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Dispositional Coping Strategies as Factors Explaining Various Aspects of Teachers' Well-being

(pp. 231–249)

Abstract

Objectives of the research: The aim of the study was to explain various aspects of teachers' well-being through their ability to use personal resources, such as strategies for coping with stress.

Research methods: The research survey was completed by 382 teachers from the Lublin Voivodeship. An original tool, the Teacher's Well-Being Scale (TWS), with satisfactory psychometric properties, was used. Additionally, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Brief COPE Inventory were used. To explain the relationship between various dimensions of teachers' well-being and coping strategies as an explanatory variable, a canonical analysis was carried out.

A short description of the context of the issue: The role and profession of a teacher are associated with numerous stressors and difficult situations that may impact teachers' well-being.

Research findings: Teachers' active approach to dealing with difficult and problematic situations and avoiding the strategy of denial promotes well-being related to the their work (especially in the dimensions of social relations

and self-fulfillment). It is also important for life satisfaction in areas unrelated to the professional role of teachers.

Coping strategies based on acceptance and seeking social support promote life satisfaction and professional well-being among teachers, who note satisfactory conditions at school for work and professional and personal development.

Conclusions and/or recommendations: Research showing links between coping skills and the well-being of teachers and their students would be interesting. The current research results on teachers' well-being explained by their self-efficacy and coping skills seem satisfactory. However, they do not correspond with the disturbingly limited research on student well-being, school satisfaction, and the results of teachers' work.

*Keywords***:** well-being, teachers, coping, health, life satisfaction

Introduction

The concept of well-being is rooted in the World Health Organization's (1948) definition of health. It is understood as a synonym for feeling well in various spheres of human life: physical, mental, and social. In the social sciences, research into well-being began several decades later. Initially, psychological well-being was considered synonymous with happiness (Diener et al., 1985). Over time, the study of well-being has evolved into two strands: hedonic (Diener et al., 2002; Seligman, 2002, 2012) and eudaimonistic (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Waterman, 2010). Some concepts, such as the onion theory of happiness, are an attempt to combine hedonistic and eudaimonistic well-being (Czapiński, 2004).

Research into teachers' well-being has also been conducted (e.g., Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Benevene et al., 2020; van Horn et al., 2004; Spilt et al., 2011; Turner & Thielking, 2019). Swiss researchers Hascher and Waber (2021) analyzed empirical data on teachers' well-being in scientific publications from 2000 to 2019. In 98 research projects carried out in over

40 countries, the authors drew attention to a variety of theoretical assumptions underlying the definition of teachers' well-being. In Poland, research was undertaken on the determinants of teachers' well-being based on the Scale of Factors Enhancing Teachers' Occupational Wellbeing (Woynarowska-Sołdan & Węziak-Białowolska, 2012). This tool does not diagnose the construct of teacher well-being itself, but a group of its possible correlates. Teachers' well-being should be analyzed in the broader school context in connection with students' well-being. This challenge was taken up by researchers from Finland, led by Kanou, who adapted Allardt's (1973, 2003) concept of well-being to the school environment. They developed tools for assessing the school well-being of students and teachers, including four dimensions of well-being: school relationships (loving), school conditions (having), self-actualization (being), and health (Konu & Rimpela, 2002; Konu et al., 2010).

The role and profession of a teacher are associated with numerous stressors and difficult situations that may impact teachers' well-being. Therefore, dispositional coping – a strategy for reacting to stressful and problematic situations – is important (Kwiatkowski, 2018). The variety of strategies available to an individual and the individual's ability to adapt them to the current situation increase the possibility of using them effectively. Coping is an important resource for teachers' well-being. Generally, confrontational strategies are believed to be more effective than avoidance coping. However, in many difficult situations that teachers deal with, strategies such as avoidance or denial can be perceived as functional (Juczyński & Ogińska-Bulik, 2012). Research among primary school teachers showed that 69.9% of respondents experienced work-related stress and 36% experienced burnout (Ozoemena et al., 2021). Teachers' stress can be caused by rapid changes in the education system, being subject to constant evaluation, low social status, dissatisfaction with remuneration, excessive workload – including non-teaching duties related to professional development – gaining subsequent levels of professional promotion, bureaucratization, and administrative work (Cîrligeanu, 2017). Qualitative research referring to Bandura's social cognitive theory identified the main coping strategies used by teachers: engaging in one's work, regaining

strength and energy, reducing workload, creating one's work environment, and seeking support. Researchers emphasized that the stress and emotional exhaustion accompanying a teacher's work lead to a deterioration in health. Despite using coping strategies, teachers see few opportunities to control important aspects of their professional work, which means that their efforts are often ineffective (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021). Many current research reports focus on the relationship between coping and well-being of teachers during the pandemic. Among their coping strategies, respondents listed social support from family and friends, physical activity, healthy eating, and recreational activities (including reading, watching movies, time with family, and devoting time to hobbies). Research using the Brief COPE questionnaire showed that teachers most often used positive reappraisal, active coping, and planning (Rajesh et al., 2022).

Research goal

The aim of the research was to explain various aspects of teachers' subjective well-being through their ability to use personal resources, such as strategies for coping with stress and problems of everyday life, including those related to professional work.

Data and method

The method of diagnostic survey was used. An original tool was designed, the Teacher's Well-Being Scale (TWS), distinguishing four dimensions of subjective well-being in an exploratory factor analysis and referring to Allardt's concept of well-being adapted to the study of school well-being by Konou and colleagues (2010).

The construct of teachers' well-being is understood here as an attempt to capture the relationship between teachers' well-being (whose dimensions include school relationships, health/vigor, school conditions,

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and self-fulfillment), and life satisfaction (understood as general mental well-being independent of the teacher's work). Diener and colleagues' Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), adapted by Juczyński (2012), was used in this study. It is a short, one-dimensional, five-item tool whose result determines general life satisfaction.

The Teachers' Well-Being Scale (TWS) consists of 16 items in the form of statements which respondents rate on a 5-point Likert scale. The tool has a four-factor structure reflecting the four dimensions of teacher well-being: Factor I: school relationships (four items, e.g., "I can communicate well with my students"); Factor II: health/vigor (three items, e.g., "I wake up in the morning feeling refreshed and have a lot of energy to work all day"); Factor III: school conditions (five items, e.g., "My school is a friendly place to work for me and I like its atmosphere"); and Factor IV: self-fulfillment (four items, e.g., "Working as a teacher is a source of satisfaction for me; it makes me feel happy and fulfilled"). The tool has satisfactory psychometric properties (total explained variance: 55.24%; reliability: $\alpha = 0.811$, $\alpha_{fI} = 0.732$, $\alpha_{fII} = 0.697$, $\alpha_{fIII} = 0.639$, and $\alpha_{fIV} = 0.617$).

Carver's Brief COPE inventory, adapted by Juczyński and Ogińska--Bulik (2012), was used to study dispositional coping, or the assessment of typical ways of reacting and feeling in situations of severe stress.

Research procedure and characteristics of the sample

The online survey was conducted in November 2022 using Google Forms with 382 teachers from the Lublin Voivodeship. The respondents' age ranged from 21 to 60 years (M = 37.2; M = 37, SD = 10.67). Other information about the respondents is summarized in Table 1.

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Table 1. Information About the Sample (N=382)

Sample characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Female	316	82.7
Male	66	17.3
Place of residence		
City	244	63.9
Countryside	138	36.1
Workplace		
City	265	69.4
Countryside	117	30.6
I work as a:		
Special educator	23	6.0
Kindergarten teacher	50	13.1
Early childhood education teacher	103	27.0
After-school teacher, librarian	7	1.8
High school teacher	46	12.0
Teacher of grades 4–8	153	40.1
Education		
Bachelor's degree	58	15.2
Master's degree	324	84.8
Level of professional development		
Junior teacher	57	14.9
Contract teacher	51	13.4
Appointed teacher	125	32.7
Certified teacher	125	32.7
No level of professional development	24	6.3
Financial situation		
Very good	37	9.7
Good	191	50.0
Average	132	34.6
Poor	22	5.8

An analysis of the data presented in Table 1 shows that the sample is dominated by women (82.7%). As both the place of residence and the place of work, the respondents statistically significantly more often indicated the city than the countryside. The largest groups were people working in primary schools as teachers of grades 4–8 (40%) or early childhood education teachers (27%). Nearly 85% of the respondents hold a master's degree and about 65% are appointed or certified teachers. Half of the respondents assessed their financial situation as good, and one third as average.

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the variables, including life satisfaction (SWLS total score), teacher well-being (TWS total score) and its four dimensions, as well as the 14 coping strategies constituting the Brief COPE subscales.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Well-Being,
Life Satisfaction, and Coping Strategies

	N	Scores	Score range of the subscale	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Satisfaction, total score (SWLS)	382	6–35	5–35	20.6597	6.29997	-0.114	-0.477
Well-being, total score (TWS)	382	36–80	16–80	53.9974	4.67500	0.182	2.780
School relationships, Factor I (TWS)	382	8–20	4–20	14.1361	1.57817	-0.669	0.979
Health/vigor, Factor II (TWS)	382	3–15	3–15	9.3228	2.84757	0.133	-0.472
School conditions, Factor III (TWS)	382	5–25	5–25	15.6535	3.94844	0.247	-0.261
Self-fulfillment, Factor IV (TWS)	382	8–20	4–20	16.2388	2.36157	-0.375	-0.272
Planning (Brief COPE)	382	1–6	0–6	3.6859	1.28212	0.010	-0.372
Positive reframing (Brief COPE)	382	0–6	0–6	3.1859	1.43430	0.046	-0.562
Active coping (Brief COPE)	382	1–6	0–6	3.8953	1.24210	-0.122	-0.523
Acceptance (Brief COPE)	382	0–6	0–6	3.8168	1.29523	-0.304	0.197
Humor (Brief COPE)	382	0–6	0–6	2.1545	1.25270	0.374	0.018
Turning to religion (Brief COPE)	382	0–6	0–6	1.9136	1.38244	0.455	-0.367
Seeking emotional support (Brief COPE)	382	0–6	0–6	3.3298	1.46386	0.066	-0.647
Seeking instrumental support (Brief COPE)	382	0–6	0–6	3.3560	1.58369	-0.208	-0.532
Self-distraction (Brief COPE)	382	0–6	0–6	2.7775	1.45455	0.047	-0.480

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	N	Scores	Score range of the subscale	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Denial (Brief COPE)	382	0–5	0–6	1.1675	1.14015	0.981	0.752
Venting (Brief COPE)	382	0–5	0–6	1.8665	1.23615	0.122	-0.944
Substance use (Brief COPE)	382	0–5	0–6	0.9529	1.11674	0.798	-0.560
Refraining from action (Brief COPE)	382	0–5	0–6	1.5733	1.16539	0.502	-0.533
Self-blame (Brief COPE)	382	0–6	0–6	2.4686	1.47696	0.435	-0.466

An analysis of the data presented in Table 2 shows that score distributions for the variables were close to a normal distribution (only the value of kurtosis for the total TWS score was higher). Among the coping strategies, the highest mean scores were observed for active coping, acceptance and planning, and strategies related to seeking support. The lowest average scores were recorded for the strategy of using psychoactive substances. In conclusion, the surveyed teachers more often choose confrontational, task-oriented coping strategies and refrained from avoidance coping.

To better understand the well-being of the respondents, an analysis of the relationship between the following elements was carried out: life satisfaction (SWLS), teacher well-being (TWS total score), school relations (TWS Factor I), health/vigor (TWS Factor II), school conditions (TWS Factor III), and self-fulfillment (TWS Factor IV). Pearson's r correlation coefficients are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Structure of the Well-Being of the Respondents –
Pearson's r Correlations**

Dimensions of teacher well-being, Pearson's r correlation coefficient	Satis-faction	Well-being, total score	TWS Factor I, school relationships	TWS Factor II, health/vigor	TWS Factor III, school conditions	TWS Factor IV, self-fulfillment
Satisfaction	1					
Well-being, total score	0.575**	1				
TWS Factor I, school relationships	0.319**	0.481**	1			
TWS Factor II, health/vigor	0.263**	0.517**	-0.019	1		
TWS Factor III, school conditions	0.306**	0.655**	0.065	0.273**	1	
TWS Factor IV, self-fulfillment	0.382**	0.534**	0.234**	-0.044	-0.058	1

**Correlations significant at p = 0.01

The analysis of the data presented in Table 3 shows that life satisfaction was highly correlated with teachers' school well-being (TWS total score) and all its dimensions. The results in the TWS subscales partially correlated with each other. The well-being related to school relationships (Factor I) among the teachers shows a statistically significant positive relationship with well-being in the area of self-fulfillment (Factor IV). Self-assessment of physical health and life energy (Factor II) significantly correlated with the subjective assessment of school conditions, which are the source of teachers' well-being (Factor III). School relationships, health, school conditions, and self-fulfillment are not only dimensions of teachers' well-being at school, but also the source of teachers' life satisfaction. Teachers' professional well-being is an important element of their life satisfaction.

The literature on the subject presents various models of the relationship between teachers' coping strategies and their well-being. For example, Parker and Martin (2009) showed that direct coping strategies are better predictors of teachers' well-being than palliative coping strategies, which often work in the short term or their effect is only indirect or very delayed. At the same time, cognitive strategies are more conducive to teachers' well-being and engagement in their work than behavioral strategies. To check the relationship between various dimensions of teachers' well-being and coping strategies, a correlational analysis was conducted. Pearson's r correlation coefficients are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Teachers' Well-Being and Coping Strategies –

Pearson's r Correlations

Dimensions of teacher well-being and coping strategies, Pearson's r correlation coefficient	Well-being, total score	Factor I, school relationships	Factor II, health/vigor	Factor III, school conditions	Factor IV, self-fulfillment	Satis-faction
Active coping	0.338***	0.155**	0.176***	0.181***	0.226***	0.256***
Planning	0.219***	0.141**	0.125*	0.090	0.139**	0.191***
Positive reframing	0.245***	0.119*	0.046	0.131	0.224***	0.197***
Acceptance	0.189***	0.161**	0.013	0.051	0.197***	0.298***
Humor	0.046	0.038	0.040	0.013	0.028	0.174***
Turning to religion	-0.124*	-0.039	0.001	-0.045	-0.168***	-0.079
Seeking emotional support	-0.159**	-0.071	-0.175***	-0.085	-0.038	0.037

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Dimensions of teacher well-being and coping strategies, Pearson's r correlation coefficient	Well-being, total score	Factor I, school relationships	Factor II, health/vigor	Factor III, school conditions	Factor IV, self-fulfillment	Satis-faction
Seeking instrumental support	0.012	0.124*	-0.046	-0.057	0.042	0.188***
Self-distraction	0.060	0.002	0.074	0.083	-0.034	0.043
Denial	-0.347***	-0.232***	-0.117*	-0.173***	-0.241***	-0.273***
Venting	-0.259***	-0.055	-0.099	-0.223***	-0.147**	-0.117*
Substance use	-0.163**	-0.124*	-0.018	-0.009	-0.216***	-0.096
Refraining from action	-0.032	-0.034	0.019	0.015	-0.070	-0.038
Self-blame	-0.212***	-0.112*	-0.097	-0.074	-0.183***	-0.115*

* Correlations significant at $p = 0.05$
** Correlations significant at $p = 0.01$
*** Correlations significant at $p = 0.001$

The analysis of the data presented in Table 4 shows that task-oriented strategies based on problem-solving and the acceptance strategy were highly positively correlated with both teachers' well-being and life satisfaction. At the same time, data shows statistically significant negative relationships between teachers' well-being and life satisfaction as well as some strategies based on emotions and avoidance. Less statistically significant relationships were visible between coping strategies and each of the four dimensions of teacher well-being. However, interestingly, only active coping correlated highly positively, and denial negatively, with each of the four factors of teachers' school well-being. Moreover, seeking emotional support had a statistically significant negative relationship with only the dimension of health-related well-being.

Correlational analysis using Pearson's r coefficient identified statistically significant relationships within the structure of well-being among the respondents (see Table 3), as well as between its elements and coping strategies (see Table 4). To explain the relationship between different dimensions of teachers' well-being and coping strategies as an explanatory variable, a canonical analysis was performed. This procedure is a generalization of linear multiple regression with two sets of variables (it is used to examine relationships between two sets of variables). Two sets of canonical variables were created. The first set of explained variables was

the teachers' overall well-being, life satisfaction, and four dimensions of teacher well-being (relationships, health, school conditions, and self-fulfillment). The second set of canonical variables were the coping strategies (14 variables from the Brief COPE inventory). Two pairs of highly statistically significant canonical variables were obtained with satisfactory canonical correlation coefficients (Rc=0.549 and Rc=0.385) and a quite low proportion of the variance of Set I (well-being) explained by Set II (coping). The results of the canonical analysis are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Teachers' Well-Being and Coping –
Results of the Canonical Analysis

	Criteria/predictors	RcI	RcII
Well-being	Teacher's well-being, total score	-0.958	0.193
	Satisfaction	-0.670	-0.601
	Factor I, relationships	-0.535	-0.272
	Factor II, health	-0.034	-0.312
	Factor III, school conditions	0.095	-0.423
	Factor IV, self-fulfillment	-0.704	-0.139
	Rc	0.595	0.385
	Λ (Wilks' lambda)	0.482	0.747
	F	3.349	1.672
	P	<0.001	0.001
	Rd (in %)	14.7	
	Rd/c (in %)	12.8	1.9
Coping	Active coping	-0.581	-0.024
	Planning	-0.389	-0.105
	Positive reframing	-0.452	-0.072
	Acceptance	-0.414	-0.542
	Humor	-0.113	-0.385
	Turning to religion	0.252	-0.024
	Seeking emotional support	0.214	-0.475
	Seeking instrumental support	-0.088	-0.654

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	Criteria/predictors	Rcl	Rcll
Coping	Self-distraction	-0.073	0.096
	Denial	0.609	0.139
	Venting	0.412	-0.320
	Substance use	0.331	0.063
	Refraining from action	0.085	0.101
	Self-blame	0.378	-0.076

The analysis of canonical loadings shows that in the first pair of canonical variables, teachers' well-being (total score), life satisfaction, and well-being related to school relationships and self-fulfillment have the greatest contribution among the variables from Set 1. These variables related to areas of well-being can be explained by the use of active coping strategies and refraining from the strategy of denial. To conclude, an active, task-oriented approach to teachers' coping with difficult and problematic situations promotes well-being related to the teacher's work (especially in the dimensions of social relations and self-fulfillment). It is also important for life satisfaction in areas unrelated to the teacher's professional role.

The analysis of loadings in the second pair of canonical variables suggests that life satisfaction and well-being associated with a positive assessment of school conditions are explained by coping strategies such as acceptance and seeking both emotional and instrumental support. Presumably, the attitude of acceptance and the social support one receives contribute to life satisfaction and professional well-being of teachers, who can perceive satisfactory conditions at school for work and for professional and personal development. Social acceptance and support probably contribute to well-being for teachers who focus more on the positive aspects of their work rather than the inconveniences related to, for example, the underfinancing of the education system.

Discussion

Scientists in many countries have analyzed teachers' strategies for coping with stress and problems in the context of well-being. Despite sociocultural and economic differences, a teacher's work is associated with many difficulties that require them to develop ways to maintain their well-being, which is conducive to effective teaching. For the sake of their well-being, teachers seek support from family, friends, and colleagues (as coping strategies). They also expect professional psychological support, undertake personal development, and try to avoid situations and people that generate stress. Common coping strategies are spending free time in nature, relaxing, and eating healthily. Sometimes it is even necessary to change jobs or use pharmacological agents (Cîrligeanu, 2017). Analyzing the coping strategies of primary school teachers, researchers found that 76.7% used dysfunctional strategies, while only 42.3% used problem-focused strategies (Ozoemena et al., 2021). Kwiatkowski (2018) demonstrated the advantage of task-oriented coping over emotional and avoidance coping among teachers to manage stress, and thus increase well-being. In the current research, teachers most often showed a readiness for active coping strategies, acceptance, planning, and seeking support. Therefore, task-oriented strategies (active coping and planning) predominated among the sample. Acceptance is also an important approach, i.e. "accepting the situation and learning how to live with it" (Juczyński & Ogińska-Bulik, 2012, p. 55). Although acceptance expresses a lack of active coping, it is a functional behavior and can be treated as the opposite of denial. Support-seeking strategies may be related to both active coping (looking for instrumental support, i.e., help/advice from others) and emotional coping (seeking emotional support, i.e., reassurance and understanding). A common element for both support-seeking strategies is pursuing a relationship with another person.

Austin et al. (2005) pointed out that the level of stress and health problems correlate positively with avoidance strategies and negatively with seeking social support, active coping, and planning. In this study, the level of stress and health problems were not examined, but only that

of subjective well-being in its various dimensions. Nevertheless, the data showed that strategies based on active coping correlated highly positively and avoidance strategies negatively with teachers' well-being. Moreover, in the first pair of canonical variables, teachers' life satisfaction and well-being related to school relationships and self-fulfillment were explained by the use of active coping strategies and avoidance of the strategy of denial. The active approach to coping showed no relationship with subjective well-being in terms of physical health, life energy, or vigor. It would be interesting to pose and verify the hypothesis that severe teacher stress and serious health problems lead to avoidance strategies, while moderate or low levels of stress and relatively good health contribute to active, task-oriented coping.

Parker and Martin (2009) recognized the importance of "everyday resilience" (buoyancy) as a mediator of the relationship between coping strategies and teachers' well-being. Buoyancy is teachers' ability to adapt to difficult situations that they experience in everyday life at school. This approach is proactive rather than reactive and is a "positive version" of resilience. Everyday resilience was not analyzed as a variable in this study. However, in the second pair of canonical variables, a relationship was noted between the coping strategy consisting of acceptance and seeking support and well-being in the dimension of life satisfaction and satisfaction with school conditions. The attitude of acceptance and openness to social support is an expression of adaptation to the conditions of everyday life at school. It does not have to mean passive acceptance of difficulties, but learning to live with them every day with the support of colleagues (head teachers and fellow teachers), students, and their parents.

Research into teachers' coping strategies in the context of their well-being suggests taking practical preventive and interventional actions. Despite numerous studies on teachers' health, which result in theoretical models and programs for dealing with stress and health problems in this professional group, the fact that teachers do not know about such programs is surprising. The variety of theories for developing teachers' coping strategies and of research reports evaluating preventive and interventive projects does not translate into practical activities for

supporting teachers in dealing with stress and health problems (Blumenthal & Blumenthal, 2021).

Current research on coping strategies as a factor of teachers' well-being, including this one, will hopefully encourage researchers to continue and take up topics that have been omitted or insufficiently investigated:

1. In research on the relationship between coping strategies and teachers' well-being, it is worth considering mediating variables (both mediators and moderators), such as resilience, self-assessment of professional competencies, personality traits, cultural differences, and the related teacher status (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).
2. It seems interesting to build a construct of a teacher's well-being, including the well-being–ill-being continuum. Research to date has focused either on the positive dimension of well-being (most often mental well-being in the hedonic or eudaimonic dimension) or on teachers' health problems (stress, burnout, or occupational diseases) (Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021; Ortan et al., 2021).
3. It is worth conducting research that demonstrates the connections between coping skills and the well-being of teachers and their students. Our results on teacher's well-being explained by their self-efficacy and coping skills seem satisfactory, but they do not correspond with the disturbingly limited research on student well-being, school satisfaction, and the results of teachers' work (Aelterman et al., 2007; Engels et al., 2004; Matteucci et al., 2017; McCallum & Price 2015).

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