

Coping with Occupational Stressors. Cross-sectional Study in Three Kindergartens

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Abstract

Employees in 3 kindergartens participated in the current study by filling in a questionnaire during their routine medical check-up, based on: Brief COPE (SC Carver), Rotter J. (1966) locus of control questionnaire, Maslach burnout inventory, perceived self-efficacy scale, Work ability index (WAI), as well as demographics (age, gender, type of residence, level of education, and income), and 16 occupational stressors (stress level) such as: Communication with other employees, Communication with superiors, Tasks, Work schedule, Limitations in career development, Risks of illness / injury, Inappropriate environment, Verbal aggression towards oneself, Gossip circles about oneself, Verbal aggression or gossip circles towards other employees; Verbal aggression from other employees; Verbal aggression from children; Verbal aggression from children's parents; Difficult collaboration with children's parents; Difficult collaboration with children. Although in each kindergarten the number of respondents is relatively small, in each of them the score of the "Use of emotional support" scale correlates positively, significantly with that of the "Use of instrumental support" scale ($p = 0.039$; $p = 0.006$ and $p = 0.010$), and the stressor "gossip circles about oneself" is negatively correlated with the scale score (Brief Cope) "Positive reframing" ($p = 0.013$; $p = 0.049$; $p = 0.046$). The whole group of respondents evinced significant correlations that indicate the type of coping depending on the occupational stressor or the studied variable, of which we mention:

-The stressor "Difficult collaboration with children" correlates positively with Behavioral disengagement ($p = 0.006$) and Self-blame ($p = 0.002$) scales;

-Difficult collaboration with parents is positively associated with Behavioral disengagement ($p = 0.003$);

-Children's verbal aggression is positively associated with Behavioral disengagement ($p = 0.012$) and negatively with Positive reframing ($p = 0.036$);

-Communication with superiors correlates positively with Behavioral disengagement ($p = 0.049$) and Venting ($p = 0.046$);

The correlations between the Brief cope scales and the studied variables show the importance of both coping evaluation and approach at individual and organisational level due to the multitude of factors involved. As the results of this study demonstrate, knowledge of the organisational environment, more precisely the employees' coping with stressors, is all-important.

Keywords: cope scales, locus of control, occupational stressors

Introduction

A wide range of stressors has been identified in the field of education, which can negatively influence job satisfaction, optimal workplace adaptation, performance and efficiency of education employees, with multiple unfavourable consequences for both the employees and the educational process. Hence, the importance of identifying and fighting against these stressors. Brief-COPE is a tool designed to assess various ways of coping that people use when facing stressors. Within this tool, the scales that also represent the methods of active coping or coping focused on problem solving are: Planning, Active coping, Use of emotional support, and Use of instrumental support. The scales that measure the use of methods for fighting against situations perceived as uncontrollable, or emotion-focussed methods are the following: Positive reframing, Humour, Acceptance, Religion, Self-distraction, Denial, Substance use.

Venting, Behavioral disengagement, and Self-blame are considered ineffective coping methods [1]. People with an internal locus of control consider that their actions determine the obtained results while those with an external locus of control consider that the results of their actions are not actually the consequence of their own way of action. Knowledge and proper use of stressor-coping methods can increase the perceived self-efficacy without influencing the control locus measured by the Rotter scale [2]



Material and Method

The questionnaire administered to the employees from the 3 educational units included the following items:

- demographics (age, gender, type of residence, level of education, and income). The level of education had 4 answer options, from vocational school (number 1), to higher education (number 4). Income level compared to other people you know had 3 response options (corresponding to scores between 1 and 3);
- 16 occupational stressors:
 - general: Communication with other employees, Communication with superiors, Tasks, Work schedule, Risks of illness / injury, inappropriate environment [3];
 - frequent in education: Limitations in career development, Verbal aggression towards oneself, Verbal aggression from other employees; Verbal aggression from children; Verbal aggression from children's parents; Difficult collaboration with children's parents; Difficult collaboration with children [4];
 - stressors most probable to appear in occupational groups: Gossip circles about oneself, Verbal aggression or gossip circles towards other employees;
- locus of control questionnaire[5];
- Maslach burnout inventory [6];
- perceived self-efficacy scale [7];
- Work ability index (WAI) [8].

The software package IBM SPSS Statistics v.20 was used for statistical processing, the Spearman correlation coefficient being considered significant at a minimum probability threshold, $p = 0.05$.

Results and Discussion

Of the total 87 employees, 75 agreed to fill in and returned the questionnaires. Only 11 of the respondents had a rural residence and only 3 were males. In the whole group of respondents, over 4/5 had low and only 1/7 had average burnout scores. The distribution of employees who did not participate in filling in the questionnaires according to the school is as follows:

- in Kindergarten no.1, five employees out of a total of 22 did not participate,
- in Kindergarten no.2, three employees out of 37 did not want to participate,
- in Kindergarten no.3, four employees out of 28 preferred not to get involved in this evaluation.

In each of the 3 kindergartens, the number of female employees is higher than that of male employees. In all 3 kindergartens employees mainly present low levels of emotional burnout and relatively high levels of self-efficacy and education, as well as of their perception on work capacity. The mentioned variables are not normally distributed in each school unit taken separately (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the studied variables according to kindergarten

School unit		type of residence	Self efficacy	Age	Locus of control	WAI	Burnout	income compared to acquaintances	level of education
Kinergarten no. 1	Mean	2.00	30.40	47.53	71.92	40.33	45.25	1.92	3.00
	N	15	15	15	13	9	12	12	13
	Minimum	2	19	36	30	31	30	1	1
	Maximum	2	39	61	90	48	62	3	4
Kinergarten no. 2	Mean	1.83	32.00	39.71	72.67	44.57	43.04	1.97	3.03
	N	35	31	35	30	28	27	32	32
	Minimum	1	26	25	25	34	33	1	1
	Maximum	2	40	62	90	49	70	3	4
Kinergarten no. 3	Mean	1.80	32.85	39.76	77.00	43.55	44.38	2.10	3.00
	N	25	26	25	25	22	24	21	20

Minimum	1	26	20	50	32	35	2	1
Maximum	2	40	60	90	49	60	3	4

However, these variables do not show significant differences among the 3 educational units. WAI had good and very good values in over 4/5 of the respondents, the rest of respondents having average values. In the total group of employees in the 3 kindergartens, women versus men use venting as a means of coping (expression of emotions) to a significantly larger extent than men ($p = 0.015$) while in men rather than women, substance abuse is a preferred coping method ($p < 0.001$), these representing the only statistically clear differences of the studied variables according to gender in the whole group (Table 2).

Table 2. Characteristics of the studied variables according to gender

gender		type of residence	Self efficacy	Age	Locus Of control	WAI	Burnout	income compared to acquaintances	level of education
male	Mean	1.67	32.00	50.67	76.67	47.00	43.00	2.00	2.00
	N	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	3
	Minimum	1	29	45	70	47	34	2	2
	Maximum	2	36	55	90	47	49	2	2
female	Mean	1.86	31.97	40.90	74.00	43.48	44.02	2.00	3.06
	N	72	69	72	65	58	60	62	62
	Minimum	1	19	20	25	31	30	1	1
	Maximum	2	40	62	90	49	70	3	4

There are no similar significant correlations in the 3 educational units in the locus of control score. Despite the small number of respondents in each kindergarten, the score of the scale "Use of emotional support" correlates positively, significantly with that of the scale "Use of instrumental support" (with $p = 0.039$; $p = 0.006$ and $p = 0.010$ respectively) in each kindergarten, while the stressor "gossip circles regarding one's own person" is negatively associated with the score of the "Positive reframing" coping scale ($p = 0.013$; $p = 0.049$; $p = 0.046$).

The two modes of active support coping (Use of emotional support and Use of instrumental support) are frequently associated. A less studied stressor in the occupational environment yet addressed in the present study is "gossip circles about oneself", which certainly requires further evaluation. Since it correlates negatively with "Positive reframing" and thus impacting both the individual and through its potential for maintenance and amplification, the organisation itself, the stressor "gossip circles about oneself" requires adequate measures for effective approach and prevention.

-The level of education correlates positively with the Positive reframing scale ($p = 0.010$). Employees with higher education prefer less active resolution of stressors in the occupational environment, preferring a possible less conflictive coping, based on emotion and a positive reinterpretation of stressful situations.

-The stressor "Difficult collaboration with students" correlates positively with Behavioral disengagement ($p = 0.006$) and Self-blame ($p = 0.002$) scales.

-Difficult collaboration with parents is positively associated with Behavioral disengagement ($p = 0.003$)

-verbal aggression from children is positively associated with Behavioral disengagement ($p = 0.012$) and negatively with Positive reframing ($p = 0.036$)

-Communication with superiors correlates positively with Behavioral disengagement ($p = 0.049$) and Venting ($p = 0.046$)

- gossip circles regarding one's own person correlates positively with Behavioral disengagement ($p = 0.011$) and negatively with Positive reframing ($p = 0.000$), and Humor ($p = 0.002$).



Conclusions

Gossip that targets individuals in organisations leaves no room for positive interpretations, thus being able to trigger in the long run, at organisational level, secondary stressors aimed primarily at communication and collegiality among employees.

The results of this study show that Behavioral disengagement, self blame, and venting, considered as inefficient ways of coping are used mainly by employees in the 3 kindergartens in dealing with the following stressors: Difficult collaboration with parents, Children's verbal aggression, Difficult collaboration with children, Communication with superiors.

The importance of effective management of these stressors that are directly related to the didactic activity consequences, imposes application of strategies that will change these employees' coping methods, especially since communication with parents and children as well as the response to children's verbal aggression are essential elements for the success of the entire educational process, first and foremost in preschool education.

The correlations between the Brief cope scales and the studied variables, of which several were mentioned herein, show the importance of coping evaluation at both individual and organisational level, but also the knowledge of the organisational climate from the perspective of studied variables, as underlined by the current results.

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