *pedagogical wellbeing* could be understood as a process comprising succeeding cycles of positive or negative learning experiences, leading either to empowerment and engagement in positive cases, or to burnout in severely negative cases. Accordingly, pedagogical wellbeing is formed in the core processes of the work of the teacher, i.e. the performance and development of the teaching–learning process, manifested as planning classroom activities, interacting with pupils, performing evaluations, and choosing and developing instructional tools. The degree of pedagogical wellbeing attained by the teacher may either hinder or promote the attainment of pedagogical goals, and therefore serves as a regulator for attaining learning outcomes.

From an organizational perspective, employee wellbeing is an important factor in quality, performance and productivity. Higher levels of teacher wellbeing are associated with less sick leave and lower supply teacher costs. Teacher happiness levels have a knock-on effect on students: Emotionally-exhausted teachers may use reactive and punitive responses that contribute to foster negative classroom climates and student-teacher relationships. For example, the prosocial classroom model proposed by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) highlights the importance of social and emotional competence and wellbeing on the part of the teacher in the development and maintenance of supportive teacher-student relationships, effective classroom management, and successful social and emotional learning program implementation. These factors contribute to the creation of a classroom climate which is more conducive to learning and which promotes positive developmental outcomes among students. Traditionally, the role of teaching has been one of nurturing and developing student potential. As Evers, Tomic and Brouwers (2004) attest, teachers play a valuable role in helping children grow, and to do this they must remain physically and mentally well. It may be plausible to argue that teacher wellbeing is influenced by job satisfaction and competence, and any lack of wellbeing associated with work may lead to stress, which in turn may affect job performance.

### **The determinants of psychological wellbeing in teachers**

According to some researchers, little research has been performed into predictors of mental wellbeing (Day & Gu, 2014), and there is a lack of consensus regarding the best approach to operationalizing teacher wellbeing (McCullough, 2015). In addition, a number of studies have attempted to highlight the factors that may be important for mental wellbeing among teachers. In contrast to these, the

present study does not promote any concept of psychological wellbeing, but rather focuses on presenting factors related to psychological wellbeing in the teaching profession.

Teacher wellbeing is influenced by environmental, biological and social factors, as well as psychological factors and those related to the activity itself. Of these, the psychological factors appear to play the most important role, and these are described below.

The factors determining teachers wellbeing can be divided into risk factors and protective factors. Occupational stress and burnout can play an important role as risk factors. The work of a teacher demands the performance of many duties which can influence stress level: Work activities, place in the hierarchy, career path, relations between employees or general organization in the workplace and the level of work-life balance can all act as potential work stressors. Stress has an influence on various work outcomes, including workplace engagement, job satisfaction and attrition. Teacher stress can also have personal consequences including absence, burnout, physical and emotional distress, reduced self confidence and self-esteem, damaged personal relationships and even suicide. Skilled and experienced teachers choose to leave the profession, resulting in a significant loss for the profession (Rudlow, 1999).

As burnout results from prolonged exposure to high levels of stress, the presence of increasing burnout rates among teachers is indicative of the nature of the stressful environment they work in (Hamann & Gordon, 2000). Maslach (1999) proposes that burnout is a long-term process that results from prolonged exposure to chronic job stressors. It can be seen as being associated with psychological and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Thus, psychological wellbeing is negatively related to burnout. Research shows that burnout significantly predicts negative consequences at the physical, psychological, professional, family and social levels, while psychological wellbeing, and more specifically emotional hardiness, reduce these negative consequences (Kareaga, Exeberria & Smith, 2008).

Among the protective factors affecting wellbeing, particular significance has been attributed to the personality and strategies adopted for coping with stress. Resiliency, understood as a personal resource, represents the presence of a group of personality characteristics allowing for effective coping with highly stressful events. It promotes perseverance and flexible adaptation to the demands of life, enables the individual to mobilise and take remedial action in difficult situations, and increases the tolerance of negative emotions and failure. A resilient individual is characterized by emotional stability, is more likely to regard difficulties as an opportunity to gain new experiences, and see himself as a person who has an impact on decision making (Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński 2008).

Resiliency may significantly increase the effectiveness of coping with stress (Ogińska-Bulik & Zadworna-Cieślak, 2014). Having the ability to deal with stressors is vital in teacher retention. School teaching is regarded as a stressful

occupation, but the perception of the job as stressful may be influenced by coping responses and social support. Research among teachers shows that coping and social support not only moderate the impact of stressors on wellbeing, but also influence the appraisal of environmental demands as stressful (Griffith, Steptoe & Copley 1999).

One of the most neglected aspects of teacher training is the need for thorough preparation in the interpersonal skills that are needed by teachers in modern schools. Interpersonal skills in the teaching profession include communication, positive motivation, effective and positive body language and humor. Effective communication between teachers and students needs to be performed at the level of understanding of the student, which can be difficult if each student has a different level of learning and understanding. Effective, positive body language employs **non-verbal communication** to make a long-lasting impression in the minds of students and to draw them into a discussion. **Positive motivation** in education typically produces positive learning. Not all students are engaged with all subjects and sometimes in unpopular subjects, it is necessary to demonstrate applications in areas that interest students to increase motivation to study. Another skill set that allows a teacher to maintain student motivation **is humor**; this can help hold the attention of a class, which is critical to the learning process (Martin, 2009; Misbah, Gulikers, Maulana, & Mulder; 2015).

According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), another essential social-emotional skill for teachers is empathy, not only for the personal wellbeing of the teacher but also to improve student learning. Empathetic teachers have a more positive self-image, are more self-disclosing to their students and respond more to student feelings. Thus, empathy, serving as a way to understand the diverse perspectives or complex emotions of others, can help improve teaching strategies and encourage more effective work practices, which also protect against burnout.

Another important factor influencing the psychological wellbeing of teachers is self-efficacy. Studies show that a belief in one's self-efficacy negatively correlates with psychological tension, burnout and depression, and positively with pro-health behaviors (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). In its broadest sense, self-efficacy is regarded as the conviction held by an individual about his or her personal ability to fulfill a variety of conditions leading to the achievement of intended results. Self-efficacy can be responsible for success or failure. If the teacher possesses a poor sense of self-efficacy and performs tasks that lead to failure, this can be a source of stress, and can act as the next step of burnout syndrome. It is important not to confuse feelings of efficacy with expectations regarding the result. Chomczyńska-Rubacha and Rubacha (2006) emphasize that self-efficacy does not relate to the certainty that action will result in the achievement of a certain standard (e.g. „I know that my lecture will inspire cognitive curiosity of students”), it is rather the belief held by the teacher that this goal is achievable.

Another important aspect concerned with maintaining good psychological health as a teacher is respecting work-life balance (WLB). WLB describes an arrangement which fosters the harmonious merging and stability between work and one's private life so that work, family and interests create a coherent wholeness. A study by Nilsson, Blomqvist and Anderson (2017) highlights the important role played by school management in achieving WLB by reducing the time pressure placed on teachers. The researchers emphasise the need to address the individual resources possessed by teachers regarding their work-life balance.

Understanding how teacher stress, burnout, coping, and self-efficacy are interrelated can inform preventive and intervention efforts to support teachers. Teachers suffering high stress, high levels of burnout, and with insufficient coping strategies were associated with the poorest student outcomes (Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2017). Many studies have shown strong associations between the affective qualities of teacher-student relationships and school engagement and achievement by students (Roorda et. al., 2011). Teacher satisfaction is not only a very important protective factor, both for the teacher and the student.

### **Measuring teacher wellbeing**

The choice of tools used to measure teacher wellbeing is typically associated with its assumed theoretical underpinning. Therefore, it can be accessed through the prism of stress experienced as part of everyday teaching duties, using stress measures such as the Teacher Stress Inventory (Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995), or through the presence (or absence) of burnout symptoms with the Teacher Burnout Scale or TBS (Seidman & Zager, 1986). An approach based on positive psychology will, in turn, focus on the factors positively affecting the mental state of teachers, and thus the level of their wellbeing: i.e. self-efficacy (e.g. The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale; TSES; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) or social competence (e.g. Social-Emotional Competence Teacher Rating Scale, SECTRS; Tom, 2012). McCullough (2015) notes that some traditional measures of teacher wellbeing focus only on the level of satisfaction associated with job issues (e.g. Parker & Martin, 2009); however, all of the competences described above are essential for teachers to fulfil their professional duties and remain in good mental condition.

Only a few standardized tools for measuring wellbeing are devoted strictly to teachers. One is the Teachers Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (TSWQ) developed by Renshaw, Long and Cook (2015), which can be used to assess the functioning of the teacher at work. It is based on the three positive indicators of teacher wellbeing proposed by van Horn, Taris, Schaufeli and Schreurs (2004): self-efficacy, positive affect and prosocial relationships. The TSWQ consists of eight items (e.g. „I am a successful teacher” or „I feel like people at this school care about me”) answered on a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = *almost never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*, 4 = *almost always*). An exploratory factor analysis performed

during an initial validation study revealed only two subscales: (1) School Connectedness and (2) Teaching Efficacy (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015). The subscale scores can be used as standalone wellbeing indicators or they can be summed to create a Total Teacher Wellbeing Scale. Higher scale scores represent greater levels of teacher wellbeing. All TSWQ scales have been found to have at least adequate internal reliability and to have discriminant and convergent validity with indicators of teacher stress, emotional burnout, and perceived support for teachers and students within the school environment. The authors note that the TSWQ is intended to be used for practical purposes as an outcome and progress-monitoring measure, and potentially as a screening instrument. However, further research is needed to demonstrate its value in this regard.

Another measure is the Teacher Wellbeing Scale (TWBS) developed by Collie (2014), which addresses the question „Currently, how do the following aspects of being a teacher affect your wellbeing as a teacher?” (Collie, Shapka, Perry, & Martin, 2015). The answers consist of sixteen items which are rated on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 = *Negatively*, 2 = *Mostly negatively*, 3 = *More negatively than positively*, 4 = *Neither positively nor negatively*, 5 = *More positively than negatively*, 6 = *Mostly positively* and 7 = *Positively*. The statements are related to the work experience of teachers and are divided into three factors of teacher wellbeing: workload wellbeing (e.g. „*Staying late after work for meetings and activities*”), organizational wellbeing (e.g. „*Communication between members of the school*”), and student interaction wellbeing (e.g. „*Student behavior*”). Cronbach’s alphas for the three factors were .85, .89, and, .82, respectively (Collie, 2014).

Both of the scales described above are new tools, but their psychometric characteristics are satisfying and they appear to be promising tools for measuring wellbeing in this specific professional group.

### **Practical implications – good practices for the prevention of stress and promotion of teacher wellbeing**

The basis of work satisfaction encompasses preventing the negative effects of stress and dealing with it. Preventing stress and strengthening wellbeing in the teaching profession should be a multi-faceted approach which takes into account the work environment. The implementation of stress management programs in schools should result from a detailed analysis of the current situation and organization. Preventive interventions should be focused on increasing wellbeing, not just eliminating the negative effects of stress. Employees should be involved in the creation, implementation and evaluation of the program. Prophylaxis should be complex, and arguably should be implemented on at least three levels: formal, social and individual (Zadworna-Cieślak & Zbonikowski, 2016).

The formal level of prevention should include actions directed towards education managers: school directors, pedagogical supervisors and the educational authorities. It should aim both to raise awareness and to promote projects that

support the personal resources used by the teacher in coping. In addition, it would be worthwhile to postulate a formal extension of the school prophylaxis program to include the aim of strengthening the personal resources of students, as well as teachers. Furthermore, future teacher training programs should be enriched with additional psychological content.

The social level of prevention should include actions directed towards the social environment of the daily work of the teacher: pupils, parents, other educators and staff members. These activities aim to develop characteristics that protect individuals from burnout and stress, such as teamwork, the ability to communicate and support one another in difficult situations, assigning collective values and goals in the teaching/learning process, and the ability to work together in achieving them. It should be noted that prevention activities associated with burnout risk factors directed toward pupils also indirectly play a role in preventing burnout in teachers.

The individual level of prevention should be addressed towards the teacher. Developmental approaches based on this level can be seen in the modern school, and are most often delivered in the form of lectures, i.e. using an informational preventive strategy. Research has shown this approach to be relatively ineffective because, beyond raising awareness of the problem, it does not develop personal competences. In practice, this strategy is often well evaluated by teachers, because it does not require the participants to work actively to develop; the active learner role is often difficult for emotionally-exhausted teachers. However, psychoeducational prevention should be promoted, allowing the development of interpersonal skills and authentic personal development.

Finally, it is worth mentioning some preventive initiatives that encourage a positive approach to education, and that focus on the teacher as well as on the student. One example is the Positive Education program designed by Martin Seligman, which was first implemented as part of the Greelong Grammar School Project. Positive Education is defined as education for both traditional skills and for happiness. The preventive program focuses on how teachers can use personal skills in their personal and professional lives (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Another approach to fostering more positive teacher practice is Visible Wellbeing (VWB), described as instructional leadership that integrates the three separate fields of positive education, visible thinking and visible learning. It provides a way for instructional leaders to help teachers adopt pedagogical practices that enhance student wellbeing (Walters, 2017).

Unfortunately, due to the limited scope of this study, it is not possible to provide a more in-depth review of these initiatives. Nevertheless, the wellbeing of the teacher can be seen as a necessary element of general wellbeing in education.

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### Psychological wellbeing in the teaching profession

**Keywords:** teacher wellbeing, teaching profession, prevention, job satisfaction

**Abstract:** Teaching is considered a highly stressful career and teacher wellbeing plays an important role in both teacher burnout and teacher satisfaction and achievement. The nature of teacher wellbeing is complex and is largely theoretical, but there are some universal factors that may contribute to the psychological functioning of teachers. The aim of the presented article is to discuss the theoretical foundations of wellbeing issues associated with the teaching profession, including risk and protective factors, and to present the measurement tools available. The article also highlights preventive activities, which can be carried out to support the wellbeing of people working in the teaching profession.

Dane do korespondencji:

**dr Magdalena Zadworna-Cieślak**

Institute of Psychology, University of Lodz

Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Health Psychology

Smugowa Street 10/12, 91-433 Łódź, Poland

Phone +48 42 66 555 13

e-mail: magdalena.zadworna@uni.lodz.pl

**dr Karolina Kossakowska**

Institute of Psychology, University of Lodz

Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Psychopathology and Clinical Psychology,

Smugowa Street 10/12, 91-433 Łódź, Poland

Phone +48 42 66 555 15; e-mail: karolina.kossakowska@uni.lodz.pl