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## PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AS A DETERMINANT OF STRESS MANAGEMENT OF INCLUSIVE TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** Psychological capital refers to the personal resources to cope with different work and life situations and consists of four components: self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience (Luthans, Youssef, Avolio, 2007; Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, Avolio, 2015). The development of psychological capital is important for job performance stress management and wellbeing of teachers working with special needs children in their classes. This paper is aimed to establish the relationships between psychological capital and stress management symptoms of teachers in inclusive education. 205 inclusive teachers working in preschool and school education took part in this research. The stress management symptoms are measured with Lattack’s questionnaire (1986, Cronbach’s alpha of internal consistency for the researched sample is high - 0,81) and are related to stress management techniques like relaxation techniques and sport activities, emotional reaction, self-therapy approach, use of medicine, alcohol use and smoking, hobbies and leisure activities.

The results show positive correlations between psychological capital and stress techniques used by teachers to manage their job stress. There are no correlations between psychological capital and ineffective and harmful for teachers’ health practices to reduce job stress like use of alcohol and smoking and use of medicine.

Regression analysis confirms that the positive and effective stress management techniques are influenced by psychological capital dimensions. Optimism predicts using of relaxation and sport activities as an approach to reduce job stress. Teachers with high self-efficacy cope successfully with stress and apply self-management approach. Seeking of professional support and religion practices are determined by optimism. The results emphasize the impact of self-efficacy, resilience and optimism on stress management. There is no impact of psychological capital on hobbies and leisure activities, emotional reactions, alcohol use and smoking and medicine use. Optimism of teachers in inclusive education is crucial for their stress management and is a main prerequisite for success of their work with children with special educational needs. Successful stress management of teachers working with children with special needs is possible to be implemented when the characteristics of psychological capital are improved. The implication of the results in stress management practices used by inclusive teachers is discussed.

**Keywords:** psychological capital, stress management techniques, inclusive education, optimism, resilience

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The education sector is fast-growing, dynamic, fulfilled with innovations and changes, which means that specialists working in this field are facing daily challenges in order to meet the expectations of the students for quality and modern education. Teaching is defined as a stressful occupation where a lot of factors could provoke stress and influence teachers’ job satisfaction, burnout and effectiveness (McCarthy et al., 2010; McCormick, Barnett, 2011; Otero López et al., 2018). The task of teachers working with children with special educational needs (SEN) is even more difficult, because the effective learning process requires a wider range of specialized teaching techniques. That implies that teachers in inclusive education are exposed to high levels of stress on a daily basis. They perceive direct interactions with pupils with emotional and behavioral disorders as tense and often aversive (Sutherland et al, 2008). Students with special needs require extra attention, skills, efforts and time compared to regular students and therefore special education teachers exhibit higher levels of stress than mainstream education teachers (Lazarus, 2006). Other research showed that there was no significant difference between special education and general (and at times integrated) classroom teachers in relation to all sources and effects of stress as well as in their coping strategies (Kebby, Al-Hroub, 2018).

Inclusive teachers need institutional, professional and personal support to work with children with emotional and behavioral difficulties in mainstream education and to change attitudes to inclusion process (Scanlon, Barnes-Holmes, 2013). If inclusive teachers want to avoid negative impact of stress on the effectiveness of the teaching process and on their job satisfaction it is extremely important to develop certain skills and competencies and as well as to choose the appropriate strategies for coping with stress. Teachers’ self-perceptions of competence are influenced by levels of resources (Butler and Shevlin, 2001) and therefore they need to improve their professional and personal resources to cope with stress caused by working with children with emotional and behavioral disorders. The success of inclusive policies for the education of children with SEN depends upon a number of teacher-related

variables, including attitudes to inclusion and skills to work with these children but their resources to manage the teaching process are too often described as inadequate (Scanlon and McGilloway, 2006).

Highest importance to stress is attributed to the behaviour of students, which predicts the occurrence of burnout and failure of teachers to deal with this (McCormick, Barnett, 2011). These factors for tension are inherent for the teaching profession and cannot be avoided as the causes of stress and burnout, and therefore they require specific approaches and practices for their management. A successful approach to prevent stress means to enable them with appropriate tools, methods and good practices (see f.ex. “MyHUB – a one-stop-shop on inclusion practices, tools, resources and methods for the pedagogical staff at formal and non-formal educational institutions”).

Coping resources of teachers are positively related to their job satisfaction and negatively related to classroom stress and teachers’ plans to leave the profession (McCarthy et al., 2010). Teachers’ effectiveness is predicted by positive personal resources and optimism is strongly related with perceived stress and coping strategies (Duckworth, Quinn, Seligman, 2009). Stress management requires teachers to increase their competences to work with SEN children and awareness about stress symptoms and to be proactive in minimizing job-related stress applying relaxation and other self-therapy techniques (Williams, Poel, 2006).

Personal resources are considered as powerful factors that determine the reaction to stress and coping with it. Psychological capital is defined as an individual positive state that consists of four dimensions – self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience what are related with well-being, job and life satisfaction and coping with negative and stressful situations (Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, Avolio 2015). The results showed that optimism and self-efficacy were significant predictors of proactive coping, and hope predicted preventive coping among teachers. Optimism, hope, and resilience had a significant impact on job satisfaction. Proactive coping mediated the relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy and work engagement as well as between optimism and work engagement (Mikus, Teoh (2021). Optimism is highly relevant to teacher stress and therefore the increasing level of optimism is a personal coping resource.

The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of psychological capital and its dimensions: self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience on stress management techniques of teachers in inclusive education.

## 2. METHODS AND SAMPLE

### 2.1. Methods

**Stress management** was measured with questionnaire that consists of 24 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale that describe the possible responses to stress in general, outside the specific work situation, and reflect the preferences for the application of different ways and means for stress management that are inherently emotional and behavioural (Latack, 1986). The reliability coefficient of Cronbach's alpha of the scale in this study was 0.81. Factor analysis by the method of Varimax-rotation was made and the following seven factors were extracted: relaxation techniques and sport activities; hobbies and leisure activities; self-therapy; emotional reaction; seeking of professional support and religion; alcohol use and smoking; and use of medicine.

**Psychological capital questionnaire** consists of 24 items, divided in four dimensions – self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience (Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, Avolio, 2015). A coefficient of internal consistency alpha of Cronbach in this study is 0,91.

### 2.2. Sample.

205 inclusive teachers have taken part in the study. Most of them are female (92.5% of the participants) and have working experience in profession more than 20 years (52%). 32 % of teachers have working experience in current school more than 20 years; 16% are newcomers and have working experience till 2 years in current organization. All of them have in their classes children with SEN.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The correlation analysis was made to establish the relationships between dimensions of psychological capital and stress management techniques. The results confirm strongly the prepositions about relation between studied variables (Table 1). Psychological capital components correlate with some of stress management techniques that could be defined as adaptive responses to stress. Relaxation techniques and sport activities correlate with all components of psychological capital and optimism and hope are related higher with this stress management technique. Self-therapy is related with self-efficacy and optimism as well as with hope and resilience. Weak correlations were established between self-efficacy, optimism and hope with seeking of professional support and religion.

Psychological capital is not related with such approaches to reduce stress as an emotional reaction and hobbies and leisure activities. There are no correlations between psychological capital and ineffective and harmful for teachers’

health practices to reduce job stress like alcohol and medicine use and smoking as a regular way to cope with stress or in practice to escape from effective stress coping.

**Table 1. Correlations between psychological capital dimensions and stress management techniques**

<b>Stress management techniques</b>	<b>Self-efficacy</b>	<b>Optimism</b>	<b>Hope</b>	<b>Resilience</b>
<b>Relaxation techniques and sport activities</b>				
Pearson Correlation	.251**	.399***	.389***	.289**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.000	.000	.002
<b>Emotional reaction</b>				
Pearson Correlation	.019	-.058	.047	-.111
Sig. (2-tailed)	.850	.555	.630	.257
<b>Hobbies and leisure activities</b>				
Pearson Correlation	.119	.152	.154	-.014
Sig. (2-tailed)	.223	.118	.113	.885
<b>Self-therapy</b>				
Pearson Correlation	.425***	.398***	.351***	.331***
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.001
<b>Seeking of professional support and religion</b>				
Pearson Correlation	.229*	.274**	.217*	.094
Sig. (2-tailed)	.022	.003	.018	.336
<b>Alcohol use and smoking</b>				
Pearson Correlation	-.182	-.145	-.157	-.171
Sig. (2-tailed)	.060	.136	.106	.079
<b>Use of medicine</b>				
Pearson Correlation	.130	.000	-.044	-.067
Sig. (2-tailed)	.182	.996	.653	.490

**Table 2. Regression analysis about impact of psychological capital dimensions on stress management techniques**

<b>Dependent variables Stress management techniques</b>	<b>Components of psychological capital</b>			
	<b>Self-efficacy</b>	<b>Optimism</b>	<b>Hope</b>	<b>Resilience</b>
<b>Relaxation techniques and sport activities</b>				
Beta		.396***		
Sig.		.000		
Adjusted R Square		.157		
<b>Self-therapy</b>				
Pearson Correlation	.417***			
Sig.	.000			
Adjusted R Square	.174			

<b><i>Seeking of professional support and religion</i></b>				
Pearson Correlation		.294**		
Sig.		.003		
Adjusted R Square		.083		

The regression analysis with stepwise method was made to establish an impact of components of psychological capital on stress management techniques (Table 2). There is no impact of psychological capital on hobbies and leisure activities, emotional reactions, alcohol use and smoking and medicine use. The results show that the main predictors of stress management techniques of teachers working with children with SEN are self-efficacy and optimism. Hope and resilience have no effect on stress management techniques.

Self-efficacy determines the applying of self-therapy approach to cope with stress that means that teachers have competencies to understand the sources of stress, to recognize its symptoms and to try to prevent the harmful effects and consequences on their health.

Optimism is a predictor of applying of relaxation techniques and sport activities where explained 15,7% of variance. It has also an effect on such stress management technique as a seeking of professional support and religion practices. Teachers who are more optimistic rely mainly on such techniques in comparison with those with pessimistic disposition. The optimistic attitude is quite important for stress management of teachers and influences their healthy behavior when stress is higher than usual.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The school policies should be aimed to prevent and reduce the stress level and its negative effect on job performance and wellbeing of teachers working with children with SEN. Prevention and management of stress in inclusive teachers' job require to improve their competencies and knowledge how to work with different special educational needs of children. Reducing of negative effects of stress is possible when the teachers would be well prepared to work with children with SEN.

Psychological capital dimensions are related with positive oriented stress management techniques and have no correlations with such approaches as emotional reaction, alcohol use and smoking and use of medicine. The results from regression analysis allow to conclude that psychological capital has an effect on stress management techniques but is it not so strong. One of reason for this it would be that measured stress management techniques concern mainly the activities that teachers apply in their live after working time. During their direct interaction with children with SEN they are not able to use these techniques. Relaxation, seeking of professional support and religion and self-therapy are stress reducing practices but they are not proactive approach and only diminish the harmful effect of stress on job performance and health. Although optimism and self-efficacy predict some of stress management techniques that prevent health and contribute to well-being of teachers.

The results give a good basis to imply different approaches in inclusive education to help teachers how to cope with stress. Stress management programs could be developed in some interconnected directions – to improve their skills and competencies, to provide them a set of practical tools and practices how to work with SEN children, to create an educational environment for development of their personal resources and psychological capital and to train them in different successful coping strategies.

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