

**THE INFLUENCE OF STRESS ON THE TEACHER'S MENTAL HEALTH:  
CAUSES AND BEHAVIOURAL STRATEGIES**

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**Abstract**

The Ukrainian population has been in a state of war for a long time and it found its mark in psychological and emotional tension, which affects the daily life of all citizens. Preschool children and high school students need special attention, because these age categories are characterized by sensitivity, the individuality formation, shaping character and outlook.

For a deeper understanding of the stress role and place in the life and professional activity of teachers, it is necessary to reveal the stress concept, its place in the internal structure of professional and pedagogical activity. At the same time, stress should be considered not only as an external factor caused by the extremity of the situation, but also as a purposeful activity that forms a personality.

The article offers a theoretical analysis of the stress problem within pedagogical workers, outlines its causes, and characterizes various behavioural strategies in stressful situations.

**Keywords:** *stress, teacher, emotional reaction, depression, behaviour strategy.*

## **1. Introduction**

The term "stress" was first proposed by the famous Canadian physician and biologist H. Selye (1939), who concluded that there is a general adaptation syndrome that ensures the body's adaptation to changing environmental conditions. At the same time, the scientist interpreted stress as a non-specific reaction of the body to any demand placed on it. Explaining this concept, H. Selye (1939) paid attention only to the biological and physiological aspects of the issue, so it became traditional to understand stress as a physiological reaction of the body to the action against negative factors that pose a threat to the body (Ovcharenko, 2023).

R. Lazarus (1970) was the first to try to distinguish between the physiological and psychological understanding of stress, who substantiated the concept according to which he distinguished between physiological (related to the influence of a real unconditioned stimulus) and mental (emotional) stress, which is related to a person's situation assessment as threatening and difficult. It is worth noting that such a division is also quite conditional, since physiological stress always has mental (emotional) elements, and mental stress is always accompanied by physiological changes (Naugolnyk, 2015).

Subsequently, H. Selye (1939) confirmed the existence of two types of stress: a) distress (the body's response to negative emotional reactions); and b) eustress (the body's response to positive emotional reactions). The scope of these concepts includes all physiological phenomena, including dream. Selye noted that even in a state of complete relaxation, a sleeping person experiences some stress and that the complete stress absence means death (Filipovych & Filipovych, 2017).

## **2. The purpose and objectives of the research**

The research problem is to analyse the causes of stress within teachers and to propose separate strategies of behaviour in stressful situations for the maximum regulation and reduction of the stress negative impact on pupils of preschool education institutions and secondary school students who are under the attention of the educators.

## **3. The results of the research**

**A theoretical approach to the problem.** The analysis of domestic research makes it possible to state that modern scientists use the term "stress" in different meanings (Ovcharenko, 2023), which makes it possible to distinguish different scientific approaches to

it. We summarized the generalized approaches in Table 1.

*Table 1.*

**Approaches to interpreting the concept of "stress"**

Name of the approach	Content characteristic
Biological approach	any external stimuli that cause tension or excitement in a person; in this sense, the terms "stressor", "stress factor" are most often used;
Cognitive approach	a subjective reaction that reflects the internal physiological and mental state of tension and excitement; this state is interpreted as emotions, defensive reactions and coping processes occurring in the person him/herself; such processes can contribute to the development of optimal adaptation by improving functional systems and mental stress;
Behavioural approach	the body's physical reaction to a proposed demand or harmful influence; the function of these physiological reactions is to support behavioural actions and mental processes to overcome this condition.

The modern professional activity of teachers is characterized by professional stress, which is caused by high complexity, responsibility, pace of implementation, the need for constant control and decision-making under the time shortage condition. If 55% of people experienced stress every week in 1983, then in 1992, one in three experienced stress every day or several times a week, which is 20% more than ten years ago. In 2006, 75% of people felt stressed every day, 78% of complaints were related to professional stress, and only 35% of people were satisfied with their work.

Data from a sociological survey, submitted on the Ukrinform website, show that 71% of respondents have recently felt stressed or nervous; two thirds of the population are stressed and can even accept it, 21% of respondents answered that they had not felt stressed and nervous lately, 8% of respondents had difficulty answering this question. Among the interviewees, two groups feel the most stress i.e. women and the group aged 25-34. Among women, 79% of those surveyed, among the age group 24-34 is 76%. There is also a high level of stress in the 45-54 age group it is 70%, among men 63% said they feel a high level of stress, among young people aged 18 to 24 it is 67%. People in the age group of 55-60 observe the least increase in their stress level is 59%. (Ukrinform, 2022).

The World Health Organization calls occupational stress a disease of the 21st century,

since this type of stress is common to all professions in the world and has reached a global epidemic proportion. The following factors are often mentioned as stressors as excessive workload, long working hours, competition, too fast job growth, negative interpersonal relationships with managers (manager pressure), conflict between work and personal life, uncertainty about the reliability of one's position at work.

Research on the state of stress in the professional activity of a teacher indicates that phenomenologically and in terms of the features on regulation mechanisms, professional stress is a specific type of stress and can be defined as a multidimensional phenomenon of an individual physiological and psychological reactions to a difficult work situation (Ukrinform, 2022).

### **Discussions and suggestions**

Based on the results of the theoretical work of domestic researchers, we determine that the *professional stress of a teacher* is a multidimensional phenomenon caused by intra-organizational (individual, group) and extra-organizational stress factors and is expressed in the physiological and psychological reactions of a teacher to a specific situation in the professional activity.

Common causes of stress include:

1. Environmental impact (noise, pollution, heat, cold, etc.).
2. Load (increased intensity):
  - physical (muscular);
  - physiological stress (disease, disorder, injury);
  - excessive amount of information that needs to be memorised, processed;
  - emotional;
  - industrial (significant changes at work, difficulties and conflicts);
  - specific workloads in pedagogical activity.
3. Monotony in labor activity, in emotional contacts.
4. Everyday irritants i.e. lack of necessary amenities, minor quarrels with others, tense psychological atmosphere, expectation, being late.
5. Absence of usual, desired social connections, social isolation, violation of emotionally significant interpersonal relations.
6. Difficult life situations i.e. illness, death of close people, difficulties experienced by loved ones, job loss or threat of job loss, rapid changes in living conditions.

7. Critical stages of life i.e. divorce, birth of children, start and end of education, transition to a new job, retirement, etc.

8. Personal disharmony i.e. intrapersonal conflicts, crises of inconsistency between the real and desired "I", crises of personality development.

9. Dissatisfaction with financial support.

10. Uncertainty or specific threat.

11. Social and socio-psychological factors (unemployment, social insecurity).

It is worth noting that the gradation of the stress causes now puts the reason of *uncertainty or a specific threat* in the first place.

Along with stressogenic factors common to all people, there is a whole series of professional stress factors in the activity of a teacher: responsibility, the need to be constantly the object of observation and evaluation, to constantly confirm one's competence, as well as temporary variability of activity. The last factor should be highlighted not only because it is associated with the most striking distinguishing feature of professional and pedagogical activity, but also because its effect increases over the years if the teacher does not develop his individual strategy of behaviour (Gabrylevych & Malimon, 2010).

It is worth emphasizing that stress is a prerequisite for restructuring and adaptation to new operating conditions. As soon as the external environment changes, stress of one degree or another immediately arises. Such variability is an integral part of the teacher's activity, so it can be said that stress is its permanent state (New Ukrainian School, 2022).

Thus, the main psychological problem in the activities of teachers is a periodically arising state of tension, associated with the need for internal adjustment to a certain behaviour, all forces mobilization for active and expedient actions.

Everyday stress consists of many minor stressors, ordinary troubles in work, school, household and family life. People often underestimate the consequences of this influence.

However, the idea that a lot of small troubles, the so-called "stressful disgust", is more harmful to health than rare strong stresses, is becoming more and more widespread.

The source of chronic depressive states development, the syndrome of dissatisfaction with work and, as a result, a powerful initial factor of professional stress and professional deformation is the ambiguous definition of the work purpose. As stress factors contributing to the occurrence of such adverse phenomena, we can name the following: lack of a developed system for assessing the level of success in the performance of tasks in the course of professional and pedagogical activity; lack of adequate feedback on the effectiveness of

pedagogical activities; untimely receiving of such information.

The high-quality duties performance requires a large amount of time and dedication, which implies the need for serious restrictions as a reduced opportunity for favourite activities, a limited circle of communication, difficult or terminated connections with family and friends and the inevitable rejection of some habits for the sake of the pedagogical activity interests (Maksymenko, Karamushka & Zaychyk, 2004).

The individual stress factors of the teacher are determined by the psychophysiological, psychological and behavioural characteristics of the individual:

- at the psychophysiological level, the nature of the professional stress development is characterized by the constitutional features of the teacher, the type of his/her nervous activity, the cyclical course of physiological functions, the presence of diseases (including those caused by this profession), etc.;
- at the psychological level, such factors include the degree of development of basic mental functions, the presence of certain abilities, the level of volitional qualities formation, the peculiarities of the motivational sphere organization, which collectively determine the individual and psychological traits of a person;
- at the behavioural level, the development of professional stress will depend on the existence of specific behavioural schemes or behavioural patterns within a particular individual.

Stress lowers everyone's immunity and makes everyone more vulnerable to infections. Stress can cause depression, anxiety, heart attacks, strokes, weakened immune systems and, as a result, increased susceptibility to a range of infectious diseases, from colds and herpes to AIDS, certain cancers and autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis. Stress often causes skin reactions (such as rashes, itching, and various dermatitis), gastrointestinal disorders, insomnia, various neurological disorders, and also sexual and reproductive disorders. Stress also plays an increasing role in the aetiology of such modern diseases as allergies.

The prayer of the German theologian Karl Friedrich Oettinger is appropriate here: "Lord, give me the serenity to accept what I cannot change, give me the courage to change what I can change, and give me the wisdom to distinguish the first from the second."

We offer several strategies for behaviour in a stressful situation, each includes both positive and negative sides. We summarized the strategies content in Table 2.

Table 2.

**Behavioural strategies in stressful situations**

<b>The name of the strategy</b>	
<b>Positive aspects</b>	<b>Negative aspects</b>
<p><i>Escape from problems</i> (the person self-eliminates and transfers responsibility for solving problems to other people saying "I will think about it tomorrow")</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to endure a pause in order to lower the emotional barrage and gain strength is a rather effective behavioral strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people's tendency to destructive behavior (immersion in fantasy, computer, alcohol and drug addiction);</li> <li>• constant problems ignoring only accumulates them</li> </ul>
<p><i>Confrontation or fierce opposition to the existing situation</i> (aggressive response to a problem and immediately intense, without thinking, struggle with it)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if stress is a specific threat, then in such way you can quickly change the situation for the better</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if the threat is not serious, such behavior can only complicate the situation or harm oneself even more;</li> <li>• aggression is difficult to control i.e. it takes away a person's sobriety of mind and he/she has difficulties planning his/her deeds and actions;</li> <li>• it is very easy to “make mountains out of the molehill” being in an aggressive state.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Self-control and suppression of emotions</i> (a person tries to suppress emotions and rather go to deliberate actions; a person does not show his/her emotions in any way, suppresses any negative experiences, does not enter into a conflict with anyone, while solving problems)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preservation of a cold (sobriety) mind</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• suppressing emotions requires a lot of mental energy, which in fact could be</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>put to work i.e. solving the problem;</li> <li>sometimes the situation may require you to show your anger in order to defeat the enemy.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Distancing from the problem or delaying responsibility</i> (solving problems at a distance)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>striving is appropriate when the enemy is in a rage and it is better not to contact him/her;</li> <li>sometimes it is very useful to take a break and distance yourself, rise above the situation (it, on the one hand, will provide safety, and on the other hand, it will give time and space for maneuvering)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>it is important that the responsibility postponement does not turn into an escape strategy;</li> <li>not all problems can be solved at a distance (there are situations when you need to be as involved as possible and "trim your sails to the wind").</li> </ul>
<p><i>Search for social support and like-minded people</i> (a person turns to close people, friends, like-minded people for help and support in a difficult situation; the strategy is designed to save a person from loneliness)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a positive effect in situations of a personal nature solving problems, grief, loss of close people, misfortune.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>frequent use of this strategy forms a negative image of a person i.e. weak-willed ("backboneless").</li> </ul>
<p><i>Taking responsibility</i> (acceptance of your mistakes: without reproaches or excuses, which allows you to take an active position; correct mistakes if possible or accept the fact that you can't fix anything, and, most importantly, turn stress into experience, a lesson for the future)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>superhero strategy;</li> <li>used by strong and strong-willed people with bright internal resources, who in most cases find a way out of the current situation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>does not have a mass character</li> </ul>
<p><i>Positive reassessment or the desire to see the positive element in any situation</i></p>	

(positive emotions even in a crisis situation can recharge us, turn on a secret "power")	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the model is effective in situations where little depends on the individual: illness, accident, unexpected dismissal, etc.;</li> <li>• trying to find the positive even in a very bad situation reduces stress due to the fact that the focus perception and the event interpretation change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• concentration on the positive can create a "blind spot" in the perception of the situation: a person will not notice a real danger or threat in time.</li> </ul>

No one will give a definite answer to the question: which strategy is the most optimal. Each strategy is effective in certain situations, has both a positive and a negative impact on various aspects of a stressful situation is the result of activity, the nature of relationships, psychological state, success, etc. It is worth noting that one and the same person, depending on the situation, his/her emotional state, current opportunities and numerous external factors, can use different strategies for his/her protection. We emphasize that each person should have a wide range of behavioural models i.e. the wider this set, the more effective stress management will be and the higher the adaptive capabilities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Teachers overcome stress in different ways. An effective response to stress that leads to adaptation is the use of such a strategy for interaction with the stressor that significantly reduces the experience of stress. There is no right strategy. We have to choose a behavioural strategy depending on the stressor and change it if necessary.

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