Occupational stress in physical education and sport area

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Abstract

Occupational stress is a debate topic for many specialists interested in optimizing the efficiency of the employees working in different fields. In physical education and sports, this issue has a series of specific traits based on the occupation (teacher, coach) requirements. This paper aims at highlighting the share factors facilitating the occurrence of stress depending on the occupation. Data analysis revealed that occupational stress has specific forms of manifestation. Results contribute to the teaching profession monograph in the field and provide reference points for personal and professional development programs designed to these categories of specialists.

Keywords: occupational stress; physical education; sport; teacher; coach.

1. Introduction

The paper starts from the conclusions of some studies reflecting that the occupations in physical education and sports field represent a framework facilitating some stressors which exert different influences on the persons involved in the respective occupations.

Occupational stress refers to the effect, on the physical and psychological levels, of some job performing, under the conditions of a discrepancy between requirements and the respective person’s capacity to solve different tasks.

Numerous specialists analyzed the occupational stress particularities, inclusively in the education field, in general, and particularly in the physical education and sports field (Adams, 2001; Blix et al, 1994; Borg et al, 1991; Brown & Ralph, 1992, 2002; Cooper, 1996; Dunham, 1976; Fejgin et al, 1995; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1987, quoted by Al-Mohannadi and Capel, 2007). By studying the aspects related to teachers’ quality of life, Peters and Mesters (2008) concluded that their major sources of stress are: the

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reforms, pupils’ behavior, sometimes violent relations with them, the overpopulated classes, some teachers’ apathy, the feeling that society doesn’t recognizes the merits of this profession, the remuneration, the lack of promotion opportunities.

Horenstein (2006) highlights the professional stressors depending on the education specificity and classifies them into three categories: external, internal and task-related ones. External stressors appear when there is a discrepancy between the supplied effort and the gained compensations (esteem, respect, salary, perspectives to be promoted, job stability). Internal stressors are represented by the following: schedule, work environment, professional travels, insufficiency of the human and material resources, evaluation of the professional efficiency, relationships with colleagues. Task-related stressors refer to: psychological exigencies (pupils with a precarious situation, maltreated pupils, diseases, and delinquency), adaptation to pupils’ level, indiscipline during the classes, pupils’ unsatisfied needs, inclusive education.

Yang, Chen and Liu (2006), by analyzing the occupational stress among teachers, concluded that the economic and material factors are the major sources of stress and that its negative effects are universal, regardless of the teachers’ specialization. The stress immediate outcomes appear on the physical and psychological levels, but also on the health, family and professional efficiency ones.

Studies showed that in France 70% out of the teachers manifest fatigue, tension and overexertion states, 20% are afraid of physical aggressions and 60% out of the high school female teachers are afraid not to be insulted (Horenstein, 2006). The stressor action correlated effects lead to an increase of teachers’ absenteeism, but also to the staff fluctuation in the case of employees who perceive their job as being too stressing (Grigore, Stănescu, 2005; Spielberger, Vagg, 2010).

In physical education and sports, there is a series of references related to the occupational stress particularities. Danylchuk (1993) analyzes these aspects within the faculties of physical education and sports in relation to gender, age, family status, years of teaching experience. Relationships were analyzed from the perspective of organizational and individual stressors. Conclusions emphasize the stronger influence of the organizational stressors represented by time, gender discrimination and overexertion, as compared to the individual ones (personal satisfaction, self-esteem, relations with students, with other teachers). The action of these factors is more obvious among females than among males.

Al-Mohannadi and Capel (2007) analyzed the stress particularities in the Qatar physical education teachers, by concluding that its effects are related to different backgrounds and experiences, to different roles and responsibilities in society, to different cultural and social expectations and to different environmental factors. At the same time, they found out that there is a series of factors influencing the teachers, in general, but also some factors specific to physical education and sports.

2. Purpose of Study

The identification of the occupational stress major sources can represent an important resource for the facilitation of some changes in the professional environment, for the professional efficiency increase and for the establishment of the most efficient methods able to reduce the stress negative effects.

Starting from the previously mentioned aspects, this paper aims at highlighting the occupational stress in the case of two professions in the Physical education and sports field - physical education teacher and coach. It was ascertained that the occupational stress (characterized through stress factors and occupational stress outcomes) is strongly correlated to the respondents’ gender, age and professional experience.
3. Research Methods

Data were obtained as a result of the questionnaire-based inquiry. The questionnaire was applied to a number of 400 people aged 22 to 65 years old, men and women in an equal ratio. Among the respondents, 235 were physical education teachers and 165 were coaches.

The monitored variables were the stressors and the occupational stress outcomes, for each of the two occupations. The investigated persons were asked to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5 the stressor action intensity and the stress outcomes intensity, where 1 is the lowest intensity (score 1) and 5 is the highest (score 5). We calculated the arithmetical mean for each variable. Variables were analyzed in relation to respondents’ gender, age and professional experience (years of teaching career), by using the SPSS software.

4. Results and Discussions

For the physical education teachers, it was found out that the strongest action is exerted by the external stressors having a mean (m) comprised between 3.73 and 4.14. For the coaches, the highest means are given by the profession-related stressors having a mean (m) comprised between 3.75 (activity planning) and 3.98 (workload) (table 1).

Table 1. Stressors in the teaching and coaching careers and correlation with gender, age and professional experience

| Stressor                          | Teachers’ Mean Scores | Coaches’ Mean Scores | Gender M(1) F(2) | Age | Professional Experience |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------|-----|-------------------------|
| **External**                     |                       |                      |                  |     |                         |
| Salary                           | 4.14                  | 3.21                 | 0.310            | 0.078 | 0.062                   |
| Social recognition               | 3.84                  | 2.50                 | 0.780            | 0.270 | 0.042                   |
| Reform process                   | 3.73                  | 1.90                 | **0.176**        | 0.014 | 0.003                   |
| **Internal**                     |                       |                      |                  |     |                         |
| Relation with other colleagues   | 3.8                   | 2.13                 | **0.135**        | 0.042 | 0.076                   |
| Conflicts                        | 1.83                  | 2.00                 | **0.135**        | 0.042 | 0.018                   |
| Relation with directors          | 2.51                  | 2.60                 | **0.126**        | 0.047 | 0.078                   |
| Violence in school/on sports fields| 3.03                | 1.00                 | **0.158**        | 0.026 | 0.025                   |
| **Related to professional tasks**|                       |                      |                  |     |                         |
| Children’s behavior              | 3.06                  | 1.80                 | **0.204**        | 0.040 | 0.048                   |
| Activity planning                | 3.37                  | 3.75                 | **0.127**        | 0.063 | **0.098**               |
| Overpopulated classes            | 3.02                  | -                    | **0.177**        | 0.011 | 0.026                   |
| Poor resources                   | 3.13                  | 3.86                 | **0.186**        | 0.051 | 0.028                   |
| Workload                         | 2.28                  | 3.98                 | **0.147**        | 0.016 | 0.019                   |
| t=1.90 (p=0.05)                  | Bold values are significant at p=0.05 | Bold values are significant at p=0.05 | Bold values are significant at p=0.05 |

Even if the difference between means is not significant, data analysis revealed that, for the physical education teachers, the strongest stressors were the external ones, while for the coaches, stressors were mainly associated to the professional tasks (table no. 1).

External stressors are more obvious in physical education teachers (salary m=4.14, social recognition of the profession m=3.84, reform process in the education system m=3.73). In the same staff category, the
stress induced by specific tasks such as planning (m=3.37), but also the precarious facilities (m=3.13), represent additional discontent sources. These data correspond to those provided by the specialty literature about the weight of the external stressors in the teaching career (Al-Mohannadi, Capel, 2007). In physical education teachers, the strongest stressors are those external to the profession, which can be explained by the reform process in the Romanian education system.

As for the relation between stressors and the respondents’ gender, it was ascertained that the stressor intensity is strongly correlated to the respondents’ gender. Thus, most of the factors have a stronger impact on women than on men (table no. 1), fact that confirms the data in the specialty literature according to which females are more sensitive to the action exerted by these factors (Danylchuk, 1993).

Although the external stressor action is not differently perceived by any of the professional categories, it can be noticed that it is more intensely felt by the men aged 31 to 35 years old (23%). For the men’s career, this would mean they have reached a professional maturity threshold, most of them holding the 1st degree and often aspiring to a leading function in the education units.

At the same time, it can be found out that the stressor action is more intensely felt by the specialists with a seniority comprised between 0 and 10 years (30%), fact that can be explained by the lack of security felt by these, who are in different stages of professional improvement, in relation to their job stability and to the variable professional requirements.

It can also be ascertained that persons with a solid professional experience are more affected by the alterations induced by the permanent change of the planning documents, as well as by their overloading with professional tasks (table no. 1).

The stress outcomes identified by the teachers primarily occur on the health level, while for the coaches, on the professional level. Teachers consider that the stress mainly has negative effects on their health (m=3.25), on their profession (m=3.16), but less on their family life (m=2.55). Most of the opinions according to which the strongest stress effects are on health belong to men aged 26 to 30 years old (28%) and to women aged 51 to 55 years old (38%).

Coaches consider that the stress mainly has negative effects on their profession (m=4.25), their health (m=3.20), and less on their family life (m=2.25). Most of the opinions according to which the strongest impact is on professional results belong to men aged 31 to 35 years old (30%) and to women aged 41 to 45 years old (32%).

5. Conclusions

Occupational stress has specific, but also common forms of manifestation in physical education and sports area, depending on the occupation: teacher or coach. The specific work conditions and the professional objectives in question could create differences in experts’ perception on the occupational stress. While teachers are influenced by the permanent changes in the education system, coaches consider that the major stressors are the conditions in which they develop their activity. While the physical education teachers are more aware of the stress negative effects on the health state, coaches pay more attention especially to the professional efficiency diminution.

The stressor action is significantly felt by women, particularly in the final part of their professional career. Men are more preoccupied about stress outcomes in the first part of their teaching/coaching activity, while the women in the second part of their activity.

For both occupations, the first years of the teaching/coaching career represent a period of adaptation to the profession requirements, most of the respondents considering it as being stressing. Specialists with a greater seniority in education have more difficulties to adapt to the current requirements imposed by the education system and to the changes it is confronted with.
Results contribute to the teaching profession monograph in the field and provide reference points for personal and professional development programs designed to these categories of specialists.

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