Teacher Stress and Free Time as a Space for Dealing with Stress

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to examine teachers' stress and free time as a space for coping with stress. When teachers experience negative emotions such as anxiety or frustration due to some form of their work, this is referred to as teacher stress. Research shows that teachers' reported stress levels continue to increase. Free time is a space where teachers can use external support and personal resources to mitigate the negative effects of teacher stress. From a pedagogical point of view, it is therefore important to design quality free time to prevent and reduce teacher stress and improve teacher well-being.
Keywords: well-being, professional stress, workload, job satisfaction

Mokytojų stresas ir laisvalaikis kaip streso įveikimo erdvė

Santrauka. Šio straipsnio tikslas – ištirti mokytojų patiriamą stresą ir laisvalaikį kaip streso įveikimo erdvę. Mokytojų patiriamos neigiamos emocijos, tokios kaip nerimas ar nusivylimas dėl tam tikrų savo darbo ypatumų, vadinamos mokytojų stresu. Mokytojų savistatų tyrimai rodo, kad jų streso lygis nuolat didėja. Laisvalaikis – erdvė, kurioje mokytojai gali pasinaudoti išorine parama ir asmeniniais ištekliais, kad sušvelnintų neigiamą streso poveikį. Todėl pedagoginiu požiūriu svarbu kurti kokybišką laisvalaikį, kad būtų užkirstas kelias mokytojų stresui arba sumažintas jo mastas ir pagerinta mokytojų gerovė.
Pagrindiniai žodžiai: gerovė, profesinis stresas, darbo krūvis, pasitenkinimas darbu.

Introduction

Stress at work is one of the biggest causes of occupational diseases in the world. Work-related stress is the reaction people can have when faced with work demands and pressures that do not match their knowledge and skills and that challenge their ability to cope (World Health Organization, 2020). It leads to cognitive, physical and behavioural responses. The results of Gallup's 'Global Workplace 2021' survey show a worrying state

of employees around the world (Gallup, 2022). Although the pandemic was thought to have taken its toll on mental health and caused stress, research has shown that the levels of stress they experience are higher than ever before. Johnson et al. (2005) find professions in health, education and social care to be very stressful.

The teaching profession is often considered (contrary to public perception) to be extremely stressful. At the beginning of the 21st century, the World Health Organisation declared stress at work a global epidemic, and since then occupational stress has increased even further due to the global crisis and unemployment (Brkić & Rijavec, 2011).

In modern society, the prevalence of work obligations and working hours sometimes make it difficult for individuals to realise personal affirmations and the need for rest in their free time (Valjan Vukić, 2013). Indeed, free time, when individuals are free from all obligations, should make them happy and allow them to develop their own abilities (Previšić, 2000). Unfortunately, precisely because of the dominance of work over free time, this is sometimes difficult to achieve and can lead to stress and thus less job satisfaction and life satisfaction in general.

Previous research has shown that job satisfaction is related to teachers' well-being (Smrtić & Rijavec, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to direct further research towards the identification of resources that improve human well-being. Teachers' subjective well-being is crucial for their welfare and is also an important factor for teacher effectiveness (Duckworth, Dutton & Quinn, 2003; according to Smrtić & Rijavec, 2019).

It can be briefly summarised that the teachers' well-being is a prerequisite for professional success and development (Trinkūnienė, Emeljanovas, Tumynaitė & Poteliūnienė, 2017), while long-term exposure to stress at work leads to burnout, which has negative consequences for mental health (García-Arroyo & Osca, 2017) and, among other things, for teachers' effectiveness (Larson, Cook, Fiat & Lyon, 2018; Braun, Roeser, Mashburn & Skinner, 2019). Free time, on the other hand, can play the role of a space in which stress is managed (Trenberth & Dewe, 2002), but also preserves the well-being of the individual, as it affects the quality of life (Wheatley, 2017).

Studies mentioned in the paper are certainly important for the theoretical understanding of the topic in the field of pedagogy and they emphasise the need for further research and practical measures in relation to the prevention and/or management of stress and burnout at work, the improvement of teachers' well-being and the organisation of free time with the aim of reducing stress and increasing teachers' satisfaction and well-being. Given their importance for teachers, these aspects are the focus of this review paper. The aim of the article is therefore to analyse their interrelation, i.e. to examine teachers' stress and free time as a space for coping with stress. A research method used was the literature review, i.e. a semisystematic approach and a snowball method due to the possibility of synthesising knowledge, the possibility of identifying theoretical perspectives as well as creating further research plans on the mentioned topic. The database was searched using keywords and the papers were selected based on their content analysis, i.e. their relevance. By analysing the literature, new sources were opened up, which were then analysed in terms of content and included or discarded for further research on the topic.

Well-being

According to Rijavec (2015), well-being is defined in positive psychology as a valuable life goal and a key measure of a person's positive functioning. There is a difference between hedonic or subjective well-being, which is determined "in terms of satisfaction and avoidance of discomfort," and eudaemonic or psychological well-being, which refers to "the realisation of one's potential" (Ryan & Deci, 2001; according to Smrtić & Rijavec, 2015, p. 16). When it comes to an individual's subjective well-being, it refers to the individual's perception of how good his or her life is, and it also includes different ways of evaluating and experiencing one's life (Lucas & Diener, 2008; Tov & Diener, 2013; all according to Plaza Leutar, 2021). A key role in the formation of a person's general subjective well-being is played by their temperament and personality traits, their own goals and values, the way they deal with life situations and events, but also the degree to which they do not neglect their own emotions, desires and needs, as well as the culture in which they live (Tadić, 2010). When it comes to a person's psychological well-being, it is seen as a "process of personal realisation of true human nature" rather than an outcome (Vielma & Alonso, 2010; according to Plaza Leutar, 2021, p. 292).

The focus of research on subjective well-being is on the analysis of the experience of life satisfaction, i.e. on the analysis of personal and subjective well-being associated with positive emotions, and pleasant sensations, i.e. the dimension of pleasure whose aim is to please oneself. In contrast to the focus of subjective well-being research, the focus of psychological well-being research is on the study of personal progress, individual self-actualisation and meaning in life. It is important to distinguish individual desires or needs that lead to well-being in a broader sense and promote human growth from the fulfilment of desires or needs that lead to immediate pleasure (Vielma & Alonso, 2010; according to Plaza Leutar, 2021).

Exposure to constant change in the work environment leads to an increased risk of stress, and thus an increased risk to well-being. Moreover, it is important to emphasise that teachers' well-being is also a prerequisite for their professional development and success (Trinkūnienė, Emeljanovas, Tumynaitė & Poteliūnienė, 2017). However, exposure to stress and a lack of free time in which teacher can relax well and develop personal inclinations and interests, can lead not only to dissatisfaction with work and career development, but also to dissatisfaction with life in general, which at the same time poses a risk to the individual's well-being.

A practical recommendation would therefore be to schedule free time every day to focus exclusively on your own well-being in order to reduce the risk of stress.

Stress in general

The concept of stress can be studied from the perspective of different sciences and there is no unambiguous definition of the concept of stress.

Stress is "a state of disturbed physiological, psychological and social equilibrium of an individual caused by an assessment of the physical, psychological or social vulner-

ability of an individual or a person close to him" (Havelka & Havelka Meštović, 2013, p. 112). Lazarus and Folkman (2004) describe stress as the relationship among the individual and the environment, taking into account the characteristics of the person but also the nature of events in the environment, i.e. they describe it as a combination of physical, emotional and/or behavioural reactions that occur when we appraise an event from the environment as threatening because it exceeds our resources for successful coping and thus endangers personal well-being.

Professional Stress – Teacher's Stress

Professional stress can be defined as a "contradiction between the demands of the workplace and the environment and our abilities, desires and expectations to meet those demands" (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1996; according to Družić Ljubotina & Friščić, 2014, p. 8). Namely, when a person feels that he or she cannot fulfil certain professional requirements in his or her work environment, certain emotional, behavioural and physical reactions to stressors occur, i.e. stress develops in the person. This experience of stress is individual and variable. Therefore, what is stressful for one person at one moment does not mean that it will be stressful for the same or another person at another moment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; according to Družić Ljubotina & Friščić, 2014). Some of the most striking consequences of long-term exposure to intense professional stress are lower job satisfaction and professional burnout.

Professional stress, i.e. teacher stress, can be defined as ''the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (Kyriacou, 2001, p. 28; according to Ferguson, Mang & Frost, 2017, p. 64).

The causes of stress in the workplace can vary depending on the type of work. Research has identified poor working conditions, the structure of the organisation and roles assigned within it (unclear work role), career development (e.g., lack of promotion), relationships with colleagues, work climate and inability to balance work and professional life as the most common stressors (Cooper & Marshal, 2013).

Despite public perceptions, teaching is a stressful profession and recent research shows increased levels of stress among teachers (Nasser Abu-Alhija, 2015; Scheuch, Haufe & Seibt, 2015; Ferguson et al., 2017; Osipova, Nikishov & Rakitskaya, 2018; Bottiani, Duran, Pas & Bradshaw, 2019; Wettstein, Schneider, Holtforth & La Marca, 2021). The individual, social and economic impact of teachers' occupational stress underlines the need for early identification of health conditions in teachers and the importance of preventive interventions (Salvagioni et al., 2017). Previous studies on teacher stress are mainly based on self-assessments of subjective stress experiences and ignore data on real-time physiological stress responses (Wettstein, Kühne, Tschacher & La Marca, 2020; Wettstein et al., 2021).

Bottiani et al. (2019) find that more than 90% of teachers experience some form of stress at work.

Teachers in Croatia are not satisfied with their status or the attitude of the relevant ministry towards their profession and see their own profession as extremely demanding and important, but also undervalued in today's society (Burić et al., 2017; according to Jukić, 2022).

Society, as well as education policy makers, are often unaware of the physiological and psychological consequences of the teaching profession (Raines Evers, 2011). Therefore, little research has been done to find out how best to prevent stress and how to intervene in chronic teacher stress.

The above scientific findings certainly contribute to a better understanding of stress, but it would be desirable to focus further research on ways and strategies to prevent and intervene in teacher stress. In this way, it would contribute in practical terms not only to reducing stress and burnout at work, but also to improving the well-being of teachers.

The Burnout Syndrome in Teachers

The concept of "burnout," being burnt out at work as a result of intense and long-term stress at work, is increasingly mentioned in connection with the teaching profession. Teacher burnout syndrome appears when there is a mismatch among job demands or stressors and the assets available to cope with them, and as a result these chronic stressors have a negative impact on teachers' mental health (García-Arroyo & Osca, 2017). It manifests itself in a decrease in motivation, interest, emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, a lower assessment of self-efficacy and a generally lower productivity and satisfaction with oneself and the work environment (Maslach & Leiter 1999; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter 2001). Miljković and Rijavec (2013; according to Škojo & Kristek, 2018) highlight employees whose job description involves supervising, guiding, teaching and helping others, such as teachers, as a particularly high-risk group. If not identified and addressed promptly, teacher burnout can terminate in physical and somatic complaints, chronic anxiety and job resignation (Marek et al., 2017; according to Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019). Professional burnout in teachers is one of the worst consequences of long-term professional stress, and the worst consequence of intensive work with children and young people in everyday educational stressful situations, because it not only has a negative impact on the physical and mental health and work efficiency of teachers, but also has negative consequences for the students, towards whom the teacher may become insensitive, indifferent or cynical.

The negative consequences of burnout at work for the teacher, but also for the students, point to the need to recognise the cause of burnout in order to prevent and mitigate the consequences. The article also lists the causes of teacher stress.

Causes of Teacher Stress

Stress occurs when the demands of the job and the individual situation exceed the individual's ability to respond to the challenges of work in a normal, emotionally balanced way. Research by Boyle and colleagues (1995; according to Brkić & Rijavec, 2011)

indicates at least four dimensions of teacher stress: student misbehaviour, time pressure and poor working conditions, need for professional recognition, and poor relationships with colleagues. Teachers are exposed to increasing pressure, greater responsibility, limited authority, increased work and programme loads, increased professional and administrative demands, frequent curriculum reform and innovation, changes in educational policy, the development of information and communication technologies, the need for continuous training and improvement, lack of autonomy in teaching, poor working and material conditions, inadequate pay, declining professional status in society, a sense of being undervalued by society, external evaluations... (Hargreaves et al, 2006; Martinko, 2009; Fuller, Goodwyn & Francis-Brophy, 2013), leading to the teaching profession being described as extremely stressful (Johnson et al., 2005; Maslach et al., 2001; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; all according to Jukić, 2022). This is confirmed by the research of Scheuch et al. (2015) and Kyriacou (2015). Stress among teachers has been identified as one of the most common reasons for leaving the teaching profession (Bachkirova, 2015).

Workload is most often cited as a source of teacher stress (the teaching profession is undergoing a process of intensification all over the world, expanding the role to fulfil greater demands of responsibility) (Ballet & Kelchermans, 2009; according to Carrol et al., 2022). The concept of workload and what it means for teachers is multi-layered and complex, reflecting the numerous roles teachers play in their everyday activities. For instance, Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014; according to Carrol et al., 2022) argue that workload should distinguish among teaching-related tasks and non-teaching-related assingments. Their research has shown that the workload associated with teaching, which is related to the interpersonal relationships among teachers and students, has one of the major effects on teachers' emotional fatigue.

Roloff and Brown (2011) emphasise that the teacher's work from home, in addition to school work, increases feelings of stress. Work that intrudes on personal and family time is perceived as an added difficulty and weakens the connection between home and comfort. Time demands that go beyond the original work contract are referred to as "extra role activities" and are closely related to extended psychological stress and burnout. Teacher stress also increases the pressure of standardised assessment because it limits and focuses on the execution of the plan and programme (Thompson, 2016).

Teachers very often point to stressors such as: distraction by students during lessons, lack of student motivation, problems in maintaining discipline (Kyriacou, 2001; according to Wettstein, 2021).

Existing literature confirms the link between stress and lack of social support (Taylor, 2011). Teachers with high levels of job stress have low levels of social support at work. Richards (2012; according to Ferguson et al., 2017) found that the most common way teachers cope with stress is to rely on friends and family relationships.

As mentioned earlier, the literature defines numerous stressors that are recognised and cited by teachers, but there is a lack of advice to help identify sources of stress in everyday working life. This is extremely important, especially considering the speed of change in everyday life and the specificity of working conditions as well as the individual differences of teachers.

Consequences of Professional Stress of Teacher

Burnout at work among teachers, and in particular the feelings of exhaustion and cynicism that occur as a result of burnout, lead to less engagement and effort in lesson planning and less acceptable social behaviour towards students, resulting in students feeling less competent, which in turn results in a lower likelihood of students internalising intrinsic motives for learning, which overall reduces the capacity and depth of learning and motivation (Maslach & Leiter, 1999; Klusmann, Richter & Lüdtke, 2016). A meta-analysis of the relationship between teacher stress and burnout and unacceptable forms of student behaviour showed that all dimensions of chronic stress and burnout are associated with higher levels of disruptive behaviour in students (Aloe, Amo & Shanahan, 2014). A number of studies confirm the increasingly common problem of teacher burnout in different educational contexts and different countries (Durr et al., 2014; Marek et al., 2017; all according to Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019). Research shows that burnout in teachers negatively affects their efficiency, motivation, self-esteem, self-confidence, productivity, job satisfaction and professional engagement (Larrivee, 2012; Gold & Roth, 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Marek et al., 2017; Herman et al., 2018; all according to Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019). Furthermore, research findings suggest a negative correlation between teacher stress and students' academic achievement (Klusmann et al., 2016; Wettstein et al., 2021).

In the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the stress on teachers was extremely high. One of the first measures taken by governments around the world to maintain social distance and reduce the risk of contagion was to close schools and switch to online teaching. Their work tasks have changed and the workload has multiplied exponentially. Teachers reported increased stress due to workload, more psychosomatic problems, feelings of being overwhelmed, anxiety (Gómez-Domínguez, Navarro-Mateu, Gómez-Domínguez & Giménez-Espert, 2023).

The results of a survey conducted in Australia showed that more than half of the respondents (out of 850 teachers) noted being under severe or extreme stress and thinking over leaving the profession, with teachers working in rural and remote areas, primary school teachers and early career teachers reporting the highest levels of stress and burnout (Carrol et al., 2022). In 2017, 60% of teachers surveyed in Australia said that stress at work exceeded an acceptable level (this is significantly higher than the average stress reported by public and government sector employees – 41%). The increase in statements at the annual level (5%, 2016–2017) and 20% at the three-year level (in 2014–2017) is worrying. Research conducted among Canadian teachers (McIntyre, 2006; Duxbury & Higgens, 2013; all according to Ferguson et al., 2017) and teachers in Hong Kong (Leung et al. 2009; according to Ferguson et al., 2017) also confirms the increasing statements about stress levels among teachers.

The strength of the studies mentioned is that they point to the consequences of professional stress and contribute to the visibility of stress and burnout in the workplace for teachers. They also point to the complexity of the teaching profession and the increase in work demands.

Strategies for Dealing with Stress

Stress management is a process of coping with difficult circumstances, making efforts to resolve interpersonal and personal problems, and attempting to overcome, decrease or tolerate symptoms caused by stressful and unpleasant situations (Weiten & Lloyd, 2005). Coping strategies include various behaviours that a person uses to overcome difficulties in stressful situations. They refer to emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses to stressful situations and vary over time and according to the characteristics of a particular situation (Vulić-Prtorić, 1997). People with better developed coping strategies are more sensitive to changes (around and within themselves) and can react more appropriately in stressful situations (Lončarić, 2006).

Although many psychologists emphasise that the concept of coping is multidimensional and that there are several different approaches to stress coping (Spirito et al., 1996; Wertlieb et al., 1987; Carver et al., 1989; all according to Vulić-Prtorić, 1997), the widely used model of Lazarus and Folkman (2004) distinguishes two groups of stress coping strategies: emotion-oriented strategies and problem-oriented ones.

Emotion-focused coping represents a group of cognitive processes aimed at reducing emotional pain and distress (strategies such as avoidance, distancing, minimisation, positive comparisons, finding positive values in negative events and selective attention) (Brkić & Rijavec, 2011). Problem-oriented coping is often focused on problem solving, but while problem solving is primarily environmental, problem-oriented coping also includes "inward-looking" strategies.

Mastering effective stress management strategies can mitigate the negative effects of stressful events.

Stress resilience implies, among other things, the ability to positively reorganise activities despite difficulties, involving personal resources and external sources of support (Bottiani et al., 2019).

Free Time

Free time can be considered as a space for personality enrichment, individualisation, but also for socialisation, self-realisation, relaxation and finally recovery from stress. It can represent an area of recovery and stress management characterised by a dual nature: activity and challenge and passive recovery and regeneration of the organism (Trenberth & Dewe, 2002). In the modern post-industrial era, it is society's duty to pay more attention to understanding the concept of free time in order to maintain the well-being of individuals, but also of society as a whole, as it directly affects the quality of life (Wheatley, 2017).

Free time can represent the space of so-called recovery from work, which Meijman and Mulder (1998; according to Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007) define as a process in which certain individual systems activated during a stressful experience return to their original level of functioning before the stressful situation. According to the theory of resource conservation, people tend to acquire, retain and preserve them (internal resources – e.g.,

certain personal characteristics or energy – and external resources – e.g., money). Stress is a threat to our resources. When people recover from stress, they try to acquire new resources and restore lost resources, especially internal resources such as mood and energy (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). The same authors highlight strategies that help recover from stress in leisure time: psychological distance from work (physical and mental), relaxation (activities that do not demand much mental or physical effort), skill enhancement (activities that divert attention from work by providing a person with challenging experiences and the opportunity to learn in other areas) and control (the ability to choose between two or more options).

Teachers' subjective well-being emerged as one of the most crucial predictors of perceived stress, with higher levels of subjective well-being being associated with lower stress, autonomous of workload and emotion regulation competences. This conclusion is consistent with a considerable body of evidence suggesting that subjective well-being is fundamental to psychological and physical well-being (Diener & Chan, 2011; according to Carrol et al., 2022) and supports the notion that interventions that directly aim well-being may be key attempts to decrease teacher stress (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; according to Carrol et al., 2022).

Renshaw, Long & Cook (2015) also emphasise the importance of subjective well-being as a predictor of teachers' successful and healthy functioning in their teaching roles.

The importance individuals place on leisure time as a measure of coping with work-related stress is a neglected area of research (Trenberth & Dewe, 2002).

Sharif, Mogilner and Hershfield (2021) analysed data from 21 736 Americans who participated in a time use survey. As leisure time increased, subjective well-being also increased, but levelled off after about two hours and began to decline after five hours. The correlations in both directions were statistically significant – higher levels of free time were significantly associated with higher levels of well-being, but only up to a point. After that, excess leisure time was no longer associated with higher levels of well-being. The researchers established that respondents with little free time felt more stressed than those with moderate free time, which contributed to lower well-being. However, respondents with a lot of free time felt less productive than those in the moderate group, resulting in lower subjective well-being (Sharif, Mogilner & Hershfield, 2021).

Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki (2019) emphasises the importance of a healthy lifestyle with physical activity, meditation, relaxation and proper nutrition to prevent stress in teachers, and all of these can be incorporated into leisure activities.

Leisure activities alleviate stress (Hartman, Barcelona, Trauntvein & Hall, 2020), relieve stress at work and are positively related to well-being and are a predictor of mental health (Chiu et al., 2020; Kim & Brown, 2018). Free time can also be understood as space for social interaction. People who are more socially integrated have better coping mechanisms when faced with stress (Cohen, Gordon & Gottlieb, 2000). Free time can be a space where activities can be organised, where teachers can get better social support from colleagues and form social bonds that are not possible in the daily work environment of school.

The most important determinant of free time is precisely the freedom to choose activities. The meaningful organisation of free time is a pedagogical category and an important area of education (Previšić, 2000). Free time can contribute to humanising work and creating a balance between leisure activities and working time. It is important to emphasise that free time is one of the indispensable prerequisites for the development of intellectual, work, aesthetic, social, moral and technical qualities in the process of a person's personality formation. Free time also contributes to raising the level of general culture, as it enables the use of cultural goods. It should be used not only for leisure and recreation, but also for creativity and personal development, and for the pursuit of social and personal interests. Moreover, free time and work are not separate and unnatural activities, but should be considered complementary, as they define human beings as social beings (Previšić, 2000).

Professional development has a positive effect on reducing teachers' stress levels. In this sense, Mansvelt, Suddaby and O'Hara (2008) particularly emphasise the importance of informal professional development. In this context, free time in particular may prove to be an area of professional growth and development for teachers, i.e. an area of effective stress management.

The strength of this paper lies precisely in its recognition of free time as a space for managing stress and enhancing teachers' well-being, based on the theoretical assumptions of existing research. In addition, it opens up a space for further research on free time, identifying practical tips and strategies that can be used by teachers, but also by professional staff in the design of activities that would empower teachers and thus contribute to improving school climate and working conditions.

Implications for Practice

Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki (2019) emphasises the importance of identifying potential risk factors that lead to stress and burnout among teachers and developing coherent strategies to alleviate the symptoms of stress and burnout, which should be at the core of any professional development programme. Furthermore, teachers should be introduced to the phenomenon of burnout and its consequences as early as possible throughout their education. In addition, effective coping strategies identified in scientifically validated research should be presented along with their contextual functions. Finally, since classroom climate and student misbehaviour have been confirmed as important factors for burnout, teachers should be trained in classroom management techniques (Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2019). WHO (2018) suggests primary prevention as a more effective and cost-effective strategy than secondary interventions.

The subjective experience of stress is most commonly studied, where biological stress may go unnoticed (Wettstein, 2021), but there is certainly a need to conduct a series of stress studies from different perspectives, combine subjective and objective stress assessment measures to gain a more comprehensive insight into the phenomenon, and more easily prevent and design ways to manage teachers' occupational stress. Teachers'

free time offers us a great scope for action, namely prevention, but also dealing with teacher burnout. From a pedagogical point of view, it is necessary to give teachers space for rest, recreation, resilience building and time for their own individual interests and needs, which are not necessarily related to the teacher's professional development. As teachers are a helping profession, exposed to extremely high demands both professionally and emotionally, leading to a stressful state of the organism, it is in the interest of teachers to try to prevent their burnout. The targeted organisation of teachers' free time is one of the ways to effectively prevent stress and intervene with the aim of reducing the perceived level of teacher burnout.

To summarise, it is necessary to continuously monitor contemporary research and to plan and conduct further research on this topic, because teacher stress, burnout syndrome, well-being and free time of teachers is a topical and important issue. It is also necessary to find practical solutions to prevent and deal with stress and to use the potential of free time pedagogically to strengthen teachers' well-being.

Conclusion

Considering the above, but also the fact that teachers' professional health is the basis for the effective work of a modern school and its strategic challenge (Osipova et al., 2018), it can be concluded that it is necessary to direct research towards the identification of resources that enable the improvement of teachers' (but indirectly also students') well-being and welfare, and help define ways to reduce and prevent stress among teachers.

There is a need to raise awareness of the importance and necessity of spending quality leisure time as a space for stress management, allowing for relaxation and the fulfilment of one's personal interests. As the teaching profession is indeed a stressful profession and teachers see their profession as undervalued in society, the question is what needs to be done to improve working conditions, change current perceptions and increase satisfaction with teachers' work. One of the ways is to make society and education policy makers definitely aware that teaching is an intensive process that has physiological and psychological consequences for teachers. It is important to create the conditions for maintaining the health and well-being of teachers, because satisfied teachers are the basis for quality education.

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