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Predicting Teacher Perceptions of Stress

Influence of Challenging Parent Behavior on Work, Health, and Perceived Stress of Teachers

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Abstract

This study on the influence of challenging parent behavior on the work and health of teachers was conducted in six countries: Netherlands, Russia, Hong Kong, Italy, India, and the US. Data from 292 teachers from nine middle and secondary schools in a southeastern state of the United States were analyzed separately. The instruments included the Questionnaire for Teachers about Parents (QTP) (Prakke, 2007), the general Health Questionnaire, the Self-Acceptance scale from the Preventive Resources Instrument (PRI) (McCarthy & Lambert, 2001), and the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamrack, & Mermelstein, 1983). The Self-Acceptance scale measures the degree to which one can accept and overcome shortcomings, imperfections, and limitations in dealing with demanding life situations. Multiple regression was conducted using the total score from the General Health Questionnaire as the dependent variable. Self Acceptance, Administrative Support, Parent and Community Support, Teacher Support, Effectiveness in Dealing with Parents, Relationships with Parents, and Effect on Work were used as independent variables. The variance accounted for (R^2) equaled .382. There was a moderate relationship between Self-Acceptance and General Teacher Health. These results suggest that Self-Acceptance is moderately associated with teacher health, and is a stronger predictor thereof than many other measures of their perceptions of their work environment. The paper includes also analyses using the Perceived Stress Scale as an additional dependent variable.

Influence of Challenging Parent Behavior on Work, Health, and Perceived Stress of Teachers

Among the demands most often reported in research on teacher stress are challenging student behavior, lack of administrative support, lack of parental support, and lack of instructional resources (Sakharov & Farber, 1983; Lambert & McCarthy, 2006). Teachers who experience an imbalance between resources and demands over an extended period of time are at risk for the negative effects of stress, which can include health problems and psychological burnout (McCarthy, Kissen, Yadley, Wood, & Lambert, 2006).

Markov and Martin (2005) interviewed via phone a total of 800 public school teachers in the US who had five or less years of experience in teaching. Data were weighted to key demographic variables to obtain a nationally representative sample of K-12 teachers. They found that 33.1% of new teachers viewed interactions with parents as their greatest challenge, compared to 22% who mentioned getting sufficient resources as most challenging, and 20% who reported classroom management as the greatest challenge.

Twenty percent of new teachers reported a somewhat or very unsatisfying relationship with parents and 24% felt that they were not prepared for the responsibility of communicating with and involving parents. New teachers were also twice as likely to indicate that working with parents was more challenging to them (31%) than their instructional responsibilities (14%). Teachers, who indicated their intention to leave the teaching profession, were more likely to be unsatisfied with parent relationships (32%) than others (17%).

As greatest sources of stress and anxiety, new teachers reported administrative, classroom management and testing responsibilities (34%), dealing with unmotivated students (28%), and working with parents (20%).

The transactional model of stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) can contribute to a better understanding of teacher stress and coping. It suggests that when a person encounters life demands, a cognitive process is triggered in which perceived demands of the event are weighted against a person's perceived ability to cope with those demands. If demands are perceived as higher than resources, the stress response is triggered (Sapolsky, 1998). This can include health problems and psychological burnout (McCarthy, Kissen, Yadley, Wood, & Lambert, 2006).

The purpose of this paper is to (1) explore if stress caused by challenging parent behavior influences the health of teachers and (2) examine if challenging parent behavior influences perceived teacher stress.

Method

This study on the influence of challenging parent behavior on the work and health of teachers was conducted in six countries. Data were collected from over 3000 participants in the Netherlands, Russia, Hongkong, Italy, India, and the US. The purpose of this research is to examine in what way difficult parent behavior creates stress in teachers.

Participants

In this paper, data from 287 teachers from nine middle and secondary schools in a southeastern state of the US were analyzed separately. Participants had an average of 11.27 years of teaching experience with a standard deviation of 8.93 years and consisted of 73.9% females and 26.1% males. Participants had an average number of teaching years at their current school of 5.52 years with a minimum of one year and a maximum of 33 years of experience. 76.2% were special education secondary teachers and 21.3% were general education teachers. The majority of the teachers were European American (73.2%).

From a total of 205 sets of parents, 96.1% were from the US, 3.9% were natives from other countries such as Africa, Brazil, Latin America, Mexico, Romania, and Sudan. 75.5% were European American, 8.6% were African American, 2.9% were Asian, 5.4% were Hispanic, and 7.6% had another ethnicity. 81% of the parents referred to by teachers were female and 19% were male parents. 76.4% had a high school or university degree. 54.1% of the parents currently had a partner and 17.2% did not have a partner. For 28.8% of the parents teachers did not report marital status.

Instrumentation

The instruments included five scales from the Questionnaire for Teachers about Parents (QTP) (Prakke, 2007). The first part assesses demographic information. The second part presents open-ended questions about the most challenging parent behavior. In addition, the second part includes a scale for Challenging Parent Behavior, which assesses 11 types of challenging parent behaviors on a scale from 0 to 4 using 24 statements concerning the extent to which the most challenging parent behavior occurs. This part is based on the work of Seligman (2000). This part of the questionnaire provides also 24 items concerning the effects on work based on the Index of Teaching Stress (ITS) by Green, Abidin, & Kmetz (1997). In the third part, background data on the parent is also collected. This part includes also the Effectiveness in Dealing with Parents scale with 11 items on a scale from 0 to 4, and fourth part, the Parent and Community Support scale, consists of 19 items on a scale from 0 to 4. It evaluates preventative factors at the institutional level such as social support provided by colleagues and contribution by parents derived from the Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments (CASE) Information Management System (IMS) by Keefe (1992). The fifth scale was the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) by Goldberg (1978). The GHQ measures teachers' perceived current level

of mental health functioning on a scale from 0 to 4. Twelve items address the frequency of recent experiences with differing stress symptoms. The GHQ has been used as part of occupational stress assessments, sense of well-being, etc.

In addition, the US data set included four scales from the Preventive Resources Inventory (PRI) (McCarthy & Lambert, 2001): (1) the Self-Acceptance scale, which measures the degree to which one can accept and overcome shortcomings, imperfections, and limitations in dealing with demanding life situations with 4 items on a scale from 0 to 5, (2) the Teacher Support scale (measuring the support available from other teachers on a scale from 0 – 7, (3) the Administrative Support scale (measuring the support available from administrators on a scale from 0 – 7), and (4) the Perceived Stress scale which is based on the work of Cohen, Kamrack, and Mermelstein (1983) and measures the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful using 10 items on a scale from 0 to 4.

Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, data were screened for missing data. 77 cases were eliminated because of missing data (26.6%) for at least one of the variables in the model. Three outliers were detected and excluded from the analysis. Prior to the hierarchical regression analyses, the independent variables were examined for collinearity through visual inspection of histograms for all independent variables.

Results

General health. Multiple regression analysis was conducted using the total score from the General Health Questionnaire as the dependent variable. Self Acceptance, Teacher Support, Administrative Support, Effect on Work, Effectiveness in Dealing with Parents, Parent and

Community Support, and Relationships with Parents were used as independent variables. The means and standard deviations are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable General Health (GEN_HLT)

Measures	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	N
Self Acceptance (PRI_SAC)	3.89	.75	218
Teacher Support (TCH_SUP)	4.11	.91	218
Administrative Support (ADM_SUP)	3.93	1.12	218
Effect on Work (EFF_WRK)	1.60	.71	218
Effectiveness in Dealing with Parents (PAR_EFF)	1.91	.54	218
Parent and Community Support (PAR_SUP)	2.35	.70	218
Relationships with Parents (REL_PAR)	3.88	.65	218
General Health (GEN_HLT)	1.03	.47	218

Five out of seven predictor variables (Self Acceptance, Administrative Support, Parent Support, Effect on Work, and Effectiveness in Dealing with Parents) contributed significantly to the prediction of General Health (for *t* values and *p* values see table 2). There was a moderately strong inverse relationship between Self-Acceptance and General Teacher Health. These results suggest that Self-Acceptance is moderately associated with teacher health, and is a stronger predictor thereof than many other measures of their perceptions of their work environment.

The unstandardized regression coefficients (*B*), intercept, and the standardized regression coefficients (β) are reported in Table 2. The variance accounted for (R^2) equaled .382 (adjusted R^2 = .361). The regression equation was statistically significant F (7,210) = 18.05, p <.001.

Table 2

Regression Model Predicting the Scale Score of Teacher General Health

IV s	*B*	β	*t*-value	*p*-value
Intercept	1.70		7.21	.000
Self Acceptance (PRI_SAC)	-.316	-.507	-8.691	* .000
Teacher Support (TCH_SUP)	.018	.035	.564	.573
Administrative Support (ADM_SUP)	.056	.134	2.092	* .038
Effect on Work (EFF_WRK)	-.151	-.227	-3.649	*.000
Effectiveness in Dealing with Parents (PAR_EFF)	.094	.143	2.288	*.023
Parent and Community Support (PAR_SUP)	.130	.152	2.482	*.014
Relationships with Parents (REL_PAR)	.058	.080	1.383	.168

Note. Betas reported are those from the step at which the variable was entered into the equation.
*p< .05.

Perceived teacher stress. A stepwise multiple regression was conducted using the total score from the Perceived Teacher Stress as the dependent variable. Self Acceptance, Teacher Support, Administrative Support, Effect on Work, Effectiveness in Dealing with Parents, Parent and Community Support, and Relationships with Parents were used as independent variables. The means and standard deviations are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable Perceived Stress (PSS_TOT)

Measures	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	N
Self Acceptance (PRI_SAC)	3.88	.75	219
Teacher Support (TCH_SUP)	4.11	.91	219
Administrative Support (ADM_SUP)	3.92	1.13	219
Effect on Work (EFF_WRK)	1.60	.71	219
Effectiveness in dealing with parents (PAR_EFF)	1.91	.54	219
Parent and community support (PAR_SUP)	2.35	.70	219
Relationships with parents (REL_PAR)	3.89	.65	219
Perceived Stress (PSS_TOT)	1.72	.66	219

Three out of seven predictor variables (Self Acceptance, Parent Support, and Effect on Work) contributed significantly to the prediction of Perceived Stress (Total Score) (for *t* values and *p* values see table 4). There was a moderately strong inverse relationship between Self-Acceptance and Perceived Stress, a weak relationship between Parent Support and Perceived Stress, and a weak relationship between Effect on Work and Perceived Stress.

The unstandardized regression coefficients (*B*) and intercept, and the standardized regression coefficients (β) are reported in Table 4. The variance accounted for (R^2) equaled .375 (adjusted R^2 = .354). The regression equation was statistically significant F (7,211) = 18.09, p <.001.

Table 4

Regression Model Predicting the Scale Score of Perceived Teacher Stress

IV s	*B*	*β*	*t*-value	*p*-value
Intercept	3.03		9.096	.000
Self Acceptance (PRI_SAC)	-.454	-.519	-8.865	*.000
Teacher Support (TCH_SUP)	.022	.031	.491	.624
Administrative Support (ADM_SUP)	.061	.106	1.642	.102
Parent Support (PAR_SUP)	-.190	-.202	-3.255	*.001
Effect on Work (EFF_WRK)	.146	.157	2.505	*.013
Effectiveness in Dealing with Parents (PAR_EFF)	.120	.099	1.615	.108
Relationships with Parents (REL_PAR)	.027	.027	.466	.642

Note. Betas reported are those from the step at which the variable was entered into the equation.

*p< .05.

Discussion

The effect of challenging parent behavior on teacher health is stronger than on teacher stress. In both models, especially entering the self-acceptance score from the PRI accounted for a statistically significant portion of the variance in teacher health and stress.

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