

## MENTAL HEALTH OF TEACHERS IN UKRAINIAN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

DOI: 10.36740/WLek202111117

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### ABSTRACT

**The aim:** To research the indicators of teachers' mental health in a destabilizing organization of professional activities.

**Materials and methods:** The study was conducted at the Poltava M. V. Ostrogradsky Regional Institute of Postgraduate Pedagogical Education, Poltava V. G. Korolenko National Pedagogical University, Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central State Pedagogical University and Poltava State Medical University in 2018-2020. The sample size of 1817 respondents (Ukraine) included 388 men and 1429 women aged 20 to 57 years. The following methods were used: "Scale of threats to occupational health" (Dziuba, 2015) and "Scale of subjective well-being" (Sokolova, 2007) adapted by T. Dziuba. The study used mathematical and statistical analysis (descriptive statistics, correlation analysis) using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 21.0).

**Results:** It was found that an unstable level of emotional comfort is dominant (57.2%). This is shown by the following indicators: "self-assessment of mental health" 61.0%, "tension and sensitivity" 54.3% and "signs of psychiatric symptoms" 53.0%. Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative impact of the threat factors "daily and weekly overtime" ( $p < 0.01$ ) and "overwork" ( $p < 0.01$ ) on mental health. There is an increase in emotional discomfort in a situation of daily and weekly overtime and overwork. There is a positive correlation between the teachers' mental health and the indicator "significance of the professional environment" ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Conclusions:** The study showed that teachers' mental health in Ukrainian educational organizations is characterized by unstable emotional comfort and increased emotional discomfort, which is a consequence of unbalanced (destabilizing) working conditions: overwork, overtime. The obtained data motivates the need to conduct targeted psychotherapeutic and corrective work with teachers who demonstrate professional distress.

**KEY WORDS:** mental health, psychological security in the educational organization, overwork, daily and weekly overtime

Wiad Lek. 2021;74(11 p.I):2779-2783

### INTRODUCTION

Professional development and career growth of teachers can occur against the background of mental harmony, well-being, positive mood, creative activity (state of psychological safety), or vice versa – anxiety, excessive stress, low mood (state of psychological danger). The psychological safety of a teacher in educational space performs a stabilizing function as it "balances" the interaction of an employee with external environment. If educational environment does not contain threats, a teacher behaves freely and without compulsion. Under other conditions, the teacher's behavior changes: it becomes "clamped" within the framework of professional conventions, there are vigilance and bias towards the existing organizational conditions, a state of "combat" readiness, and so on. In addition, in case of a violation of psychological security,

there is a disintegration of professional interactions and psychological and somatic status [1].

Thus, organizational educational environment may contain some destabilizing features (threats), which under certain conditions violate the psychological safety of a teacher and negatively affect his/her mental health and well-being in general.

The complex and multifaceted problem of ensuring psychological security in educational organizations is associated primarily with studying the conditions of personal growth of the subjects in the educational process through their interaction that does not show psychological violence [2]. However, the effects of a destabilizing organization of professional activities on mental health and well-being have not been specifically studied, which necessitates appropriate research.

## THE AIM

The aim was to assess the level of the indicators of teachers' mental health in a destabilizing organization of professional activity.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted at the Poltava M. V. Ostrogradsky Regional Institute of Postgraduate Pedagogical Education, Poltava V. G. Korolenko National Pedagogical University, Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central State Pedagogical University and Poltava State Medical University in 2018-2020. The sample size of 1817 respondents (Ukraine) included 388 men and 1429 women aged 20 to 57 years. The sample is characterized by an uneven distribution by male gender. We define the uneven disintegration of the sample as an objective factor, given that most employees working in educational organizations in Ukraine are women.

The following methods of theoretical analysis and empirical research were used:

1. "Scale of threats to occupational health" [3]. Its items representatively cover the aspects of professional activity in educational organizations that are perceived and understood by teachers as possible threat factors in the context of professional activity, business communication and professional career realization.
2. "Scale of subjective well-being" by M. Sokolova adapted by T. Dziuba. It allowed to determine the levels of professional well-being as a basic indicator of teachers' mental health in educational organizations [4].

"Scale of threats to occupational health" contains four scales: "Destroying communications", "Destabilizing organization of professional activity", "Destructions of professional self-affirmation" and "Demotivators of work performance". Each scale is formed by eight threat factors, which, in our opinion, in one way or another affect the mental health of the teacher. In this publication, we focus only on the threat factors of the scale "Destabilizing organization of professional activity" that includes chronic fatigue; performing several tasks at once; overtime working day and week; negative working conditions; professional activity is physically exhausting; professional activity is morally exhausting; excessive load; frequency of changes and reconstructions.

"Scale of subjective well-being" by M. V. Sokolova adapted by T. Dziuba used as an indicator of teachers' subjective well-being in professional activities. The scale is based on screening method, which allows a teacher to assess own psychological state in professional activities, professional behavior, and individual physical symptoms by six indicators: "tension and sensitivity"; "signs that accompany main psycho-emotional symptoms"; "mood swings"; "significance of professional environment"; "mental health self-assessment"; "degree of satisfaction with professional activity".

The results were subjected to mathematical and statistical analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 21.0). The correlation analysis was used to identify the relationships among the obtained indicators.

## RESULTS

The indicators of teachers' mental health in educational organizations (Table I) show that in general, an unstable level of emotional comfort is dominant (57.2%).

The data presented in Table 1 shows that there are no serious problems in the professional sphere for most respondents, but we cannot talk about emotional comfort and its rapid recovery. Also, slightly higher values were obtained in terms of "self-assessment of mental health" (61.0%), "tension and sensitivity" (54.3%) and "signs of psychiatric symptoms" (53.0%) at the level of unstable emotional comfort. At the same time, almost a third of the respondents stated the high importance of their professional environment for them (26.4% the level of "complete emotional comfort").

One cannot ignore the fact that only 1.8% get complete emotional comfort. These teachers do not complain about various ailments, act effectively under stress, are confident in their abilities, have a set of personal resources that act as regulators of psycho-emotional tension and psycho-physiological activation. 40.5% of respondents show moderate emotional comfort in the educational organization. These teachers do not experience serious emotional problems, they are quite active, confident, and adequately direct their behavior. However, if we compare the unstable and general total indicator of moderate and complete emotional comfort (40.5 and 1.8% respectively), we can see that the unstable level of emotional comfort significantly prevails (57.2% of the total quantity).

The results of correlation analysis showed that there are significant correlations between the factors that threaten mental health, which formed the scale "Destabilizing organization of professional activity" and the level of teachers' mental health that impairs the psychological safety of the educational environment (Table II).

From the eight threat factors significant correlations with the level of mental health of teachers were formed by the factors: "daily and weekly overtime" ( $p = -0.738$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and "overload" ( $p = 0.659$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It is important to emphasize that the data indicate the presence of respectively negative and positive statistically significant correlations.

The threat factor of "daily and weekly overtime" was a negative predictor of teachers' mental health, which may indicate the presence of high professional requirements, work overload, and therefore unfavorable organizational and psychological conditions in the educational environment (Table III).

The results of the correlation analysis show that the threat factor "daily and weekly overtime" violates the teachers' mental health on such indicators as "mood swings" ( $p = -0.792$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), "mental health self-assessment" ( $p = -0.500$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), "professional satisfaction" ( $p = -0.340$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), "signs of psychiatric symptoms" ( $p = -0.110$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and "significance of the professional environment" ( $p = 0.141$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). At the same time, there is positive correlation ( $p = 0.141$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) for the indicator "significance of the professional environment" that indicates a positive influence on mental health.

**Table I.** The level of mental health indicators

Indicators of mental health	The level of manifestation, number of subjects, in %			
	complete emotional comfort	moderate emotional comfort	unstable emotional comfort	emotional discomfort
Tension and sensitivity	3.5	18.3	<b>54.3</b>	23.9
Signs of psychiatric symptoms	3.4	40.1	<b>53.0</b>	3.5
Mood swings	5.5	65.5	28.3	0.7
Significance of professional environment	26.4	59.1	12.5	2.0
Self-assessment of mental health	2.7	34.5	<b>61.0</b>	1.8
Satisfaction with professional activities	4.2	55.3	36.8	3.7
Overall indicator of mental health	<b>1.8</b>	<b>40.5</b>	<b>57.2</b>	<b>0.5</b>

**Table II.** The relationship between the level of teachers’ mental health and risk factors

Mental health risk factors	Level of mental health
Scale “Destabilizing organization of professional activity”	-0.601**
“chronic fatigue”	-0.012
“perform multiple tasks at once”	0.036
“daily and weekly overtime”	-0.738**
“negative working conditions”	0.117
“professional activity exhausts physically”	-0.041
“professional activity exhausts morally”	0.094
“overload”	0.659*
“frequency of changes and reconstructions”	0.107

Notes: \* –  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* –  $p < 0.01$ .

Next we analyze the threat factor “overload” (Table IV).

The results of the correlation analysis showed the presence of a positive statistically significant correlation with the overall level of mental health ( $p = 0.659, p < 0.01$ ).

It is noteworthy that there is a negative correlation between teachers’ assessment of the threat factor “overload” and mental health indicators “tension and sensitivity” ( $p = -0.236, p < 0.01$ ), “signs of psychiatric symptoms” ( $p = -0.287, p < 0.01$ ) and “significance of the professional environment” ( $p = -0.660, p < 0.05$ ), while the indicator “mental health self-assessment” ( $p = 0.236, p < 0.01$ ) shows weak but statistically significant correlation, which is positive and identical to the value for the indicator “tension and sensitivity”.

**DISCUSSION**

The dominance of the level of unstable emotional comfort among teachers may indicate they tend to unnecessary emotional experiences and dramatization of the situation including those related to health or professional activities:

“my work puts pressure on me...”, “it is hard at work morally and physically...”, etc. It may also indicate certain psychosomatic symptoms (excessive response to professional situations and failures, violation of sleep cycle, decreased overall activity, etc.). This trend shows that the high level of professional requirements causes stress and can lead to a variety of negative symptoms: burnout, dissatisfaction with work results, stress, health problems [5].

The identified trend also indicates the presence of destabilizing organizational threat factors in pedagogical activities which can be manifested in unclear chaotic organization and planning, poorly structured and vague information, excessive and often recurring information pressure, inflated requirements for current activities, etc. This conclusion is consistent with the results of studies that have identified certain psychological problems: increasing workload increases the level of stress and role responsibility [6]; overtime (on average from 41 to 50 hours per week) spent on current professional tasks [7]; physical health problems associated with overload, lack of exercise, bad sleep, time constraints and high professional requirements [8].

Decrease of the general level of mental health of Ukrainian teachers in the situation of daily and weekly overtime causes them feeling difficulties in controlling emotions (indicators: “mood swings”, “signs of psychiatric symptoms”, “self-assessment of mental health”), constant worries about real and imagined professional situations (indicators: “self-assessment of mental health” and “satisfaction with professional activities”). Similar results of the relationship between physical health and overloaded roles were found by J. Ilmarinen who showed that as teachers’ workload increases, their physical health deteriorates and as their workload decreases, their physical health improves. Learning is not considered as a physically demanding activity and an overload of professional roles is usually associated with injuries such as foot and back pain [9].

Manifestations of the so-called “conditional comfort” in a situation of excessive professional workload were also discovered. “Overload” is perceived by a teacher as

**Table III.** Indicators of mental health of teachers according to the threat factor “daily and weekly overtime”

Indicators of mental health	The threat factor “daily and weekly overtime”
Tension and sensitivity	-0.011
Signs of psychiatric symptoms	-0.110**
Mood swings	-0.792**
Significance of professional environment	0.141**
Self-assessment of mental health	-0.500*
Satisfaction with professional activities	-0.340**
Overall indicator of mental health	-0.738**

Notes: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table IV.** Indicators of teachers’ mental health according to the threat factor “overload”

Indicators of mental health	The threat factor “overload”
Tension and sensitivity	-0.236**
Signs of psychiatric symptoms	-0.287**
Mood swings	-0.008
Significance of professional environment	-0.660*
Self-assessment of mental health	0.236**
Satisfaction with professional activities	-0.012
Overall indicator of mental health	0.659*

Notes: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$

a compensatory mechanism when he/she wants by any means to reduce emotional stress and overcome disorganization in behavior, consciousness and psyche while being in a situation of professional psycho-emotional overload. The “illusive relaxation” in teachers’ perceptions of stress in the educational environment allows them to better concentrate and mobilize efforts to carry out current professional task. We explain this pattern by the fact that the absence of negative indicators in the organization of educational space plays a less significant role than the presence of positive ones. Positive indicators expand the repertoire of personal and professional resources, opportunities and actions for a teacher and consequently affect the overall assessment of mental health indicators by oneself.

Daily and weekly overtime encourage teachers to seek stability: they aim to assert themselves in the chosen profession, to ensure a stable position in the professional field, to try different professional statuses and roles while focusing on their real professional opportunities. High rates of emotional discomfort indicate the crises of professionalization and burnout. The identified trend is consistent with other studies which emphasize that the high level of professional requirements is a cause of stress and can cause a variety of negative symptoms: occupational burnout, psychological stress, health problems [10]; dissatisfaction with the work

results due to insufficient understanding of the relationship between the realization of creative abilities and mental health [11]; excessive anxiety under uncertainty [12].

The main result of this study is that professional environment is extremely important for teachers’ mental health. This demonstrates the importance of the psychological microclimate in the team, necessity of support from colleagues to maintain emotional comfort and a sense of professional well-being. Professional support is a resource for activating and realizing the professional potential of teachers, optimization of intensive interpersonal interactions, making optimal decisions in situations of excessive professional and time stress. The results are consistent with studies by foreign scholars which show that high levels of protection correlate with low levels of psychological stress in uncontrolled situations involving threats to the individual [13].

## CONCLUSIONS

Our research has shown that most educators demonstrate unstable emotional comfort. This is due to unbalanced (destabilizing) working conditions (overload, daily and weekly overtime) in Ukrainian educational organizations which worsen the psychological security in educational environment. The concept of “*destabilizing organization of professional and pedagogical activities*” is defined by the authors of the study as a set of organizational (external) threat factors (harmful and dangerous circumstances in the organizational educational environment) that adversely affect the health of educational organization personnel.

Destabilizing threat factors in educational organizations lead to a violation of the dynamic balance between a teacher and a professional environment and cause a slowdown in professional development, reduced productivity, a concentration of mental energy of an employee on personal experiences. Destabilizing factors affect mental health, cause crisis and frustration, inadequate perception of feedback from other participants. The obtained data allow to specify the meaning of the threat factors for the teachers’ professional health in situations of excessive overload and justify the need for targeted psychotherapeutic and corrective work with teachers who have manifestations of professional distress. It is also necessary to increase the awareness among teachers about the value of maintaining and developing mental health.

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#### Conflict of interest:

*The Authors declare no conflict of interest.*

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**Received:** 01.06.2021

**Accepted:** 07.10.2021

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**A** – Work concept and design, **B** – Data collection and analysis, **C** – Responsibility for statistical analysis,  
**D** – Writing the article, **E** – Critical review, **F** – Final approval of the article