

Relationship Between Anxiety, Mental Resilience and the Presence of a School Psychologist in the Teaching Community

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Abstract

The article examines the role of the school psychologist in relation to stress, positive emotions and psychological resilience in teachers. The study involved 101 teachers, 93 of whom were female and 8 were male, from all levels of education. The study was conducted using an online form that included questions related to their demographic data (e.g., gender, age, etc.), as well as the STAI questionnaire, the Positive Emotion Scale (mDES) and the CD Risc. Reliability analysis of the scales showed very good internal consistency of the items and excellent reliability. Coefficient Cronbach's alpha is > 0.748 . Cronbach Alpha values were checked on both subscales of the mDES – Negative emotions (NE) and Positive emotions (PE).

Keywords: school psychologist, mental resilience, teachers, stress.

1. Introduction

There is a lot of research in both Europe and America that examines teacher stress, positive emotions, and resilience. Some of them focus on the causal factors, which can cause stress, on the effect of experiencing positive emotions on the educational process, and on strengthening the mental resilience of teachers. Also, there are several studies that examine the role of the school psychologist, the tasks he/she has in the school unit, or the transition from the classic and limited role of systematic support of students to the more expanded one of advisory support of the entire educational community. However, there is not enough research that correlates teachers' stress, the positive emotions they experience, and the strengthening of their mental resilience with the existence or not of a school psychologist in the school. This specific research aims to shed light on the advisory role of the school psychologist and how he/she can influence the emotions and resilience of teachers. Especially with the advent of the pandemic that led to distance education, it is interesting to study how the stress levels of teachers were formed, the existence or not of positive emotions, and the impact of the above on their mental resilience, taking into account whether the school unit where they work has a school psychologist or not.

A teacher's role is fundamental for the success of every educational process. Stress may affect teacher's productivity, attitudes and interactions with workmates and especially students. Stress is the body's reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental or emotional adjustment or response. Stress can arise from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, nervous or anxious (Azhan & Majid, 2016: 438). There are not a few research that have been done

regarding the stress of teachers. They examine the causes, demographics, or coping mechanisms of this stress. Below, some of the research data are reported.

As Wettstein et al. (2021) mention “Teachers have above-average burnout rates compared to other professions (Kyriacou, 2015), and the occupational stress among teachers has increased significantly over the last decade (Aloe et al., 2014). Around 30% of teachers report that the teaching profession is ‘very stressful’ or ‘extremely stressful’ (Kyriacou, 2015). The Gallup Report results from 2014 (Gallup, 2014) indicate that 46% of US teachers report very high daily stress during the school year. According to an SNF study on Swiss teachers from the fifth to the ninth school year, around one-third of teachers feel ‘very stressed’ (Kunz Heim et al., 2014a).

Besides, according to the most recent data available from the U.S. Civil Rights Data Collection, nearly 29% of teachers were considered chronically absent, missing ten school days or more. When teachers are chronically absent, students’ test scores decrease. Teacher absences also negatively impact school budgeting, generating the additional expense of hiring substitute teachers (SEF Foundation, 2021).

Today, teaching is one of the most stressful occupations in the U.S. High levels of stress are affecting teacher health and well-being, causing teacher burnout, lack of engagement, job dissatisfaction, poor performance, and some of the highest turnover rates ever. Stress not only has negative consequences for teachers, it also results in lower achievement for students and higher costs for schools. A New York City study showed higher teacher turnover led to lower fourth and fifth grade student achievement in both math and language arts. The cost of teacher turnover is estimated to be over \$7 billion per year (The Pennsylvania State University, 2016)

In research done by Azhan and Majid (2016) it was shown that poor student behavior is correlated with teacher stress. Also, supervisory support was found to be inversely related to teacher stress. Increasing support can significantly reduce stress. Finally, workload can increase their stress. Nevertheless, as the researchers’ report, the above correlations do not necessarily constitute causal relationships. As they mention “...student behavior is not the major contributing factors that could lead to stress among school teachers. Instead, it is the lack of the supportive role played by the school administration and the excess workload that has actually caused stress among school teachers (p. 442).

According to Apostolou and Nikolova (2022) “Stressors in the teaching profession are influenced by the characteristics of national education systems and the conditions prevailing in schools. They may thus differ between countries or within countries at different time points (Kyriacou, 2001). Earlier studies in Greece propose that Greek teachers are less exhausted than teachers in other European countries (Kantas & Vassiliaki, 1997). However, the huge changes that the country has been through after the economic crisis, which manifested itself in 2008, must have indeed affected this balance. The first clue of this can be seen in later studies in the Greek domain, which has proposed additional stress sources such as the curriculum, the lack of knowledge on how to handle learning / behavioral problems, the delays in sending books, the substitutes, the hourly wages, teaching different subjects, and the untimely placement of seconded (Mouzoura, 2005; Apostolou & Nikolova, 2022: 204-205).

Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, from a psychological perspective, contributes to the conceptual basis for understanding the resilient qualities of teachers who are doing a job that is itself emotional by nature; and it mirrors the work of a range of educational researchers on the nature of teaching (Nias, 1989; Nias, 1999). Hargreaves (1998: 835), for example, posits that emotions are at the heart of teaching (Gu & Day, 2007: 1304).

Theory indicates a strong relationship between positive emotions and resilience while positive emotions are more common among individuals with high level of resilience (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). Moreover, positive emotions actually feed the resilience, since resilient individuals

make use of positive emotions in order to recover from stressful situations and to find a positive meaning in such events, while the adaptive benefits of positive emotions are greater when individuals are under stress (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2002, 2004). Moreover, resilient individuals appear to maintain a more optimistic, enthusiastic and energetic life attitude while they are more curious and open to new experiences and further characterized by higher positive emotionality (Block & Kremen, 1996; Klohnen, 1996, Karampas et al., 2016: 1729).

The relationship between mental resilience and positive emotions was examined by Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) focusing on the hypotheses a) that the positive emotions are active components of mental resilience and b) that people with high mental resilience will return more quickly to normal levels of cardiovascular function after experiencing a of negative emotion than people with lower levels of mental resilience. The research results confirmed both hypotheses. Mentally resilient people recover faster than the negative emotional arousal using coping strategies that they evoke positive emotions to regulate negative situations. In addition, in mentally resilient individuals the activation of positive emotions is done automatically, saving cognitive resources. The positive emotions help build psychological resources which are necessary to cope with adverse conditions (Tugade & Fredrickson 2004, in Mandroni-Miggina, 2018: 12).

It is clear that emotional intelligence and the ability to connect interpersonally of teachers with students plays an important role in effective teaching and in the psycho-pedagogical attitude (these teachers avoid professional burnout and contribute significantly in learning, achievement and inclusion of students) (Place & Elliott, 2014; Kauffman & Landrum, 2013). A positive relationship with educators can reduce many of the significant psychosocial and behavioral children's problems and strengthen the ability to adapt to school (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, in Kourkoutas et al., 2019: 11).

The literature emphasizes the need for students and teachers alike to understand their own emotions and those of others and to be able to handle and express those emotions. Kawamura, Suzuki, and Iwai underscored that, "Teachers should understand their own feelings, particularly when their students are being disrespectful. The degree of teachers' interventions depends on the degree of negative feeling of their own" (p. 1). Emotional labor (or emotion work, emotion management or "deep acting") refers to the effort a person makes in response to the emotions of others (Ramvi, 2017: 140).

The understanding of resilience is inspired by Ungar (2012) who defined (general) resilience as a process whereby individuals harness personal and contextual resources in order to successfully navigate challenging circumstances. Like wellbeing, resilience is a multidimensional construct involving activation of multiple personal and contextual resources (Hascher, Beltman & Mansfield, 2021: 3). With regard to teacher wellbeing and resilience, both constructs have been shown to have positive outcomes for teachers, including teaching and learning quality, teacher self-efficacy, commitment, and job satisfaction. It can also be seen that teacher wellbeing is important in the resilience process, as a state of more positive wellbeing will influence how teachers interpret and respond to challenges, as well as being an important outcome of the resilience process (Hascher et al., 2021: 418).

According to the Resiliency Model when an individual of any age experiences adversity, he or she also -ideally- experiences individual and environmental characteristics, protective factors, that buffer that diversity. With enough "protection", the individual adapts to that diversity, without experiencing a significant disruption in his or her life. The individual stays within a comfort zone, or at "homeostasis", or moves to a level of increased resiliency because of the emotional strength and healthy coping mechanism developed in the process of overcoming the adversity (Henderson & Milstein, 2003: 7).

2. Research aims and hypothesis

The purpose of the research is to study the role of the school psychologist in relation to stress, positive emotions and mental resilience of teachers.

General hypothesis: Teachers in schools with a school psychologist will have less anxiety, more positive emotions and stronger mental resilience compared to those who work in schools without a school psychologist.

Hypothesis 1: We assume STAI and CD Risc are negatively related.

Hypothesis 2: We assume that resilience is associated with positive emotions.

Hypothesis 3: We assume that longer internship as teachers is associated with higher mental resilience.

Hypothesis 4: We assume that longer internship as a teacher is associated with high anxiety.

3. Research design

In order to achieve the objectives and required data collection, three different instruments were used:

✓ The Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). Spielberger's (1970) Anxiety Questionnaire has been weighted to Greek population by Liakos and Giannitsis (1984), and since then is widely used in Greek research, but also in clinical practice. Each subscale of Spielberger's (1970) questionnaire consists of 20 statements – responses rated on a Likert scale four levels (1,2,3,4) with a possible score from 20 to 80 points. The range of responses ranges from not at all (0), somewhat (1), moderate (2), very a lot (3), for the subscale examining stress as a state and almost never (0), sometimes (1), often (2), almost always (3) for the subscale that examines anxiety as a personality trait. At the end the is calculated total of the aggregated scores of each subscale separately, but also in combination of the two subscales (Tola, 2013: 59).

✓ The Modified Differential Emotions Scale (mDES). The mDES scale has been adapted to the Greek language and translated into it based on the process of reverse independent translation. It is used as a reliable tool to assess positive and negative emotions in the Greek population. The Cronbach Alpha index for the scale is $\alpha = 0.751$. The scale's weighting has been carried out in a Greek sample by Galanakis, Stalikas, Pezirkianidis and Karakasidou (2016).

✓ The Connor Davidson Resilience Scale (CD Risc). The CD-Risc evaluates five dimensions of resilience: a) personal competence, high standards, and tenacity; b) trust in one's feelings, tolerance of negative affect, and strengthening effects of stress; c) positive acceptance of change and secure relationships; d) control, and e) spiritual influences. The psychometric properties of the CD-RISC have been found to be good in almost all studies that used it. The scale has been reported as reliable ($\alpha = .89$) and valid by several researchers (Connor, Davidson, & Lee, 2003) and it has been used in studies worldwide (Singh & Xiao-nan Yu, 2010) (Daniilidou & Platsidou, 2018: 19). The scale has been translated into 52 languages, including Greek, and is widely used.

✓ Demographic information (gender, age, marital status, education, specialty, professional experience, etc.)

4. Reliability

In terms of age and gender, the participants represented all age groups. Specifically, 12 people aged 22-30, 25 aged 31-40 (22 women and 3 men), 20 aged 41-50, 40 aged 51-60 (35 women and 5 men) and 4 aged over 60 participated. Of the participants 60 were married, 31 single, 7 divorced and 3 widowed.

Of the schools where the teachers who participated in this research worked, 45.5% had a school psychologist (a total of 46 schools). Most of the schools were located in Athens, few in Thessaloniki and the rest were scattered throughout the Greek territory.

The distribution of raw scores on all scales was normal. Kurtosis and Skewness values are in the range -1,1 (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the data by the measured scales

	STAI	mDES	CD Risc
N	101	101	101
Mean	41,98	47,3168	94,32
Median	41,00	47,0000	95,00
Mode	40	45,00	99 ^a
Std. Deviation	8,954	7,83955	14,460
Skewness/asymmetry/	,447	,003	-,246
Kurtosis/excess/	-,138	,496	-,420
Minimum	26	27,00	59
Maximum	69	70,00	124

Note: STAI-The Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory

Reliability analysis of the scales showed very good internal consistency of the items and excellent reliability. Coefficient cronbach's alpha is > 0.748. Cronbach Alpha values were checked on both subscales of the mDES – Negative emotions (NE) and Positive emotions (PE). If these scales are analyzed separately, they would be more informative in subsequent analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of reliability analysis of the scales

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
STAI	0.850	20
mDES	0.748	20
PE	0.892	10
NE	0.844	8

Note: PE- Positive emotions; NE- Negative emotions

Correlation analysis showed strong linear relationships between all scales (Table 3). A positive strong and statistically significant correlation exists between STAI and NE ($r=0.551$; $p<0.001$). A positive strong and statistically significant correlation exists between PE and CD Risc ($r=.609$; $p<0.001$). As expected, anxiety was related to the experience of negative emotions, while the experience of positive emotions was significantly related to resilience.

A negative and statistically significant correlation exists between STAI and PE ($r=-.462$; $p<0.001$). A negative and statistically significant correlation exists between STAI and CD Risc ($r=-.283$; $p<0.001$). A negative and statistically significant correlation exists between NE and CD Risc ($r=-.347$; $p<0.001$). These results quite naturally confirm the existing negative

relationship between anxiety, positive emotions and resilience. The more anxious a teacher feels, the less likely he is to experience positive emotions and the less his resilience resources. A state of resilience correlates with positive emotions. *These results confirm hypothesis 1 and 2.*

Table 3. Results of correlation analysis by Pearson coefficient

		PE	NE	CD Risc
STAI	Pearson Correlation	-.462**	.551**	-.283**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.004
	N	101	101	101
PE	Pearson Correlation			.609**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			<.001
	N			101
NE	Pearson Correlation			-.347**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			<.001
	N			101

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Independent samples T-test was conducted in order to check whether there are significant differences in the values on all scales between teachers according to whether the school they work in has a school psychologist. As shown in the descriptive data of the answer to the question: “Is there a school psychologist in your school?” - nearly half of the respondents, or 45.5% (46 schools), have such a specialist. In this sense, we have two almost quantitatively identical samples - teachers who have a school psychologist, and teachers who do not. It is this distribution that we used as a factor nominal variable for analysis.

The results show that there is a statistically significant difference in STAI levels according to the presence of a school psychologist, or lower anxiety levels in those teachers who confirm that there is a psychologist in their school (MYES=39,87; SDYES=7,873). While the anxiety levels are significantly ($t|99|=-2,208$; $p=0,030$) higher among teachers who report that there is no psychologist in the school where they work (MNO=43,75; SDNO=9,479).

Table 4. Results of independent samples T-test to establish significant differences in the levels of STAI, PE, NE and CD Risc according to the presence of a school psychologist

	Is there a school psychologist at your school?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.
STAI	Yes	46	39,87	7,873	-2,208	99	,030
	No	55	43,75	9,479			
PE	Yes	46	35,91	7,551	1,450	99	,150
	No	55	33,65	7,991			
NE	Yes	46	12,02	4,548	-1,116	99	,267
	No	55	13,15	5,417			
CD Risc	Yes	46	93,30	13,871	-,642	99	,523
	No	55	95,16	15,010			

No statistically significant differences are found in the levels of PE, NE and CD Risc according to whether or not there is a school psychologist in the respective educational institution.

These results are an indirect indicator of the role of the school psychologist, who could nevertheless represent a certain resource for teachers. *They also partially confirm the general hypothesis of our study, according to which: Teachers in schools with a school psychologist will have less anxiety, more positive emotions and stronger mental resilience compared to those who work in schools without a school psychologist.*

It was conducted One-factor analysis of variance (One Way Anova) to establish significant differences in the levels of STAI, mDES and CD Risc according to demographic characteristics. In this case factor variables, or independent variables, are namely age, profession, weekly workload and internship. Dependent variables in this analysis were STAI, mDES and CD Risc levels.

No statistically significant differences were found in the values of STAI, mDES and CD Risc in relation to age (Table 5). No statistically significant differences were found in the values of STAI, mDES and CD Risc in relation to profession (Table 6). No statistically significant differences were found in the values of STAI, mDES and CD Risc in relation to weekly workload (Table 7).

No statistically significant differences were found in the values of mDES and CD Risc in relation to internship. But a tendency to increase the values of STAI with increasing internship in teachers was found. According to the values of the mean, the highest levels of STAI is among teachers with 9-10 years internship, and the lowest among those with 7-8 years internship (Table 8).

Table 5. Results of one-factor analysis of variance (One Way Anova) to establish significant differences in the levels of STAI, mDES and CD Risc according age

		N	Mean	SD	F	df	p
STAI	22-30 years old	12	41,83	7,359	,964	4; 96	,431
	31-40 years old	25	44,24	9,153			
	41-50 years old	20	42,75	11,111			
	51-60 years old	40	40,75	8,139			
	over 60 years	4	36,75	7,588			
	Total	101	41,98	8,954			
mDES	22-30 years old	12	48,50	9,150	1,065	4; 96	,378
	31-40 years old	25	49,12	6,918			
	41-50 years old	20	44,95	7,487			
	51-60 years old	40	47,38	8,041			
	over 60 years	4	43,75	8,732			
	Total	101	47,32	7,840			
CD Risc	22-30 years old	12	96,50	16,127	,346	4; 96	,846
	31-40 years old	25	94,64	13,140			
	41-50 years old	20	91,10	15,134			
	51-60 years old	40	94,85	14,766			
	over 60 years	4	96,50	15,843			
	Total	101	94,32	14,460			

Table 6. Results of one-factor analysis of variance (One Way Anova) to establish significant differences in the levels of STAI, mDES and CD Risc according profession

		N	Mean	SD	F	df	p
STAI	Children's teacher	20	44,25	9,352	,814	3; 97	,489
	Elementary school teacher	20	41,60	7,796			
	High school teacher	54	40,98	9,414			
	Other	7	44,29	7,158			
	Total	101	41,98	8,954			
mDES	Children's teacher	20	46,85	8,586	2,077	3; 97	,108
	Elementary school teacher	20	50,70	6,853			
	High school teacher	54	46,78	7,652			
	Other	7	43,14	7,946			
	Total	101	47,32	7,840			
CD Risc	Children's teacher	20	92,85	15,749	,604	3; 97	,614
	Elementary school teacher	20	98,20	13,606			
	High school teacher	54	93,50	13,303			
	Other	7	93,71	22,051			
	Total	101	94,32	14,460			

Table 7. Results of one-factor analysis of variance (One Way Anova) to establish significant differences in the levels of STAI, mDES and CD Risc according weekly workload

		N	Mean	SD	F	df	p
less than 20 hours	30	39,90	8,057	2,334	1; 99	,130	
21-25 hours	71	42,86	9,220				
Total	101	41,98	8,954				
less than 20 hours	30	47,10	8,109	,032	1; 99	,858	
21-25 hours	71	47,41	7,780				
Total	101	47,32	7,840				
less than 20 hours	30	96,80	13,179	1,262	1; 99	,264	
21-25 hours	71	93,27	14,933				
Total	101	94,32	14,460				

Table 8. Results of one-factor analysis of variance (One Way Anova) to establish significant differences in the levels of STAI, mDES and CD Risc according internship

		N	Mean	SD	F	df	p
STAI	1-2 years	12	45,58	9,239	2,299	4; 96	,041
	3-4- years	10	41,90	6,420			
	5-6- years	8	40,00	9,636			
	7-8 years	7	36,00	5,260			
	9-10 years	4	53,75	13,301			
	over 10 years	54	41,63	8,695			
	not specified	6	39,83	8,110			
	Total	101	41,98	8,954			
mDES	1-2 years	12	48,67	10,517	,903	4; 96	,497
	3-4- years	10	48,60	7,367			
	5-6- years	8	51,25	10,767			
	7-8 years	7	47,43	6,655			
	9-10 years	4	46,25	9,465			
	over 10 years	54	45,91	7,162			
	not specified	6	50,50	2,881			
	Total	101	47,32	7,840			
CD Risc	1-2 years	12	95,00	16,777	1,107	4; 96	,364
	3-4- years	10	92,80	15,740			
	5-6- years	8	89,25	15,854			
	7-8 years	7	104,43	7,413			
	9-10 years	4	85,00	15,599			
	over 10 years	54	94,17	14,164			
	not specified	6	98,00	12,264			
	Total	101	94,32	14,460			

These results do not support hypothesis 3 of the study according to which the longer internship as teachers is associated with higher mental resilience. And hypothesis 4 is partially proven, because in the variance analysis, a tendency to increase the values of STAI is observed, but this cannot be claimed for all groups of teachers.

5. Conclusion

In a predominantly female Greek sample, as are often the realities in the teaching profession, we were able to investigate the phenomena of anxiety, positive and negative emotions and resilience in search of their relationship with the presence of a significant figure – the school psychologist. We studied 101 people, of whom 92 were women. Despite this fact, we have retained the gender division in the graphical representation of the demographic descriptions, because it is more informative.

Most of the participants in the sample were aged 51-60. 55% of the teachers had a master's degree, and almost 45% had PhD in education. There are the most master's in the age group of 31-40 years. The most PhD are in the 51-60 age group. Over 53% of them are high school teachers by profession. Regarding the weekly workload, most of the teachers indicated that it varies between 21 and 25 hours. Regarding the most important question, namely, is there a school psychologist in the school by place of work, 45.5% answered positively.

Although the distribution of demographic characteristics was heterogeneous, the distribution of raw data from teacher's responses on all psychometric scales was normal. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was over 0.748 also on all scales, which is an indicator of high reliability of the methods.

We were able to prove hypothesis 1 and 2 in correlation analysis by Pearson's coefficient. Anxiety was related to the experience of negative emotions, while the experience of positive emotions was significantly related to resilience – there are positive strong and statistically significant correlations between STAI and NE, PE and CD Risc.

The correlations also confirm the existing negative relationship between anxiety, positive emotions and resilience. More anxious teachers are less likely to experience positive emotions and have fewer resilience resources – there are negative and statistically significant correlations exists between STAI and PE, STAI and CD Risc, NE and CD Risc.

We indirectly tested the presence (or absence) of a school psychologist as a nominal variable in independent samples t-test. We found a statistically significant difference in anxiety levels – the group of teachers with a school psychologist showed lower anxiety. We can only guess what the nature of interaction with the school psychologist is, but in any case, we can claim that such a specialist is a kind of resource in the educational field. *This result partially confirms our general hypothesis.*

We looked for significant differences with analysis of variance (One Way Anova) in the levels of the measured phenomena according to different demographic categories such as age, profession, internship as a teacher, weekly workload. We found such a difference only according to the length in internship as a teacher. In our sample, teachers with 9-10 years internship have the highest level of anxiety, and those with 7-8 years have the lowest level of anxiety. *This partially confirms hypothesis 4.*

Hypothesis 3 remains unconfirmed by the results generated.

It is likely that a more extended and larger sample could show the differences we hypothesized to be significant. But even with the limitations of our sample, we were able to research significant relations and trends. Resilience, in addition to a positive emotional state, can be indirectly related to the presence of a school psychologist.

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