



## Implications of Correlations Between Communication Stressors and Correlations Between Anxiety and Mental Health

<sup>1</sup>Dorin-Gheorghe Triff, <sup>2</sup>Zorica Triff, <sup>3</sup>Mușata Dacia Bocoș

<sup>1</sup> Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

<sup>2</sup> Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

<sup>3</sup> Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

### Abstract

*During the periodic medical check-up, workers from one high school (having 93 employee) and 2 middle schools (with 43 and respectively 35 employee) received a voluntary questionnaire that included the following:*

*-socio-demographic variables (age, length of employment in the unit, biological gender, type of residence);*

*Six occupational stressors that scored the worker's stress (on a Likert-type scale) related to communication with colleagues, students and their parents: "Verbal violence from other employees", "Verbal violence from some students", "Verbal violence from some parents", "Physical violence from some parents", "Difficult cooperation with some parents", "Difficult cooperation with some students";*

*-the personality traits of Gray's Behavioral Inhibition and Activation Systems [BIS/BAS], namely anxiety, fun-seeking, drive, reward-responsiveness*

*- The General Health Questionnaire (12 item). This questionnaire is used as a screening instrument for mental health and psychological -psychiatric disorders in non clinical settings*

*In the 3 schools the level of stressors ranges from low to medium.*

*In all 3 schools there are positive correlations between occupational stressors as follows:*

*-"Verbal violence from other employees" correlates with "Verbal violence from some parents"( $p_1=0.001$ ;  $p_2=0.016$ ;  $p_3=0.009$ ) and with "Physical violence from some parents"( $p_1=0.030$ ;  $p_2<0.001$ ;  $p_3=0.002$ );*

*-"Verbal violence from some parents" correlates with: "Difficult cooperation with some parents"( $p_1=0.001$ ;  $p_2=0.006$ ;  $p_3<0.001$ ) and with "Difficult cooperation with some students"( $p_1=0.001$ ;  $p_2=0.016$ ;  $p_3=0.002$ );*

*"Verbal violence from some students" correlates with "Difficult cooperation with some students" ( $p_1=0.001$ ;  $p_2=0.001$ ;  $p_3=0.017$ ).*

*In all 3 schools, GHQ correlated with Anxiety (BIS) ( $p_1<0.001$ ;  $p_2=0.044$ ;  $p_3=0.006$ ). Although the number of respondents is not large, the consistent results obtained in all 3 schools draw attention to the importance of the results obtained. Although the level of stressors related to communication problems with students and their parents is low, the data obtained lead to the conclusion that in schools, in the present and at least in the immediate future, the efficiency of student-teacher communication and in fact the success of the educational act requires the active involvement, at least from the point of view of facilitating communication, of parents.*

*Among school workers, although anxiety levels are not high, their association with mental health disorders shows the importance of informing workers about this issue and managing anxiety-generating situations.*

**Keywords:** Anxiety, mental health, school, communication stressors, students, parents

### Introduction

In the educational environment, communication is essential for the efficiency of the educational act. Good communication allows for relationships with others and even the establishment of interpersonal relationships, and the way in which teachers communicate with students modulates their behaviors and integration in the classroom and even socially, the advantages of effective communication being numerous.

For teachers, stressors related to communication are mainly represented by tense interactions with students (lack of receptivity, disinterest, disruptive attitude and indiscipline in the classroom, resistance to dialogue by students, emotional barriers of students), with parents (unrealistic expectations of parents, intrusion and criticism of teachers, insufficient involvement in home education, etc.), with



colleagues (gossip circles, uncollegial attitudes, unconstructive criticism, etc.) and with the management department (bureaucratic requirements, lack of institutional support, conflicts of ideas, authoritarian communication, ineffective meetings, etc.). Along with students, parents can influence the way they communicate with school staff.

If the teacher is stressed even by the inefficiency or deficiencies of communication with students, the stress can spread to the students and their behavior worsens, reflecting more stress on the teacher and can lead to a generalization of the stress level in the classroom. This vicious circle of stress related to student-teacher communication once it is started, becomes difficult to break.

Stress on school staff can be influenced by their personality traits. For example, it is known that the Behavioral Activation System (BAS) or the "start" system, activates approach motivation, regulates responses to pleasant stimuli, goal achievement and rewards. People with a high BAS show joy, enthusiasm, hope, are predominantly extraverted, impulsive, action-oriented. The Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS), also known as the "braking" or threat avoidance system, regulates the response to dangers, punishments, frustration, and is associated with anxiety, fear, and insecurity. Individuals with a high BIS are more sensitive to criticism and avoid risks [1].

In assessing workplace stressors, it is also important to assess the mental state, anxiety, and/or well-being of the individual. At the organizational level, questionnaires can be used that, in order not to burden the respondent's schedule or time, should be as easy or quick to complete as possible.

### Material and Methods

During the periodic medical check-up, workers from one high school (having 93 employees) and 2 middle schools (with 34 and respectively 35 employees) received a voluntary questionnaire that included the following:

- socio-demographic variables (age, length of employment in the unit, biological gender, type of residence);
- six occupational stressors that scored the worker's stress (on a Likert-type scale in 3 steps, on a perceived level of stress scored from "very low"=1, to "medium"=2 and to "high"=3) related to communication with colleagues, students and their parents: "Verbal violence from other employees", "Verbal violence from some students", "Verbal violence from some parents", "Physical violence from some parents", "Difficult cooperation with some parents", "Difficult cooperation with some students";
- The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12). having 12 items on a 4-point Likert scale is used as a screening instrument to detect mental health and psychological -psychiatric disorders and common psychological issues like anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction in non clinical settings [2];
- the personality traits of Gray's Behavioral Inhibition and Activation Systems [BIS/BAS], namely anxiety, fun-seeking, drive, reward-responsiveness [3].

The present study aimed to evaluate the level of stressors in school workers related to communication with students, colleagues, and parents as well as the perceived level of negative reactions they have towards the workers (GHQ12) [4], in relation to the personality traits of the workers (BIS/BAS dimensions) and socio-demographic indicators [5], [6].

### Results

The number of participants (respondents) completing the questionnaires is high in the 3 school units (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Number of workers and number of non-respondents by school unit

School unit	number of workers	number of non-respondents
<b>School no 1</b>	92	33
<b>School no 2</b>	33	3
<b>School no 3</b>	34	5

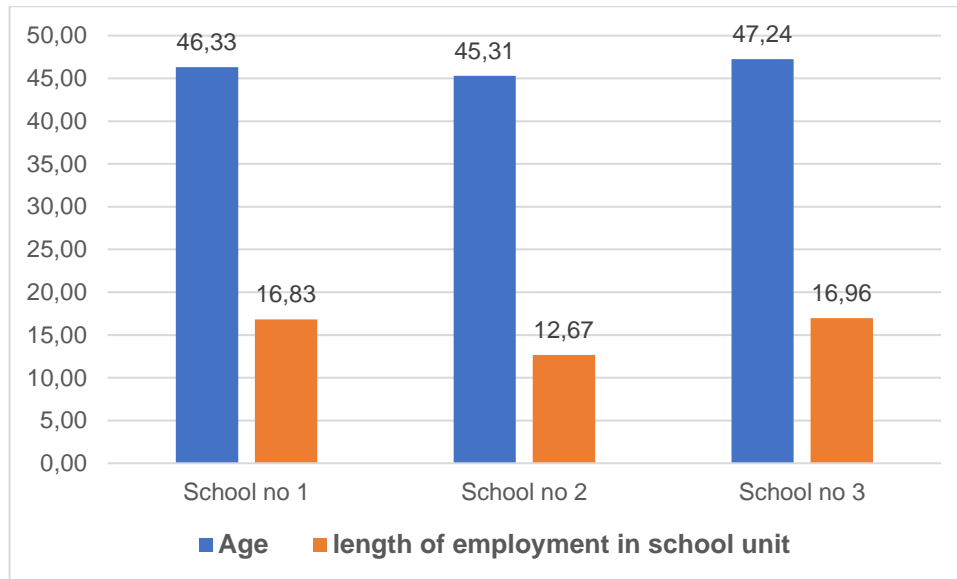
School no. 1 is located in an urban area and schools no. 2 and no. 3 are located in a rural area. The proportion of workers is similarly distributed by type of residence (Table 2).



**Table 2.** Percentage of female workers and those living in urban areas by school

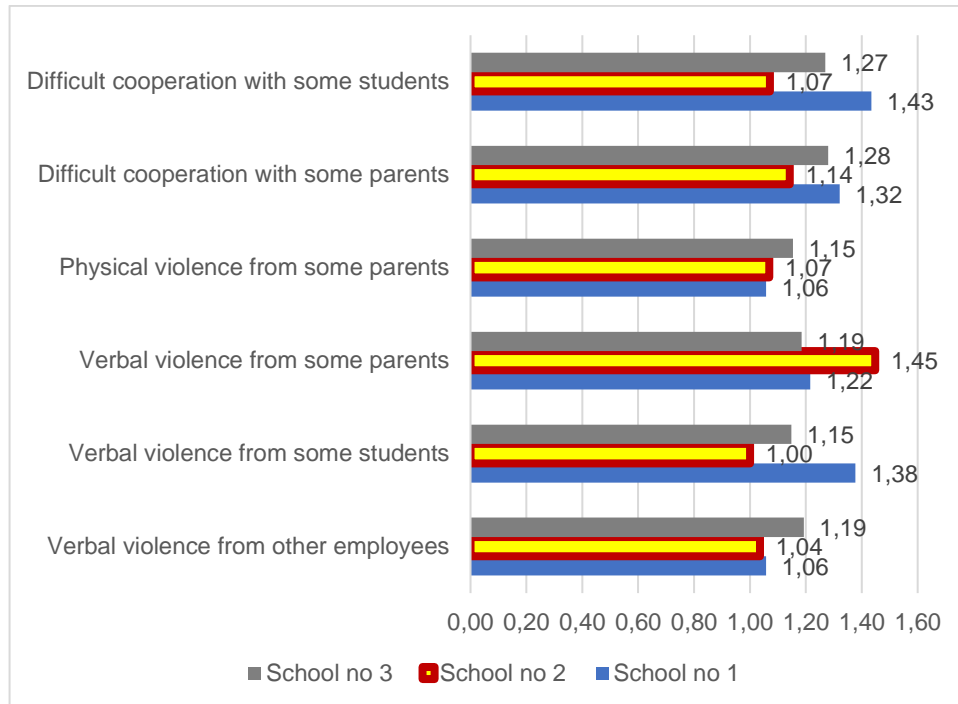
	percentage of women	percentage of people living in urban areas
<b>School no 1</b>	68	82
<b>School no 2</b>	79	6
<b>School no 3</b>	79	4

Female workers predominate in all schools compared to males. In terms of age and length of employment in the school, workers in the 3 school units have an average age between 45 and 48 years and an average length of employment in the unit between 12 and 17 years (Fig. 1.).



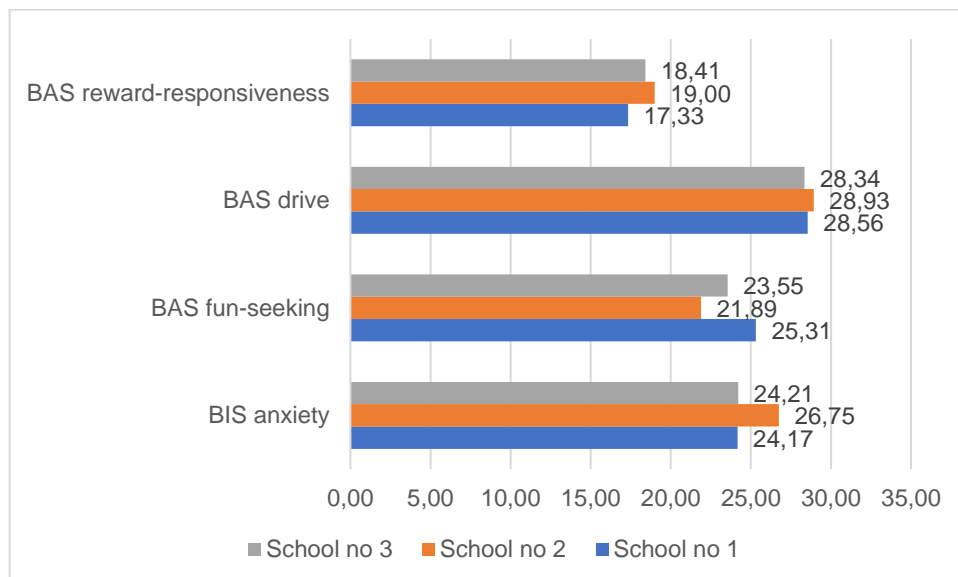
**Fig. 1.** Age and average duration as a worker in the unit after school

Middle adulthood or mature adulthood, between 40 and 65 years of age, indicates self-confidence, clear values, and reaching the peak of one's professional life. An optimal duration for an individual to have good professional experience at a workplace is a minimum of 3 years. A longer duration shows professional experience on the part of the worker as stability, loyalty, and interest in the workplace and in the respective activity. In the 3 schools the level of stressors ranges from low to medium (Fig. 2.)



**Fig. 2.** Average level of stressors in workers by school

Average values of personality traits dimensions [BIS/BAS] in workers are similar in the 3 schools (Fig. 3.)



**Fig. 3.** Average values of personality traits dimensions [BIS/BAS] in workers depending on school

The distribution of respondents by school department is presented in Table 3. The main occupational group is represented by teachers. The non-teaching department includes cleaners, security guards, maintenance workers, and drivers, while the auxiliary department includes accountants, property administrators, financial administrators, librarians, secretaries, and IT network administrators.

**Table 3.** Distribution of respondents in the 3 schools by department

School unit / department	number of workers		
	auxiliary	(didactic) teaching	non-teaching
School no 1	2	55	2



School no 2	2	21	7
School no 3	3	19	7

Among the variables studied, there are significant differences between the values of the variables studied between workers in the 3 compartments, only those mentioned.

Thus, in School no.1, workers in the non-teaching compartment ( $p=0.018$ ) have the highest average value (namely 2) of the stressor "Verbal violence from other employees" compared to workers in the auxiliary compartment (namely an average score of 1) who have the lowest value.

In School no.2, there are no significant differences between the variables studied depending on the school compartment.

In School no.3, workers in the non-teaching compartment have the highest ( $p=0.001$ ) age (with an average of 56.29 years) compared to workers in the teaching compartment (with an average value of 43.68 years).

In the total group of respondents from the 3 schools, there are significant differences between the variables studied by department for 2 variables as follows:

-Age ( $p=0.034$ ) workers in the non-teaching department have the oldest age (with an average of 52.71 years) compared to workers in the teaching department (with an average value of 45.26 years);

-"Verbal violence from some parents" has the highest value ( $p=0.011$ ) among workers in the non-teaching department (with an average of 2.17) compared to workers in the auxiliary department who have the lowest value (average value of 1.17).

There are numerous correlations between the variables studied, different according to the school unit. However, similar correlations also appear in all 3 schools, which suggests a tendency to generalize these results.

In all 3 schools there are positive correlations between occupational stressors as follows:

-"Verbal violence from other employees" correlates with "Verbal violence from some parents" ( $p_1=0.001; p_2=0.016; p_3=0.009$ ) and with "Physical violence from some parents" ( $p_1=0.030 ; p_2<0.001; p_3=0.002$ );

-"Verbal violence from some parents" correlates with: "Difficult cooperation with some parents" ( $p_1=0.001; p_2=0.006; p_3<0.001$ ) and with "Difficult cooperation with some students" ( $p_1=0.001; p_2=0.016; p_3=0.002$ );

"Verbal violence from some students" correlates with "Difficult cooperation with some students" ( $p_1=0.001; p_2=0.001; p_3=0.017$ ).

In all 3 schools, GHQ correlated with Anxiety (BIS) ( $p_1<0.001; p_2=0.044; p_3=0.006$ ).

## Conclusions

The levels of stressors related to communication between workers and students, parents of students and other employees are generally low and do not differ significantly between teachers and workers in other departments (auxiliary and non-teaching). Overall, workers in the non-teaching department have significantly higher stress levels compared to workers in other departments in Verbal violence from parents.

The perception of stress related to communication with other workers is associated with the perception of stress given that communication with parents (even with physical violence from them) is expected to be unrelated to personality traits of Gray's Behavioral Inhibition and Activation Systems [BIS/BAS].

Although the number of respondents is not large, the consistent results obtained in all 3 schools draw attention to the importance of the results obtained. Although the level of stressors related to communication problems with students and their parents is low, the data obtained lead to the conclusion that in schools, in the present and at least in the immediate future, the efficiency of student-teacher communication and in fact the success of the educational act requires the active involvement, at least from the point of view of facilitating communication, of parents.

Anxiety as a personality trait is associated with affecting the state of health (mental health and psychological -psychiatric disorders) without these being constantly associated with perceived stress as a result of communication difficulties with students, their parents and other employees.

Among school workers, although anxiety levels are not high, their association with mental health disorders shows the importance of informing workers about this issue and managing anxiety-generating situations.



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