RESEARCH ARTICLE

The mental resilience of employees in special education during the pandemic Covid-19

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Abstract: In the present work, an investigation is carried out for the burnout of Special Education Teachers and Special Support Staff, as considered necessary to investigate, to communicate this aspect of the problems caused by the pandemic. The special education teachers' sector did not have to be part of a research interest, which aroused their interest in this work. The questionnaire was made through his platform Google Forms, shared electronically in all country regions, and responded to these seventy-four people as a sample. Given the statistical results, it appeared that positive emotions largely possessed respondents; it was adaptive and optimistic despite the difficulties they faced. To ensure the reliability of the results, a corresponding one was sought content surveys to compare results and see any similarities or differences.

Keywords: special education, teacher's secondary education, special support staff, Connor-Davidson resilience scale

1 Introduction

Chronic Work Stress "Occupational Exhaustion Syndrome" is a burnout as a result of the unrealistic expectations of individuals who are responsible for experiencing feelings of burnout and frustration of employees, which in turn, according to Freudenberger and lead to a change in motivation, moods and attitudes (Mavros, 2014). Some of the symptoms of occupational exhaustion syndrome (or burnout syndrome) are loss of pleasure, energy and motivation, isolation from colleagues, impatience, a feeling of "trapping". A syndrome is something much more and different from work stress. This way, all people who experience high stress at work are not at risk of burnout. According to Maslach (1982), burnout occurs in both men and women and includes three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. Perlman & Hartman (1982) studied "burnout" by collecting data from research conducted from 1970 to 1980. They concluded that burnout results from chronic emotional stress and includes three components: emotional and/or physical exhaustion, low productivity levels at work, and excessive depersonalization. According to Farber & Miller (1981), burnout does not appear suddenly due to an intensely stressful situation but results from accumulated stress in the workplace. These pressures can lead to maladaptive coping responses and poor work performance. Hendrickson (1979) focused on teacher burnout and noted that a burnout teacher is characterized by a loss of interest in teaching and is possessed by a feeling of lethargy, diminished enthusiasm and difficulty concentrating.

More and more research has been conducted and related to professional exhaustion, especially in professions characterized as functions, such as doctors, nurses, psychologists, teachers, *etc*. (Tzimopoulos et al., 2021; Papadopoulou et al., 2022). For the most part, it appears in those who develop a relationship of care and responsibility with other people at work. As far as teachers are concerned, they often face difficulties that go beyond their limits and therefore show symptoms that manifest physical and mental exhaustion (Farber, 2000; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). The behaviour of teachers and their psychological state impacts the whole school context, especially on students (Kokkinos et al., 2005).

Employees in special schools dealing with students with special needs believe that they have a more difficult task than their colleagues in general education. Students need more

care and attention. They are in charge of extra responsibilities and responsibilities, and they compile themselves therapeutically – educationally programs and are constantly modifying objectives, techniques, and teaching methods to meet her needs personalized intervention. The teacher needs to know the abilities of each student individually and the conditions under which he learns better; thus, each process acquires an individual character as well it is impossible to generalize the treatment of the problem with the implementation of a unified strategy for all cases (Antoniou et al., 2010; Brownell 1997 ; Drakos, 2002). In addition, employees in special schools create materials and tools that meet each student's particular needs, contribute to their social adjustment and undertake the difficult task of supporting parents. In addition, many times and due to the circumstances, each employee's roles in the school reality of the special schools are not completely clear. Then, working in special schools is characterized by significant emotional investment and frequent frustrations. The present work is mainly aimed at the burnout of Special Education workers during the Covid-19 pandemic and, in particular, February to April 2021 (Karakose et al., 2021; Karakose et al., 2021; Karakose et al., 2021). According to Karalis (2020), the conditions resulting from the pandemic in education have plagued educational practice at the universal level. The new practices followed in educational practice in conjunction with disease control and strict measures to alienate citizens had psychological effects and were stressful for the employees in education (Karakose et al., 2021; Lifelong Learning Platform, 2020). The load for workers was heavy from the start, especially now during the pandemic, where they were burdened even more, as the special schools were among the schools that remained open. After all, the professional exhaustion of Greek teachers in Primary and secondary education was also highlighted by the studies of Kamtsi & Loli (2016) but also from the study of Raikou et al. (2020). The issues they had to deal with are related to the parallel external source stress (quarantine and fear for health) and internal conditions (change of working conditions) (Spyromitros & Iordanidis, 2017). In addition, the professional exhaustion of teachers in special education depends on the lack of support from administrative mechanisms (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), bureaucratic data (Romano, 2016), student attitudes and ongoing challenges (Brunsting et al., 2014), the abundance (Adera & Bullock, 2010) and the imbalance between expectations and real school life (Andrews & Brown, 2015). It was considered necessary to investigate workers' burnout in special education for the reasons above.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: in section 2, we present the research methodology. Section 3 presents the results, and section 4 is devoted to the evaluation and concludes the paper.

2   Methods

The questionnaire concerning Connor-Davidson (2003) Resilience Scale has 25 statements self-report. Respondents choose from 1-5, where one corresponds to 'Not at all true' and 5 in 'Almost always true'. Rates sort his questions: (1) Personal Competence, High Standards and Persistence, (2) Confidence in personal instinct, Long-suffering in negative mood and Strengthening effect of stress, (3) Positive acceptance of change and Safe Relationships, (4) Control, (5) Spiritual influences. in which the number of questions. This questionnaire was chosen because it was considered the most functional and appropriate for this quantitative research. The Google Forms tool was used to make it easy to use and ensure the respondents' anonymity. Before completing its questionnaire was completed by the participants as a voluntary pilot completion of 3 Special Education workers to prevent the risk of questions being misinterpreted by participants. Before the questionnaire was complete, a special permit was obtained from the University of Patras to do the research. The questionnaire was sent to a sample of Special Education Teachers and Special Support Staff to carry out accurate and reliable results. The results showed that of the seventy-four respondents, fifty-two were women, and twenty-two were men.

Regarding their age, 43.2% were aged 36-45, 41.9% were aged 22-35, and 14.9% were 46-55 and above. The most significant percentage lives in a big town (with 41.9%), followed by the Town or the village (with 33.8%) and at the end the Capital-Co-capital (with 24.3%). Most respondents are not married, the other married or something. In terms of their status, most (56) are Teachers, while the rest (18) are Special Auxiliary Staff. About the years' respondents have 60.8% have 1-5 years, 23% have 11-15 and more years, while 16.2% are 6-10 years old. These statistics came out after completing the questionnaire, which was studied and processed to collect answers. In conclusion, it was deemed necessary to look for other similar ones to make the present work credible so that the possibility of duplication of research by other researchers.

3   Results

The results of the questionnaire given to the sample were varied and exciting. We observe that most of the sample is characterized by adaptability, as 39.2% said they frequently adapt to change. This may also play an essential role in establishing close and secure relationships, something that 43.2% of respondents said that this statement is valid quite often. On the contrary, the teachers and support staff have shown little reliance on assistance from God, since 45 out of 74 answered that they do not believe at all or rarely things will be helped by fate or God. Interestingly, most of the sample seems to deal effectively with any difficulty. It turns out that this can be combined with the fact that there were equally positive answers whether the respondents' past successes help cope with their daily challenges. Still, most people in the sample group must see the positive side with the situation (31.1% often the proposition is true), while at the same time most often recover after some challenge or even illness.

Additionally, 33.8% answered that they do best possible almost always with what is dealt with without being negatively affected by what happens, and 48.6% follow the same tactics. These percentages cumulatively show people striving for the goals they set with perseverance and dedication. This point is also worth noting that most respondents (46 in 74) stated that they often or almost always fight for their goal even if the situations do not seem particularly promising. Still, quite a large percentage, 36.5%, answered that they know where to turn for help if needed, which shows us that these individuals have supportive factors to a satisfactory degree. According to the respondents, things are complicated when managing stressful situations since only 10.8% (8) answered that "he thinks net" in the case of such a situation, while 32.4% is in an intermediate position.

Nevertheless, the above fact does not discourage them from often wanting (35.1%) or sometimes (29.7%) to take the lead in solving problems. Fifty-one of the subjects (25 and 26 respectively) stated that often or sometimes are not easily discouraged by failure, which allows us to associate it with the fact that half of the sample, which is 35 people (47.3%), consider themselves possible. 43.2% said they could often make difficult decisions while managing unpleasant emotions; the answers vary. In other questions, one of which concerns the need to follow their intuition and the other in whether they like challenges, the respondents' answers are shared and do not point in a specific direction. In addition, it is worth mentioning how the majority of people (53) claim that they often have control over their lives, which we could also connect with the fact that 46 out of 74 support that they have a strong sense of purpose. Finally, the answers regarding self-esteem and work development seem quite positive since, on the one hand, more than half sample (51.4%) boasts of its achievements, and on the other hand, 55 of the 74 say they work almost always or often to achieve their goals.

4   Conclusion

Analyzing the results obtained from the collection of statistical data emerges as a conclusion that employees in the field of special education possess a high degree of personal competence combined with high standards and perseverance, having most a high sense of purpose. At the same time, they stated that work to achieve their goals despite the percentages discouragement from previous failures is moderate. The analysis of research findings in special education workers seems to differ from the results of teachers' research on management of the educational crisis due to the pandemic of Raikou et al. (2021), as well as the transient stress of teachers in this research displays high levels in contrast to workers in special education in secondary education. This fact is probably because the structures of the Special Education continued to operate in the year 2020-2021, despite the pandemic.

It is noteworthy that these employees feel confident to deal with new challenges based on their previous successes while showing faith to themselves more than in the intervention of spiritual agents. Respectively in the research of Raikou et al. (2021), its price Obstacle management is average while, unlike the present study, it occurs low rate of barrier management. However, the feeling of trust in the personal instinct of the research subjects is vital, as their response rates to this question are high. At the same time, the characteristic of long-suffering acts positively in cases of negative mood, although the effect of stress does not seem to help much. Depending on research by Raikou et al. (2021), stress is projected as a factor in reduced efficiency.

In addition, special education workers show a positive acceptance of change and close and secure relationships to a satisfactory degree, as they feel they can respond to new conditions. At this point, it appears differentiation in terms of general education teachers, as the latter is characterized by reduced ability to manage the new training structures that arose due to the pandemic.

Finally, in terms of self-assessment, employees in the field of specialization find that they are effective in controlling their lives by working effectively, fulfilling their goals and feeling proud of their achievements (Katsaris & Vidakis, 2021). On the contrary, in terms of assessing their skills, teachers consider that they cannot use their skills during the conditions of the educational crisis brought about by covid-19 (Raikou et al., 2021). After all, limited personal achievement depends on individuals' factors in contrast to the emotional exhaustion associated with the environment of work (Kokkinos, 2007).

The observation of the findings yielded helpful information about its object research, but there are still some restrictions on their generalization results. The main limitation is that the sample came from all over Greece, but the opportunistic sampling followed does not lead to conclusions that can be generalized with certainty to the entire population (Creswell, 2011). On the other hand, the completion of the questionnaires is uncertain whether it was done with due diligence and honesty, as the consequences of the current situation are likely to be actively revealed at a later stage, as individuals during the pandemic experience a stressful state of danger with consequences in their mental health (Gonidakis et al., 2020). As future work, it would be to investigate the pandemic problems in general education educators.

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