

## **Stress, burnout, well-being in teaching profession: Portuguese studies**

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Professional satisfaction plays an important role in the way the human being develops his work. This is a complex and subjective concept since the same situation can be a source of satisfaction for one individual and the cause for dissatisfaction for another (Lammy, 2015). Professional satisfaction in teaching is associated with important variables such as self-esteem, physical and mental well-being, motivation, commitment, involvement, stress, absenteeism, success and professional achievement (Viveiros, 2011). When a teacher displays feelings of dissatisfaction and malaise, such feelings affect not only his fellow teachers but also the students. Such disinvestment and lack of motivation contribute directly to students' lack of interest in the classroom and, consequently, to a lower quality of the teaching and learning processes (Resende, 2003).

According to Silva (2012), professional satisfaction has direct effects on teachers' motivation, which in turn always influences in some way the students' academic success and compromises teachers' willingness to their work, both individually and in teams. Professional satisfaction thus contributes to a pleasant school climate, facilitating planning and collaborative practices among teachers in order to achieve educational success.

When the feeling of satisfaction is not reached, some indicators appear in the opposite direction, that is, manifestations of teacher dissatisfaction (Alves, 1994), such as fatigue, malaise, stress, absenteeism, desire for abandonment and even abandonment. Many of these are directly linked to changes in schools' working climate occurring these days. These manifestations are thus permanent negative effects that affect the personality of the teachers as a result of psychological and social conditions in which teaching is practiced (Alves, 1994). Often, teachers are confronted with educational and political requirements difficult to carry out in face of the existing conditions, placing them under of pressure, causing stress and other dissatisfaction manifestations, which can lead them to abandon the profession (Lamy, 2015).

Teaching is one of the professions most commonly associated with high levels of stress and it is classified by the International Labor Organization as a profession of physical

and mental risk (Jesus, 2000; Picado, 2005). Since in the past teachers did not display levels of stress higher than those observed in other professional groups, it is appropriate to try to understand the reasons underlying this situation at the present time. In addition to factors related to the current lifestyle, it is also necessary to distinguish between factors found at macro and micro levels (Jesus, 2001).

At macro level, socio-political factors, such as the excessive number of students, lead to students' lack of motivation and indiscipline, causing stress and excessive demands on the teachers and consequently making them disregard their training and the quality of their working, hindering them to respond adequately to the demands placed on them (Jesus, 2001). The accelerated technological development has also contributed to teachers' stress, as it induces a greater rate of knowledge expiration, and impairs the social image transmitted through the media with its tendency to emphasize the negative aspects of the situations. At a more micro level, the main cause of stress is students' indiscipline, with disruptive situations being more and more frequent and serious, thus making unfeasible all the planning of the classes and damaging the quality of the teaching and learning process intended by the teachers (Jesus, 2001).

Currently, teaching, regardless of the level of education or the type of school, public or private, is becoming a profession subject by numerous contextual psychosocial stressors, with emphasis on mental and emotional overloads (Carlotto, 2011). This job is characterized by high levels of concentration, precision and diversified attention. Emotionally, teachers are required interrelate with students, parents and guardians, colleagues and technical staff, relationships that can often become conflicting (Salanova, Martínez & Lorente, 2005).

Several investigations have established the relationship between stress and the appearance of health problems in teachers. Regarding health issues related to the teaching profession, Scheuch, Haufe and Seibt (2015) mention that there are several international studies that describe the most common health problems among teachers, with emphasis on psychic disorders (depression, stress, and burnout being the most common), vocal problems and musculoskeletal disorders. Stress is not just a concept that vaguely relates to some uncomfortable situation. There is currently evidence that occupational stress, when it is intense, unpredictable, uncontrollable and repetitive or prolonged, has negative consequences at the individual and organizational levels, representing high costs for societies.

One of the possible consequences of prolonged or chronic stress in the teaching profession is the professional burnout syndrome or "teacher syndrome". The term burnout in the teaching profession is used to describe the "degenerative cycle of teacher effectiveness". Exhaustion arises as a consequence of teacher malaise, which is designated as the set of permanent negative consequences that affect the teacher caused by the joint action of the psychological and social conditions in which teaching is exercised. It is known today that the burnout syndrome can generate psychological and body disorders and mood and conduct fluctuations. "The experiences of stress and burnout in the teacher should, therefore be understood as a threat to their well-being, self-esteem and personal values, which may lead to the development of negative feelings, revealed in their professional practice by the diminishing quality of the activities performed in a school context" (Patrão, Rita, & Marôco 2012, p.180). For example, it may lead to the teacher's estrangement from work, alienation, cynicism, apathy, absenteeism, and ultimately the decision to abandon the profession. The teacher wears off and, in an extreme, cannot endure it and "gives up". It is important to study occupational malaise since increased knowledge will allow a more effective intervention to prevent it. The study of burnout is an important element in the context of the prevention of occupational risks and the analysis of working conditions on account of the different European rulings that recognize that psychopathologies (mental disorders) may have an occupational-type etiology, although they do not appear in the usual occupational diseases lists of European countries. In this sense, teachers are a professional category especially exposed to psychosocial risks. In fact, several investigations (Carloto, 2002; Gomes, Peixoto, Pacheco & Silva, 2012) coincide in considering that the level of burnout is higher in teachers than in other professional groups. Without the willingness to relate to the students, the role of the teacher risks being mischaracterized with the automatic and standardized fulfillment of tasks, and consequent loss of richness of the teaching and learning process. According to Carloto (2002), burnout syndrome affects many teachers nowadays, manifesting through physical and emotional exhaustion, anxiety, frequent irritations, insomnia, in addition to other more serious conditions, such as alcohol abuse and medication. Thus, stress and burnout in the teaching profession, in addition to deteriorating the teacher's work relationship with his students and leading to a break in the commitments that the teacher is able to assume, can reduce the quality of teaching and learning, which will affect students.

The depreciation of the traditional role of the teacher we have witnessed in these last two decades in Portugal and, simultaneously, the increase of the social requirements of the role of the teacher, have reaffirmed the pertinence of the study of the phenomenon of stress in this professional group. In this way, more studies are needed that address this issue and help teachers dealing with a phenomenon that is characteristic of today's society, where time runs swiftly, the tasks to be performed are multiple and complex, and the conflicts between the different roles teachers are obliged to play are constant. In Portugal, since the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s (after the approval of the Basic Education Act of 1986 - Law no. 46/86 of October 14<sup>th</sup>), the references to teacher malaise in scientific publications, union reports, and public debates have increased (Lopes, 2001). Several studies carried out in the last two decades established the existence of professional burnout, high stress prevalence, reduced work capacity, health problems and professional dissatisfaction in Portuguese teachers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of basic education and in secondary education and support an in-depth analysis of these problems (Jesus, 2002). The need for further studies has been reinforced by the recent changes in fundamental aspects of the Career Statute for Early Childhood Educators and Primary and Secondary School Teachers. The come into force of these changes created new contexts and constraints (e.g. worsening teachers' working hours at school), with repercussions on the personal, family and professional life of these teachers. According to Gomes, Montenegro & Peixoto (2010), the modification of the legal norms decided at the political level can be a source of tension for professionals and organizations, highlighting in their study that 689 Portuguese teachers of 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle and secondary education observed significant values of occupational stress (close to 40%), and burnout (10% in emotional exhaustion, 3% in low personal achievement and 1% in depersonalization) and several physical health problems and values of professional dissatisfaction close to 20%.

As a final reflection, we believe that in Portugal there is an urgent need to characterize the health of teachers, identify the factors that cause these health, stress, and burnout problems, thus contributing to sensitize government entities to adopt policies that promote the health and well-being of teachers. The measures to be adopted should not only be related to medical care but also with prevention and health promotion policies, in addition to improving working conditions and enhancing the social value of education professionals. The primary intention is to encourage change policies that promote healthy educational

environments, that is, to transform the school into a place of involvement, motivation, and learning, both for students, teachers, and other school staff. In short, a school that promotes health and well-being.

This change must be geared towards initial and continuing training, leading to a continuous supervision of teachers, at the level of their personal and social skills which promote both emotional self-regulation, health and well-being, as well as an effective management of curricular aspects in general.

In this context, we are currently developing a project to characterize Stress, Burnout and Well-being in Portuguese teachers, materialized in the collection of data already done from 2500 Portuguese teachers of different school levels. The analysis of this data and the results will be reported in future studies.

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