

OCCUPATIONAL DIFFICULTIES AT WORK OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Research background and hypothesis. In recent years, the phenomenon of stress and burnout among physical education teachers has been evidenced by researchers from many countries. It should be noted that all those studies about work difficulties of physical education teachers are individual. However, despite a large number of studies conducted and the progress made in this area, a universally accepted survey identifying five most important difficulties in physical education teachers' work usually defined in contemporary studies still does not exist. This is mainly because there is still no consensus either on the decisive factors causing those difficulties for physical education teachers or what the central symptoms actually are.

Research aim was (a) to review and (b) to identify five most important difficulties in physical education teachers' work usually defined in contemporary studies.

Research methods. This review examines research literature concerning the causes of stress and burnout of physical education teachers from the year 1999 to 2009 applying computer-aided literature search. The keywords used for the electronic search were "stress" and "burnout" or "job satisfaction" and "physical education teacher". The main method of our research was logical deductive research literature analysis.

Discussion and conclusions. Research literature review allowed identifying physical education teachers' work difficulties (we found 24 of them). We established that the five most important difficulties in physical education teachers' work usually defined in contemporary studies were as follows: low status of physical education; limited equipment, facilities and supplies; lack of time; large class sizes and excessive daily workloads.

Keywords: burnout, job satisfaction, physical education teacher, stress.

INTRODUCTION

Difficulty in the work of physical education (PE) teacher is understood as a cause of trouble, struggle, or embarrassment (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2009) and, as an extraneous effect interfering with the pedagogical process and the possibilities of adaptive and adequate behavior and work (Jovaiša, 2007). Depending on the research aim, methods theories and approaches applied (psychological or sociological), authors present difficulties of PE teachers work rather differently.

In psychological research "difficulty" usually refers to the reason of job stress or burnout, for example, H. Selye (1946) identified the stimuli

that create stress as "stressors" (cited from: Al-Mohannadi, Capel, 2007); others refer to these simply as "causes of stress" (Smith, Leng, 2003; Lee et al., 2006); "the reasons or causes or sources of burnout" (Mei-juan, 2006); "factors causing burnout" (De Heus, Diekstra, 1999); "the major causes of stress" (Al-Khalefa, 1999); "the highest stressors" (Torres et al., 2009); "critical incident" (Jung, 2010); "number of variables" (Gross, 2009).

The problem issues of difficulties at work are also discussed in studies about job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In those studies they are described as "sources of job dissatisfaction" (Johansson, Heikinaro-Johansson, 2004) and "the specific

factors which are influential on the teachers' job dissatisfaction" (Yaman, 2009).

In terms of sociology, there are studies referring to PE teachers' job difficulties as problems, such as: "most important problems", "a serious problem" and "greatest problems" (Wong, Louie, 2002); "issues in provision (concerns and/or problems)" (Hardman, 2008 a, b);

In spite of this, all of them refer to one and the same irritant which causes tension, fatigue, poor feelings of well-being, dissatisfaction, stress and burnout in PE teachers work.

In recent years, the PE teacher stress and burnout phenomenon has received increasing attention by researchers from many countries. These international concerns, have been evidenced by research works conducted in the USA (Gross, 2009; Jung, 2010), Poland (Brudnik, 2003; Pec, 2005), Greece (Koustelios, Tsigilis, 2005), Finland (Johansson, Heikinaro-Johansson, 2004), Turkey (Yaman, 2009), the Qatar (Al-Mohannadi, Capel, 2007), the Singapore (Smith, Leng, 2003), Korea (Lee et al., 2006) and China (Mei-Juan, 2006).

It should be noted that all those studies about PE teachers' work difficulties are individual. However, despite a large number of studies conducted, and the progress made in this area, a universally accepted survey identifying five most important difficulties in PE teachers' work usually defined in contemporary studies still does not exist. This is mainly because there is still no consensus either on the decisive factors causing those difficulties for PE teachers or what the central symptoms actually are.

Thus, **the purpose of this study** was (a) to review and (b) to identify five most important difficulties in PE teachers work usually defined in contemporary studies.

RESEARCH METHODS

Procedures for Identifying Articles. This review examines research literature concerning the causes of stress and burnout of PE teachers from the year 1999 to 2009 applying computer-aided literature search. The keywords used for the electronic search were "stress" or "burnout" or "job satisfaction" and "physical education teacher". Various databases were accessed, including SPORTDiscus, Health Medline, ProQuest and PsycINFO. A grand total of 41 articles were sourced from a broad selection of journals. Conscious of

the inadequacy of many of the articles' relevance to the literature review, the researcher re-examined the articles and applied a specifically designed five criteria model to increase the focus of the study: (a) they must be published in English, (b) they must be directly related to stress, burnout or job satisfaction with a focus on physical education teacher, (c) they must be an original study; (d) they must be published between 1999 and 2009, and (e) they must be published in journals, thus excluding books, unpublished papers, doctoral dissertations and Master theses. Having sourced 41 articles originally, 15 proved suitable after implementing the selection criteria.

Thus, **the main method of our research** was logical deductive research literature analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

On the basis of the research aim and the structure of the article, firstly we will review research literature and identify five most important difficulties in PE teachers work usually defined in contemporary studies.

The purpose of D. Smith and G. W. Leng's (2003) research was to assess the burnout levels of secondary school PE teachers in Singapore and identify some specific work conditions related to burnout. The Work Environment questionnaire (Fejgin et al., 1995), administered to 74 Singapore PE teachers, measured the relationship between burnout and four theoretical dimensions: psychological, structural-physical, social and bureaucratic. It was found that physical education teachers in Singapore experienced only moderate levels of burnout. They perceived bureaucratic, psychological and social to be significant contributors. However, there was no significant relationship between the demographic data (age, gender, race, marital status, position, years of teaching, and educational level) and burnout among teachers.

The reasons for PE teacher burnout consist mainly of the following: 1) physical education is a nonexaminable (not graded) subject and usually takes the second place in schools; 2) school rankings according to the annual physical fitness tests and weight control; 3) PE teacher teaches at least one academic subject; 4) PE teachers are also sometimes required to serve as guardians, disciplinarians, and role models; 5) PE teachers' feeling of monotony because they usually teach the same curriculum

over and over again; 6) excessive and unnecessary paperwork; 7) the dual role conflict of teaching and coaching (between self, school and the Ministry of Education); 8) lack of time (for in-service programs and the requirement to fulfil 100 hours of courses per year; 9) additional work (as going with school teams for several weekends) with no extra pay; 10) the marginal status of PE for negative attitudes toward the PE teacher and his or her profession.

The purpose of the study carried out in Qatar (Arab country in the Middle East) was to identify causes of stress for physical education teachers in at the beginning and end of the school year as well as any changes over the course of the year. A second purpose was to try to explain any differences in causes of stress according to: gender, nationality, type of school, and amount of experience. Results showed that there were different causes of stress for different groups of teachers which could be related to different backgrounds and experiences and different roles and responsibilities in society as a result of different cultural and social expectations and environmental factors (Al-Mohannadi, Capel, 2007). The causes of stress for PE teachers: 1) problems with administration; 2) workload and responsibilities; 3) physical education curriculum; 4) low status of physical education; 5) salaries, bonuses and allowances; 6) poor school facilities; 7) pupils' problems; 8) responsibilities for pupils' safety. Statistically significant stress factor established was "Workload and responsibilities" and the greatest but statistically insignificant factor was "Pupils' problems" at the beginning and end of the academic year for PE teacher.

Researchers A. Wong and L. Louie (2002) attempted to identify what PE *teachers* were doing in secondary schools and what help they needed from professional bodies in the field. In order to collect preliminary data for the purpose of understanding the present situation, questionnaires were responded 209 (including 132 males and 76 females) secondary school PE *teachers* in Hong Kong, China. The data indicating, that *physical* education lessons in Hong Kong secondary schools were skill oriented in general and typically that PE *teachers* were technocratic in nature.

Respondents were also asked to list three most important problems for the teaching of *physical education* in secondary school. Their responses can be summarized in the following five problem areas. They are ranked according to

their importance: 1) school-*environment* related, e. g. insufficient facilities/equipment, insufficient curriculum time, a marginal subject and not part of the school assessment; 2) student-related, e. g. poor physical ability, poor attitude and poor motivation, poor discipline; 3) *teacher*-related, e. g. too heavy a workload, incompetent in both skills and knowledge, teacher burn-out; 4) social-*environment* related, e. g. subject not valued by students/parents, subject not valued by the society as a whole related; and 5) subject-matter related, e. g. no text books, no standard comprehensive curriculum, no standard/objective evaluation. As to problems in the school *environment*, facilities and equipment deficiency and low subject status were perceived as the greatest problems.

PE *teachers* in Hong Kong (Wong, Louie, 2002) regarded a serious problem in the present teaching situations: 1) most PE *teachers* were required to teach at least one other subject such as language, history, mathematics, etc.; 2) excessive daily workloads led to low motivation; 3) PE *teachers* had a great amount of additional workload involving coaching, managerial and non-academic duties. A shortage of manpower was not a problem.

An adverse tendency about the lack of PE *teachers* was shown in a study by R. M. Ingersol (2003). The author suggests that forty-six per cent of *teachers* will leave the profession within their first five years of teaching. These data refer to *teachers* from all disciplines including physical education.

Numerous studies report reasons why new PE *teachers* feel overwhelmed during their first years of teaching. Such feelings are linked with: a) low status of the subject matter; b) a lack of respect given to PE by members of the school community; c) physical isolation in the school setting; d) fewer colleagues for collaboration; e) the lack of appropriate resources or teaching space (McCormack, Thomas, 2003).

D. Liston et al. (2006) identified different reasons for difficulties in the first years of teaching physical education: heterogeneous and difficult students, large class sizes and sharing space with other physical education classes, is vastly different from the reality of a classroom teacher with a limited number of students who are commonly seated at their desks.

Research by J. Jung (2010), Northern Illinois University, applying the method of "critical incident

interview”, which facilitates problem solving, showed that incidents critical to the PE teachers included: a) burn-out, b) marginalization/isolation, c) student injury, d) success of low-skilled students, and e) devaluation of physical education. Those critical incidents influenced their career either positively (e. g. strengthen professional identity, facilitate learning to teach, reframe belief systems) or negatively (e. g. loss of enthusiasm, leaving the profession).

The purpose of the study carried out in Korea (Lee et al., 2006) was to examine the causes and consequences of occupational stress in Korean secondary PE teachers when compared with classroom teachers. Three of these significant differences were for a stressor scales: workload, organizational climate, and home-work balance. Four outcome scales also exhibited significant differences: job satisfaction, energy levels, organizational security, and physical symptoms. It was established that job-related stressors accounted for between 3–30% of the outcome variance for PE teachers, and 12–40% for classroom teachers. The determinants of outcome variables were generally different for the two groups.

Professional burn-out in the activities of PE teachers was researched by a Chinese scientist (Mei-Juan, 2006). Research results showed that the causes of professional burn-out appeared in the community, at school, teachers’ professional adjustment, interrelations, as well as personal environment.

Aiming at establishing links between burn-out and job satisfaction, 175 PE teachers from Greek schools were interviewed (Koustelios, Tsigilis, 2005, p. 189). It was established that job satisfaction was primarily affected by “job itself” followed by “supervision” and “working conditions”, whereas burnout is affected by “personal accomplishment” and “emotional exhaustion”. Intrinsic aspects of job satisfaction seemed to correlate stronger to burnout than the extrinsic.

Specific factors associated with job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of male and female PE teachers working at different levels in Finnish schools were studied by N. Johansson and P. Heikinaro-Johansson (2004). On the basis of their evidence the authors established five sources of job dissatisfaction were found: poor working conditions, work under pressure of time, student misbehaviour, large class sizes and lack of resources.

Turkish National Education Ministry initiated a study involving 197 PE teachers: 47 women and 150 men. The aim of the research was to establish teachers’ job satisfaction (Yaman, 2009). Determining the factors which are influential on the teachers’ job satisfaction, such as the profession and its characteristics, working conditions, social relationships, economic conditions, administration and inspection and social requirements, thus finding out the factors causing job dissatisfaction and helping teachers in working more efficiently and attaining job satisfaction are vitally important in terms of properly raising the future generations as well. Based on the findings, the factors affecting job satisfaction were determined and the suggestions were offered.

A finding from the study „Middle school physical education performance data: school and teacher characteristics” (Hall et al., 2009) was that school poverty index was negatively related to school performance in physical education, suggesting that poverty may be a risk factor for program success.

A study carried out in Poland (Brudnik, 2004) showed that PE teachers experienced the greatest professional burn-out compared to other teachers at school. Professional burn-out of PE teachers was also analysed by K. Pec (2005) and M. Brudnik (2003, 2004). According to S. Tucholska (2003), PE teachers are the group of teachers most unsatisfied with their profession.

PE specialists aiming to conduct high-quality classes come across obstacles which can cause frustrations and stress. Interfering variables were indicated by M. K. Gross (2009): a) limited equipment and supplies (LaFee, 2008), b) large class sizes (Hastie et al., 1999; Barroso, et al., 2005), and c) discipline problems (Kulinna, 2008). Lack of sufficient time and large class size (Siedentop, 2009) (cited from: Gross, 2009) may be the most serious problems that cut across K-12 physical education.

S. M. Al-Khalefa (1999) found the major causes of stress for PE teachers to be: work conditions; salaries, bonuses and allowances; status of physical education; supervision; school facilities; workload; career development (cited from: Al-Mohannadi, Capel, 2007).

DISCUSSION

European Commission official Working Paper “*On the mid-term review of the European strategy 2007–2012 on health and safety at work*” (2011) suggests that the right to health is a fundamental right and all workers must have legal guarantees to have such working conditions that protect their health, safety and dignity. It is also argued there that the problems at work are more often associated with health complaints than financial or family problems, and work-related stress is recognized as a major obstacle to productivity in Europe. Therefore, interest in work stress is a justified theme and attracts more and more researchers’ attention.

Physical education teachers represent the occupation, the activities of which are associated with permanent mental and physical stress (Yaman, 2009; Jung, 2010). The specificity of their work is unique and differs significantly from that of other participants of education process (Hardman, 2011) because the latter have to meet certain requirements: control emotions, behave irreproachably, follow the school regulations, rules of work procedures, general hygiene standards, health requirements, safety rules in the gym, which causes difficulties in the professional work of physical education teachers.

Starting with discussion of professional problems of physical education teacher at work, which leads to stress, dissatisfaction with work and exhaustion, it is particularly useful to say that in many countries physical education as a subject that receives too little attention.

K. Hardman (2008 a) presents the situation of physical education in the world schools, comparing it with the data of 1999. This comparison shows that the situation of physical education at school, especially in economically developing and less-developed countries, has changed little since 1999 Berlin meeting on physical education global issues.

The study shows that physical education as a subject is more than any other subjects intended to be removed from the general education curriculum. In many countries it is formally requested that this subject occupied 79%, and in Europe – 89% of time in the curriculum. It should be noted that physical education as an examined school subject is taught in 61 per cent of countries in the world. This means that two-thirds of countries gave physical education the status of the examined subject in the general education curriculum, thus increasing the

importance of those lessons. Unfortunately, as the scientist states, despite the formal obligations to take care of physical education in schools, in reality the situation is different from the attention to physical education in the general education curriculum. The “scissors”, as the study shows, between official educational policy and educational reality is a geographically widespread phenomenon.

It should be noted that such phenomenon is distinguished when the responsibility of the implementation of this general education program is treated as a condition to devote more time to other subjects which are given priority because of their ranking in the examination system in different countries. Low status of physical education classes is a characteristic phenomenon in general. In addition, it lacks official assessments of the subject quality and student achievements. When various resources are spent for other purposes, when physical education teaching does not receive the available financial resources, and there is a lack of financial support, there is a necessity for suitably qualified staff, careful and responsible approach of school management is of vital importance. In his study K. Hardman (2008 a) considers such phenomenon of physical education lessons as not participating in the lesson on the basis of a medical certificate. It is believed that this also indirectly reduces the status of physical education as a subject. The question is whether there is an exemption from other subjects (with the possible exception of religious education in some countries).

Interesting thoughts are of individuals involved in the study, for example, one of Cyprus school principals acknowledges that the real situation of the subject of physical education teaching contrasts to formal requirements of this subject; according to one Spanish physical education researcher, situation in Spain shows that mandatory physical education classes during the last school year became optional (facultative). In this case, the instructions the government for physical education as a compulsory subject in the compulsory educational curriculum are ignored.

With regard to the status of physical education teachers, in the context of teachers of other subjects it should be noted that physical educators are valued worse than teachers of mathematics, Lithuanian language and other subjects. L. Kardelienė et al. (2009) argue that non-examinable subjects in the educational system are valued worse because they are peripheral in the aspect of the main instrumental

function at school. As a result, the status of teachers who are specialists in non-academic subjects is declining. It is interesting to note that students and parents also more value teachers of academic subjects, especially mathematics, Lithuanian language and literature compared to those of non-academic subjects (music, technologies, moral education (ethics, religion), and physical education).

However, D. Masiliauskas (2011) points out in his study that attention should be drawn to the fact that the students welcome such personal qualities of a physical education teacher as friendliness, calmness, and a sense of humour. Students also identified the characteristics of the teacher and his/her teaching performance features that they did not like. Boys more often than girls do not like the fact that physical education teachers do not always take into account their wishes during the lessons, but require performing the normative exercises. In turn, girls often emphasize teachers' unwillingness to communicate, disparaging remarks, intolerance.

It is worth discussing physical education teachers' opinion (ibid.) of students' characteristics that help and hinder teachers in their creation of educational interaction during physical education classes. It has been established (Masiliauskas, 2011) that all teachers (males and females) appreciate students' curiosity, confidence in their own powers and initiative, and students' characteristics that impede these interactions are their indifference and laziness in physical education classes. In this respect, K. A. Jenkinson and A. C. Benson's (2010) study is relevant, which included 115 physical education teachers (62 men and 53 women) from the State of Victoria (Australia). The researchers were trying to determine the difficulties that arose in the implementation of the physical education educational process in secondary schools. It was revealed that the major challenge for teachers was students' laziness and unwillingness to participate in physical education classes.

An overview study of the professional difficulties reaffirms the need for teachers to accept the view that one of the biggest disturbances for physical education teachers at work is a poor training (learning) environment and inadequate training equipment and facilities. It is worth quoting the claim of the organizers of the population's physical activity promotion strategies about today's physical education teacher's difficulties in the realization of health education due to the infrastructure conditions and poor educational

environment as well as the number of pupils in physical education classes in mainstream urban schools (Jankauskienė, 2008). It should be noted that those disturbances of the pedagogical interactions are an argument in discussions with students revealing the benefits of the tasks and exercise to them and showing them the peculiarities of a healthy lifestyle. Other researchers point out that in physical education classes pedagogical interaction is negatively affected by the lack of inventory and educational environment (Al-Mohannad, Capel, 2007; Yaman, 2009; Jung, 2010), which is neither functional, safe nor hygienic. It should be emphasized that *Lithuanian General Programmes of Primary and Basic Education* (2008) state that the development of students' sports skills need safe learning environment, which, according to the above-mentioned foreign scientists, must be functional, hygienic, and tools, equipment and supplies must be ergonomic and orderly, gyms should have showers, rooms must be well lit, ventilated, harmless to health and maintain their optimal temperature.

Research by A. Stočkus and E. Adaškevičienė (2012) confirms the importance of studies on the interfaces between physical education teachers' work stressors and sociodemographic variables. It turned out that the major source of stress for physical education teachers in their work was the amount of various documents and other "paper" work, education reforms and too much responsibility for students. In addition, younger teachers and those with less teaching experience were more stressed by a large number of students in the gym than their older counterparts. Older physical education teachers and those with longer years of experience indicated that their working stressor was a huge responsibility for others, an abundance of various documents and other "paper" work, and when physical education teachers were underestimated. In the aspect of gender, men were more dissatisfied with low salaries, and women indicated that other teachers' attitudes towards physical education caused dissatisfaction with their work. Urban teachers perceived students' disrespect and a large number of students in classes as greater stressors than physical education teachers working in regions. Physical Education teachers working in high schools (gymnasiums) assessed competition in the educational institution as a stronger stressor than teachers who worked in the main or secondary schools.

In conclusion, it may be maintained that the low status of physical education lessons is a characteristic phenomenon because different resources are allocated for other purposes, the available material resources are not suitable for physical education curriculum, and there is a lack of financial support for the realization of the objectives of the subject as well as properly qualified staff. Thus, it is necessary for physical education teachers to accept the most responsible approach to the development of social interaction due to the realization of the social order – the development of pupils' attitudes towards health enhancing physical activity, their skills and systemic physical activity habits not only during physical education classes and in their free time, but also after school and during their whole life.

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

After research literature review and identification of PET work difficulties (we found 24 of them) we suggest that they are as follows: low status of physical education (by the society, students, parents); limited equipment, facilities and

supplies; lack of time; large class sizes; excessive daily workloads; no text books; no standard comprehensive curriculum; no standard/objective evaluation; most PE teachers were required to teach at least one other subject such as language, history, mathematics, etc.; PE teachers are also sometimes required to serve as guardians, disciplinarians, and role models; PE teachers' feeling of monotony because they usually teach the same curriculum over and over again; excessive and unnecessary paperwork; the dual role conflict of teaching and coaching; additional work (as going with school teams for several weekends) with no extra pay; the marginal status of PE teacher; problems with administration; salaries, bonuses and allowances; pupils' problems (poor physical ability, poor attitude and motivation, misbehaviour); responsibilities for pupils' safety; student injuries; success of low-skilled students; poor working conditions; fewer colleagues for collaboration.

We established that the five most important difficulties in PE teachers work usually defined in contemporary studies were as follows: low status of physical education; limited equipment, facilities and supplies; lack of time; large class sizes and excessive daily workloads.

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PROFESINIAI SUNKUMAI KŪNO KULTŪROS MOKYTOJO DARBE

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SANTRAUKA

Tyrimo pagrindimas ir hipotezė. Šiuo metu užsienio tyrinėtojai intensyviai analizuoja kūno kultūros mokytojo streso ir išsekimo sindromo apraiškas ir jų priežastis įvairiose šalyse. Pažymėtina, kad visi šie tyrimai, atskleidžiantys sunkumus kūno kultūros mokytojo darbe, yra pavieniai. Nepaisant didelių studijų ir pažangos šioje srityje, apžvalgos ir sisteminio modelio identifikuojant penkis svarbiausius, kaip dažniausiai pasitaikančius tyrimuose, sunkumus kūno kultūros mokytojo darbe nepavyko rasti. Taip yra dėl to, kad iki šiol nėra aišku, kokie veiksniai sukelia sunkumus ir kurie iš jų yra pagrindiniai.

Tikslas: (a) apžvelgti ir (b) identifikuoti penkis svarbiausius, kaip dažniausiai pasitaikančius tyrimuose, sunkumus kūno kultūros mokytojo darbe.

Metodai. Mokslinė literatūra apie sunkumus kūno kultūros mokytojo darbe apžvelgta nuo 1999 iki 2009 metų naudojant kompiuterinę paiešką. Raktažodžiai, kuriais atlikome mokslinės literatūros paiešką, buvo „stresas“ ir „profesinis išsekimas“ arba „pasitenkinimas darbu“ ir kūno kultūros mokytojas. Pagrindinis tyrimo metodas – loginė dedukcinė mokslinės literatūros analizė.

Aptarimas ir išvados. Apžvelgus mokslinę literatūrą identifikuoti dvidešimt keturi sunkumai kūno kultūros mokytojo darbe. Nustatyta, kad penki svarbiausi (pagrindiniai), kaip dažniausiai pasitaikantys tyrimuose, sunkumai kūno kultūros mokytojo darbe yra: prastas dalyko statusas; ribota ir netinkama mokymo įranga ir priemonės; laiko trūkumas; didelės klasės; pernelyg didelis kasdienis kūno kultūros mokytojų darbo krūvis.

Raktažodžiai: profesinis išsekimas, pasitenkinimas darbu, stresas.

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