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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

Work-related Stressors of Female Teachers During Covid-19 School Closure



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ABSTRACT

In Slovakia, the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in the educational sector lasted for three months and caused unexpected changes with demands on pupils and their parents, students and teachers. The global school closure at all educational levels occurred suddenly and caught the school system and its actors unprepared. Teachers were forced to quickly adapt to the “new” work approach with minimal and/or confusing directions. Female teachers who predominate at primary schools in Slovakia, around 90%, faced even greater challenge and experienced stress, as many of them simultaneously took care of their own children and households. The aim of the presented paper is an examination of stress level that primary school female teachers experienced during the schools’ lockdown period. Two measures of stress were used: Teacher stressor questionnaire (Clipa, Boghean, 2015) and the Perceived stress scale (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983). Additionally, an open question was added to learn about the teachers’ subjective perception of work pressure caused by the lockdown. The research sample consisted of 103 female primary school teachers (47 at the first primary education stage, 56 at the second

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primary education stage). Data were collected online in April 2020, with teachers being invited to participate via teachers' online forums.

Significant differences in the perceived intensity of work stressors were present between the first and the second stage primary school teachers. The most frequent problems teachers reported were the challenging preparation of teaching materials, unclear directions from school management and strenuous communication with children and their parents. Teachers also suffered from work uncertainty, strain from too much use of PCs and other technology, and problems with time management.

KEY WORDS: *female teachers, stress, Covid-19 school closure*

Introduction

Covid-19 pandemic has caused many sudden changes over the world and the same has happened in Slovakia. One of the major changes was the initial lockdown in the educational sector that started on March 16th of this year. The lockdown lasted for more than two months till June 1st, when pre-schools and primary schools were re-opened under strict conditions. During the lockdown period pupils, students, their parents and teachers experienced demands they have never faced before. This was especially true for teachers who were forced to rapidly adjust their work approach, sometimes with confusing directions. For instance, the directions from The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic stated that distance online education should be applied to those school subjects where it was applicable and classic education should be postponed until schools reopened (Minedu.sk, 2020). Based on these directions, teachers did not know how the transition from regular education to distance education should take place and were unsure for how long such a situation would continue. Additionally, adding to the stressful situation were the (home) working parents who were demanding the continuity of their children in the educational process.

In general, teaching is a highly stressful profession even under normal circumstances as it brings numerous challenges. Educators are burdened with administrative duties, classroom management problems and lack of cooperation with their peers (McCarthy, 2019). Stress impacts teachers both personally and professionally, it affects job satisfaction, student engagement and even causes feelings of attrition and burnout (Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf & Spencer, 2011). High levels of perceived stress are often regarded as

one of the reasons why between 25 and 50% of new teachers leave the profession (Algozzine, Wang & Violette, 2011). This was also confirmed in Czechia where primary school teachers reported alarmingly high rates of burnout, which quickly leads to feelings of unhappiness (Ptáček et al., 2018). Research has repeatedly and over a long-term period proved that teaching is full of hurdles and stress (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Chan, 2002; Lazuras, 2006; Chaplain, 2008). In this line teachers in Slovakia are not an exception.

In 2017, research on work stress on 50 Slovak primary school teachers was conducted. Educators rated 15 possibly stressful situations they encounter in their occupation. The most stressful situations rated were: working with pupils with special educational needs, professional acknowledgement and frequent legislative changes. Excessive work stress in teachers frequently manifested itself as physical exhaustion, disease vulnerability, mental exhaustion, internal strain and headaches (Žitniaková-Gurgová & Behúňová, 2017).

As Paulík (2012) argues, educators are constantly monitored by pupils, their parents, superiors and even the media. Moreover, evaluation of teacher's work results by parents and media is often negative (Vašutová, 2011). This creates a system of complicated relationships which might be difficult for teachers to manage during the prolonged period of distance education that was the case of Covid-19 schools' lockdown.

Distance education, especially applied abruptly and with no preparation as happened during the initial Covid-19 lockdown, can be very demanding and brings several problems. Firstly, many pupils and teachers may have little to no experience with this form of teaching (Fojtík, 2018). This point was very true for Slovak primary schools, as a situation that required long-term distance education in a primary school setting had never happened before.

Secondly, for distance teaching to function properly, students and pupils need to be highly motivated and be able to deal with time efficiently. The same applies for educators because preparation for distance education is far more time-consuming. Slovak teachers also had to check on numerous daily school assignments and communicate with pupils individually. As Paulík (2012) states, in the teacher's profession, many tasks must be completed by certain deadlines, which often forces teachers to take their work duties home. This causes a problematic mixing of work-related and non-work-related tasks. It is fair to speculate that these problems only increase during school closures.

Thirdly, pupils' ownership of and access to technology is also major problem (Fojtík, 2018). Not all children in Slovakia are properly equipped

with ICT for distance education and the internet coverage in Slovakia is only about 80-85% (Mirri.gov.sk, 2019). This of course disrupts effective schooling.

Fourthly and lastly, a period of generalized distance education requires not only intense communication with pupils but also more intense communication with parents. Interacting with parents is an important task in the teaching process and can be more demanding for teachers than we realize (Gartmeier, Gebhardt & Dotger, 2016). The need to interact with parents solely through technology certainly puts additional strain on teachers.

A survey among students in nursing courses on distance education also shows that they perceive the limited personal contact with teachers and other students as a fundamental disadvantage (Hannay & Newvine, 2006). This effect is even more prevalent in a primary school setting where pupils require more direct supervision, support and motivation. A lack of personal contact limits teacher's means for motivating and managing pupils (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

The Slovak education system is divided into the primary education stage and secondary education stage. The first education stage consists of 4 grades and children enter the first stage at the age of 6 or 7. The second education stage comprises of five grades. Education in both stages is performed through independent programs (Bernátová, 2013), but in both stages the teacher's role is significantly different. In the first stage teachers lead their own class and teach nearly all subjects to the class. In the second stage teachers have a specialization in specific school subjects and teach multiple classes.

Not surprisingly, research on Slovak teachers indicates that in the first education stage and second education stage teachers perceive stress differently. According to a 2017 study, the general rate of burnout was higher in teachers in the first education stage compared to ones in the second stage. A critical state of stress (a state that is close to the actual burnout syndrome) was present in 36 % of the first stage teachers, compared to 20 % present in second stage teachers. Additionally, the presence of actual burnout syndrome was higher in the first stage teachers. Research also confirmed statistically significant differences in average stress levels between experienced teachers and teachers at the beginning of their careers. The average stress levels of experienced teachers were comparatively higher. (Žitniaková-Gurgová & Behúňová, 2017).

The teaching profession in primary education in Slovakia is hugely dominated by women, with 90 % (Education and training monitor, 2019).

Even though the number of working women is constantly increasing, their weekly time capacity for taking care of children and household did not change compared to the past (Bianchi, Robinson & Milke, 2006). A study from 2018 suggest this inequality is truly significant, as women involvement in household chores is more than double compared to the involvement of their male partners (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). A recent report at edweek.org claims that teachers are "...trying to be there for pupils and their own families. And many are also juggling the needs of their own children or other loved ones while managing their own coronavirus fears".

Many of the discussed factors potentially complicate the work of female teachers and have raised their stress levels during the Covid-19 pandemic school closures. The main aim of the present paper is an examination of stress level that primary school female teachers have experienced during the schools' lockdown. We aim to examine which specific stressors were perceived as the most intense and which are most frequent. Moreover, the stage of primary school, the teacher's age and the amount of work experience also entered the analysis. Additionally, we aim to analyse statements which teachers have submitted as answers to open questions. Due to the different working routine and also the different age and maturity of pupils, we consider it important to analyse responses from the first and the second stage of primary schools separately, as two independent groups.

Methods

Our research sample included 103 primary school female teachers (47 at the first primary education stage, 56 at the second primary education stage). The ages of the first primary education stage teachers ranged from 23 to 63 (mean 44.8) with 19 years of work experience on average. The age of the second primary education stage teachers ranged from 24 to 64 (mean 43.3) with 17 years of work experience on average.

The sample was built on self-selection. We have used voluntary response sampling. Teachers were informed about the research through teachers' online forums and they completed the online questionnaire on a voluntary basis. The completion of the questionnaire took about 15 minutes. All participants' questions were answered in the comment section. Data were collected in April 2020. It was the first month of school closure, which was the period of most intense changes and adaptation.

We used two methods for measuring stress – a Teacher stressor questionnaire (Clipa & Boghean, 2015) and a Perceived stress scale (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983). Additionally, one open question was added to collect more specific information about teachers' perception and management of the demand of the Covid-19 lockdown work situation.

The Teacher stressor questionnaire (TSQ) was utilized for identifying specific stressors for school teachers. The method was used previously by Slovak researchers on a sample of 50 primary school teachers (Žitniaková-Gurgová & Behúňová, 2017). From the original 25 items, researchers used 15 items. For our study, only 5 items were included in the questionnaire. The reason for this was that the rest of the items were not appropriate for the teachers' current working conditions. For example, the item *school equipment* was irrelevant when considering distance teaching. An additional original item, *extra hours for preparation*, was included. This item was included because we assumed extra preparation for distant education might be stressful in the current situation. Cronbach's alpha for our reduced and modified version of the questionnaire was evaluated at 0,79. To assess the perceived intensity of stressors, a 5-point scale was used from 1 (not stressful at all) to 5 (extremely stressful).

To measure the general basal stage of teachers' perceived stress the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was applied. The PSS is widely used and a popular tool for measuring the frequency of psychological stress. The method evaluates the stage to which individuals perceive their life as being uncontrollable, unpredictable and overloaded in a previous month's work. A study from 2012 reports its psychometric properties as being acceptable. In all 12 studies that were tested for internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha was evaluated at $>.70$. The study also reports satisfactory test-retest reliability when its first and second administrations were separated by between two days and four weeks (Lee, 2012). For the purpose of this study a shortened 10-item version of PSS was used. An item example is: In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? Respondents answered on a 5-point scale (1- never, 2- almost never, 3- sometimes, 4- fairly often, 5- very often).

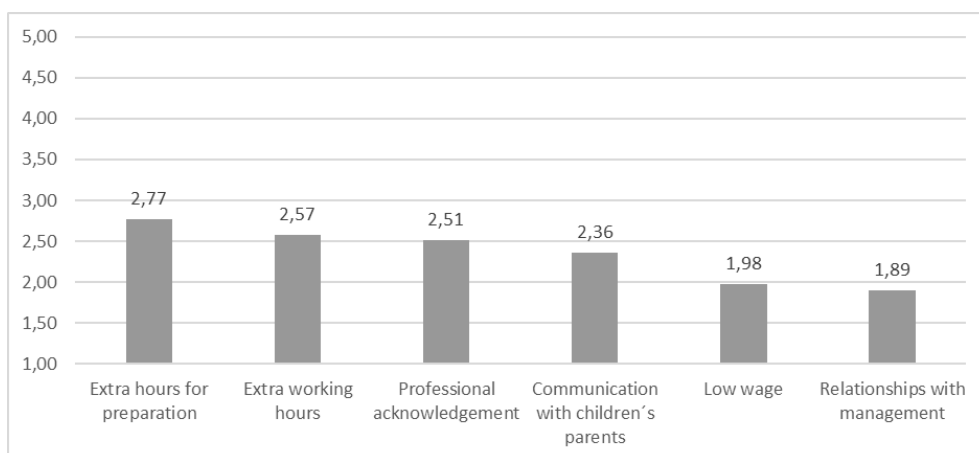
The purpose of open questions was to attain more specific and deeper information on what female teachers truly undergo during school closures and what specific stressor burdened them the most. The formulation of the question was as follows: From the start of school closure due to the pandemic, what specifically caused you the most intense feeling of pressure? The

responses were analysed using the content analysis. The method of open coding was used for analysis. Themes or categories of reported 'feelings of pressure' were identified from all submitted answers.

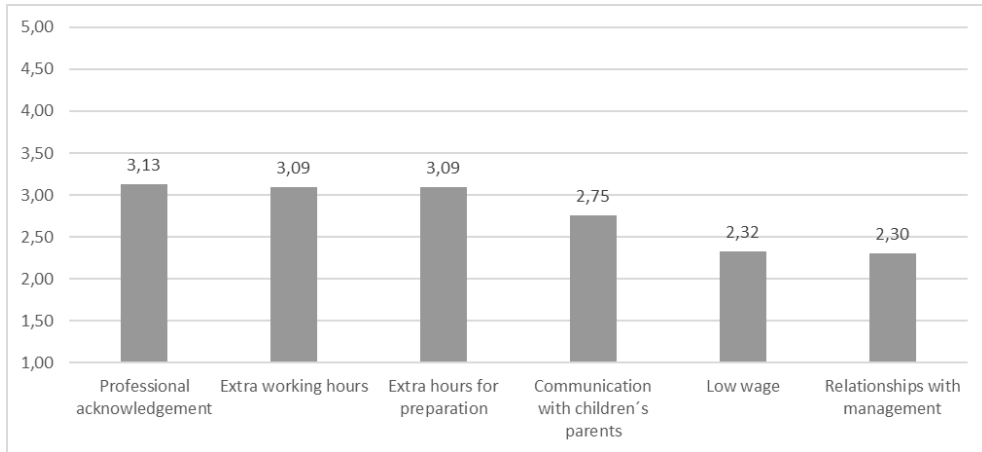
Results

Following the main aim of this paper we examined the stress levels that primary school female teachers experienced during the schools' lockdown and also identified the level of stressors. The data showed that the value of distress measured by TSQ was referred as significantly lower by the first stage female teachers (mean=14.09) compared to the second stage teachers (mean=16.68). There was no significant difference between the first (mean=29.87) and second stage teachers (mean=30.13) in the PSS score.

Figure 1: Stressors of female teachers at the first stage of primary school



Altogether there were six TSQ stressors evaluated by teachers on a five-point scale (1 – not stressful to 5 –extremely stressful). The results are shown in Figure 1 for stressors values of the first stage teachers and in Figure 2 for stressors of second stage primary school teachers.

Figure 2: Stressors of female teachers at the second stage of primary school

The significant difference in the level of reported stressors was present in the higher level of stress intensity in the second stage teachers caused by a lack of professional recognition. This was the top ranked stressor for the second stage teachers while for the first stage teachers the top ranked stressor was associated with spending extra hours on preparation of new lessons and courses (based on the changes brought about by distant teaching) (see Figure 1). Low wage and poor relationships with the school management were reported as lower-level stressor. In general, the second stage teachers reported a higher level of all six stressors (see Figure 2).

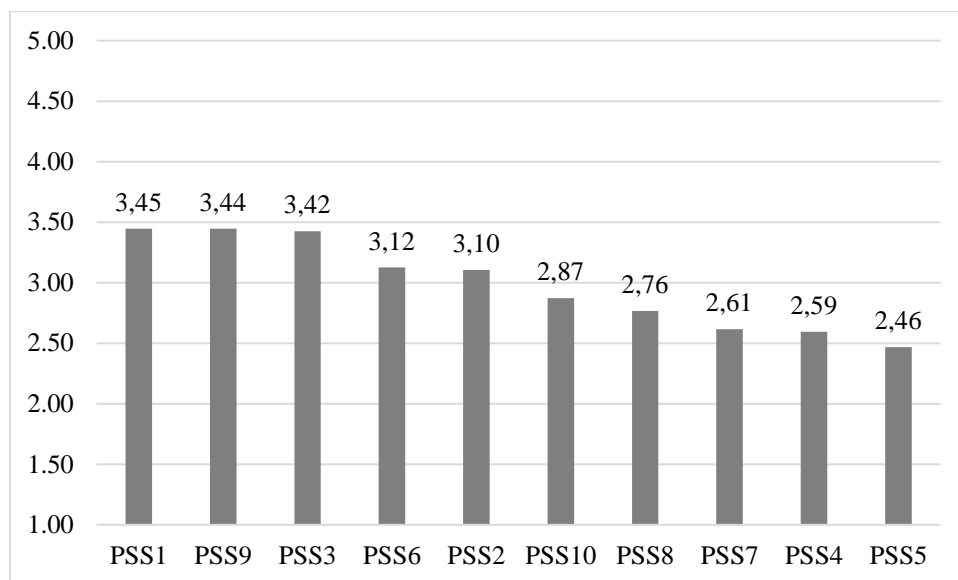
Our results include a comparison of order of our mean scores of TSQ items and order of mean scores of 5 selected items of same method measured in the Slovak study carried out in 2017 (Žitniaková-Gurgová & Behúňová, 2017). The results indicate that the item we included in the list, *Extra hours for preparation*, had the highest average score of all items, and it was a very significant stressor for teachers that participated in our Covid-19 study. Additionally, *extra working hours* seems a comparatively more important stressor in our sample than in the 2017 sample. *Low wage*, the item with the highest average score out of 5 in the 2017 study, ranked the second lowest in our average scores comparison. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of orders of TSQ items average scores in our study and in the 2017 study

	TSQ items (Žitniaková-Gurgová & Behúňová, 2017)	TSQ items (our data set)
1.	Low wage	Extra hours for preparation
2.	Professional acknowledgement	Extra working hours
3.	Communication with children's parents	Professional acknowledgement
4.	Extra working hours	Communication with children's parents
5.	Relationships with management	Low wage
6.		Relationships with management

In Figure 3 and 4 we display scores of the first and the second stage female teachers in PSS items.

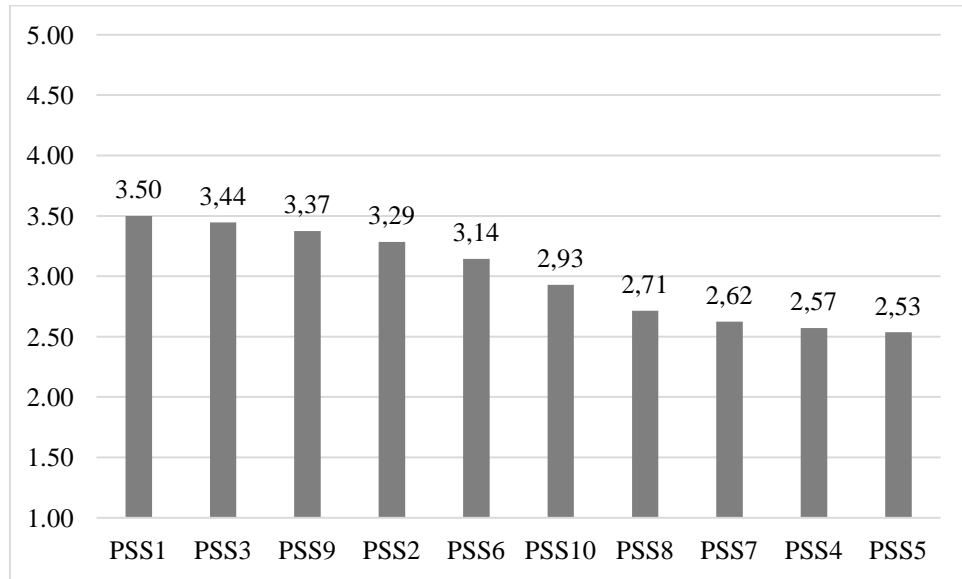
Figure 3: Perceived stress frequency of the first stage primary school female teachers



(PSS items: In the last month, how often have you...(PSS1) been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? ...(PSS2) felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? ...(PSS3) felt nervous and "stressed"? ...(PSS4-R) felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? ...(PSS5-R) felt that things were going your way? ...(PSS6) that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? ...(PSS7-R) been able to control irritations in your life? ...(PSS8-R) felt that you were on top of things?

...(PSS9) been angered because of things that were outside of your control? ...(PSS10) felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? R-reversed

Figure 4: Perceived stress frequency of the second stage primary school female teachers



(PSS items: In the last month, how often have you ...(PSS1) been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? ...(PSS2) felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? ...(PSS3) felt nervous and “stressed”? ...(PSS4-R) felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? ...(PSS5-R) felt that things were going your way? ...(PSS6) that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? ...(PSS7-R) been able to control irritations in your life? ...(PSS8-R) felt that you were on top of things? ...(PSS9) been angered because of things that were outside of your control? ...(PSS10) felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? R-reversed

There were no significant differences confirmed between the first and the second stage primary school teachers in PSS frequency. The most frequent stressor for teachers was reported to be the unexpected situations and events, which probably mostly reflects the unexpected shutdown of schools and related changes. The second most frequent stressor of the first stage teachers was reported to be the feeling of being unable to control the important things in life; while for teachers at the second stage it was the feeling of being nervous and stressed.

Altogether there were five stressors reported above the mid-scale value, meaning that teachers experienced the stressor fairly often or very often. The

most frequently perceived stressors for teachers at both stages were: the feeling of being upset because of something that happened unexpectedly; feeling of being unable to control the important things in your life; being nervous and “stressed”; feeling of being able to cope with all the things that had to be done; being angered because of things that were outside their control.

Following the second aim of this paper we examined whether age and years of work experience in primary school female teachers correlates with their stress level experienced during the lockdown. We present results separately for the first stage teachers and the second stage teachers.

A correlation analysis did not show any significant relationship between TSQ items and the age of teachers neither between TSQ items and years of work experience of teachers at the first stage of primary school. However, there were negative significant correlations confirmed for age and years of experience of teachers at the first stage of primary school and the PSS items. The results indicated that lower age correlated significantly with higher frequency of (PSS1) being upset because of something that happened unexpectedly; (PSS3) feeling nervous and “stressed”; (PSS4-R) feeling confident about the ability to handle personal problems; (PSS5-R) feeling that things were going one’s way; (PSS6) feeling of failure to cope with all the things one had to do. Also, years of teachers’ work experience correlated significantly negatively with the PSS items. Shorter work experience correlated with higher frequency of (PSS3) feeling nervous and “stressed” and (PSS5-R) feeling that things were going one’s way. We present these correlations in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlations between PSS items and age/years of work experience in primary stage teachers

PSS	Age	Years of work experience
PSS1	-,289*	Ns
PSS2	Ns	Ns
PSS3	-,294*	-,317*
PSS4	-,290*	Ns
PSS5	-,391**	-,380**
PSS6	-,338*	Ns
PSS7	Ns	Ns

PSS	Age	Years of work experience
PSS8	Ns	Ns
PSS9	Ns	Ns
PSS10	Ns	ns

Correlation coefficient strength: under 0,1 trivial; 0,1 –0,3 weak; 0,3 –0,5 moderate; more than 0,5 strong; ns (non-significant).

Correlation analysis of the second stage teachers' data did not show any significant correlations between PSS items and the age of teachers neither between PSS items and years of work experience of teachers at the second stage of primary school. Significant correlation was confirmed between years of work experience and salary conditions (TSQ stressor). The more experienced teachers were the more there were stresses from the low wage. We present these correlations in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation between TSQ items and age/years of work experience in secondary stage teachers

TSQ	Age	Years of work experience
Low wage	ns	.314*
Professional acknowledgement	ns	ns
Communication with children's parents	ns	ns
Extra working hours	ns	ns
Relationships with management	ns	ns
Extra hours for preparation	ns	ns

Correlation coefficient strength: under 0,1 trivial; 0,1 –0,3 weak; 0,3 –0,5 moderate; more than 0,5 strong; ns (non-significant).

Using content analysis, we analysed data from open questions (we received responses from 75 teachers) that asked: From the start of school closure due to the pandemic, what specifically caused you the most intense feeling of pressure? From submitted answers we have identified dominant, repeated themes or categories of reported stressors. 12 distinct topics/categories were specified. Categories of stressors varied widely in frequency, from 12 answers to 1 answer. We present these categories in Table 4.

Table 4: Categories of reported stressors and their frequency

Frequency	Categories of reported stressors
12	Unclear directions from superiors
10	Extra hours for preparation
10	Communication with children's parents
9	Communication with children
8	Extra working hours, time management
8	Work uncertainty
7	Strain from using too much PC and other technology
5	Adaptation on distance education
3	Work-Family Balance
1	Feeling that children will forget what they have learned
1	Documentation of work
1	Absence of social connections

Discussion

The main objective of this paper was the examination of stress level that primary school female teachers experienced during the schools' lockdown. One of the important findings of our study is the significant difference in value of distress measured by TSQ between the first stage female teachers (mean=14.09) and the second stage teachers (mean =16.68). However, no significant differences were confirmed between the first and the second stage primary school teachers using PSS. The first stage teachers thus reported (according to TSQ methodology) less perceived stress. This finding is not in line with a previous study that measured stress in Slovak primary school teachers (Žitniaková-Gurgová & Behúňová, 2017). The study concluded that both a critical state of stress (a state close to burnout syndrome) and the presence of actual burnout syndrome was significantly higher in the first education stage teachers, compared to second education stage teachers. However, this trend was not confirmed during the Covid-19 school lockdown.

Generally speaking, both the first education stage teachers and the second education stage teachers could have experienced serious challenges managing their work during Covid-19 schools' lockdown. It is plausible to assume that organizing and managing younger pupils (from ages 6 to 10) during times of distant education was fairly challenging as a class of younger children is naturally less organized and their teachers need to direct them and motivate them more. A lack of personal contact in this time did not make this objective any easier (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Also, we assume that the first

stage teacher needed to communicate with children's parents more frequently. Concurring with other authors' work (Gartmeier, Gebhardt & Dotger, 2016), this may cause additional workload.

The secondary stage teachers, on other hand, work with multiple classes. During lockdown, they monitored numerous daily school assignments from a large number of pupils. Also, these teachers have less intense contact with their pupils in comparison to the first grade teachers, who work with smaller groups. Communication with pupil's parents is often limited, which can be perceived as advantage (as such communication requires additional time and energy) but it also causes problems. Older pupils (aged 10 to 15) might in this setting feel less obligated and motivated to actively participate in distance schooling. This was mentioned multiple times when answering our open question, (for example an answer from secondary stage teachers "I find the effort of communication with children and the small reaction from their side as stressful" "There were children that did not respond to any form of teaching") although we reduced these notes into the category "communication with children" for purposes of analysis. Because the secondary stage teachers come into contact with a larger number of pupils, they may encounter more technical issues with the internet connection. Technical difficulties can seriously disrupt the schooling process.

Our results indicate that the general problems of the secondary stage teachers have been emphasized by the schools' lockdown. The top three most intense stressors were identified as follows: firstly, "Lack of professional acknowledgement", secondly, "Extra non-planned working hours" and thirdly, "Putting in extra hours for preparation". The first stage teachers also perceived these factors as most stressful but in a different order: firstly "Putting in extra hours for preparation", secondly "Extra non-planned working hours" and thirdly "Lack of professional acknowledgement".

The interpretation of the data in the context of the unexpected lockdown of schools seems quite straightforward. For all female teachers, at both education stages, extra time for preparation and high workload in general have been difficult to manage. This finding confirms the previous findings by Ptáček et al. (2018) that teachers experience a daily high-job related stressor and the [educationsupport.org.uk](https://www.educationsupport.org.uk) blog shows similar survey findings in the UK. During the Covid-19 school closure more than half of primary school teachers responded about feeling higher stress levels than usual.

Stressors related to low salary and relations with supervisors have been reported as lower-level stressors. In these specific circumstances,

dissatisfaction with low incomes might have seem less important to teachers than other, more pressing, issues.

A major difference seems to be the fact that the “Lack of professional acknowledgement” has ranked higher in the order of stressors intensity for the secondary stage teachers. Based on our data, it is difficult to understand why secondary stage teachers felt less professional acknowledgement compared to primary teachers. We could only suggest that our data confirm the OECD TALIS study findings that the share of teachers in Slovakia who feel insufficient acknowledgement is only 4.5 per cent and is the lowest from all OECD countries that participated in the study, with an average score of 26 per cent (OECD/TALIS).

Altogether, our data do show that both groups of primary school teachers felt unappreciated during lockdown and there is an evidence that it could cause severe consequences. Research emphasizes that prolonged exposure of high job related stressors can indeed generate dissatisfaction and a higher rate of unhappiness in primary school teachers when job changing and early retirement can quickly follow (Ptáček et al., 2018).

Further, no significant differences between the first and the second stage primary school teacher were found in the perceived stress measured by PSS. The reasons here might be that the PSS method is not sensitive enough to the occupation of teacher, and it measures a more general level of perceived stress. The most frequent reported stressor for all teachers was to “be in unexpected situations and events”. Such an assessment is quite understandable and is reflecting the unanticipated shutdown of schools and related need for sudden adaptation. The second most frequent stressor of the first stage teachers was reported to be “the feeling of being unable to control the important things in life”; while for teachers at the second stage it was “the feeling of being nervous and stressed”. Both of these formulations express feelings of internal pressure and a lack of control over important things, which were in period of lockdown (at least in the professional world) certainly present.

Following the second aim of the paper, we explored whether age and years of work experience of primary school female teachers correlates with their stress level experienced during the Covid-19 lockdown. We present our findings separately for the first and the second stage teachers.

Correlation analysis did not show any significant correlations between TSQ items and age or work experience of teachers at the first stage of primary school. However, there were significant negative correlations confirmed for

age and years of experience of first stage primary school teachers and the PSS item scores.

Results suggest that the lower age of the first stage teachers correlated significantly with higher frequency of (PSS1) “being upset because of something that happened unexpectedly”; (PSS3) “feeling nervous and stressed”; (PSS4-R) “feeling confident about the ability to handle the personal problems”; (PSS5-R) “feeling that things were going one’s way”; (PSS6) “feeling of failure to cope with all the things one had to do”. Also, the years of the first stage educators’ work experience correlated significantly negatively with the PSS items. Shorter work experience of educators correlated with a higher frequency of (PSS3) feeling nervous and “stressed” and (PSS5-R) feeling that things were going one’s way. The strength of the aforementioned correlation coefficients varied from weak to moderate.

This finding also does not correspond with recent research done on Slovak primary school teachers (Žitniaková-Gurgová & Behúňová, 2017), which indicated average stress levels in experienced teachers were higher compared new teachers. We can only speculate this discrepancy can be explained by the professional experience of teachers. Simply, we have two different situations at hand. Under “normal” conditions, both a teacher’s age and longer work experience can act as accumulation of long-lasting stressors, often resulting in high stress levels or burnout. However, during lockdown, age and experience might serve as a protective factor. It is possible that more experienced first stage teachers are able to keep young pupils disciplined and motivated even during changed schooling conditions. This assumption is supported by research indicating that more experienced teachers are usually more effective in many facets of teaching (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Their less experienced colleagues might have more problems, thus feeling more “nervous and stressed” and “upset because of something that happened unexpectedly”.

Correlation analysis of the second stage teachers’ data did not show any significant correlations between PSS items and the age of teachers either between PSS items and years of work experience of this group. Nevertheless, a significant moderate correlation was confirmed between years of work experience and TSQ stressor - salary conditions. The more experienced teachers were, the more stressed they were from the low wage. Trying to rationalize this finding would be highly and unnecessarily speculative.

The findings of the content/thematic analysis were presented by categories of stressors (reported as answers to our open question: From the

start of school closure due to the pandemic, what specifically caused you the most intense feeling of pressure?). The frequency of identified categories confirmed some of the expected notions but it also revealed other interesting findings. “Extra hours for preparation” (frequency of 10), “Communication with children’s parents” (frequency of 10), “Extra working hours, time management” (frequency of 8) were all, as expected, frequently submitted answers. We were able to identify other stressors as well. At the top of our list was the answer “Unclear directions from superiors” (frequency of 12). That answer category supports the general concerns that directions given by the educational bodies in the Slovak Republic to teachers were not sufficient. We assume this problem was particularly prevalent at the very start of the pandemic lockdown.

Other categories of stressors identified by content analysis were: “Communication with children” (frequency of 9), “Work uncertainty” (frequency of 8), “Strain from using the PC too much and other technology” (frequency of 8), “Adaptation to distance education” (frequency of 5), “Work-Family Balance” (frequency of 3), “Feeling that children will forget what they have learned”, “Documentation of work”, “Absence of social connections” (all three answers with a frequency of 1). “Communication with children”, “Work uncertainty” and “Adaptation to distance education” were all identified stressors reflecting the difficult process of adjustment all educators had to go through. Out of those identified categories of stressors the one regarding “Strain from using the PC too much and other technology” requires additional attention. When analysing a teacher’s stress, the fact that might be underestimated is that primary school teachers (compared to many other professions) are not used to using PCs for long hours every day. It is not surprising then that work which suddenly requires an allocation of 8 hours per day spent in front of the PC screen might be physically tiring for the majority of teachers. “Work-Family Balance” was another category of stressor identified by female teachers. It is in line with those studies stating that the number of working women is continually increasing, but their weekly time spent taking care of children/households did not change compared to past (Bianchi & Robinson & Milke, 2006). It should be emphasised that the workload of female teachers combined with the load of housework and care duties stands here as factor that should not be underestimated. If the schools’ lockdown (due to a pandemic or any other unexpected situation) will happen again in future the educational bodies and school management should set regulations and offer strategies to help female teachers manage their work time easier and create support for coping with their work-family spill-over.

Our findings suggest that the schooling system in Slovakia was not prepared for the possibility of prolonged distance education, as teachers have reported stress from unclear directions from superiors and extra hours of preparation for appropriate forms of education. Our recommendations for practice is therefore not directed at teachers but to school managers and schooling system authorities. We believe it is necessary to prepare and introduce plans for distance education that will help and support keeping the continuation of teaching at primary schools. Also, appropriate forms of distance education and studying materials should be prepared and provided for the teachers. This could lead to better time management of teachers and decrease the level of stressors related to working extra hours.

Approaching the end of the study we would like to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The first limitation to mention is the sample size. It is not representative and does not allow for a generalisation of the findings. However, the number of 103 female teachers that were willing to devote their time and respond to the survey despite the demanding situation, can also be seen as a proof of their willingness to express their feelings and experience with a hope that their voice would not stay unheard. The second limitation of the study could come from the selected methods that had not been applied before such an extraordinary situation as the Covid-19 pandemic and school's lockdown. There were so many unexpected changes in the teaching process that applying more qualitative methods (as interviews) would maybe be more accurate for a better understanding of Covid-19 circumstances in the teaching profession.

We would like to conclude our study by saying that today it is more important than ever to be mindful of teachers' feelings and perception of their situation. Even though many areas of life have been postponed momentarily because of the pandemic, the education of the youngest children has not. Primary school teachers help to build crucial foundations for pupils' growth and development and they have carried out the teaching and continued the children's education throughout the schools' lockdown. As primary school teachers made this continuation possible, now it is a great opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate their status and occupation even more strongly than before.

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