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Multidimensional Work Addiction in Upper Secondary School Teachers

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Abstract

Research Objectives and Problems: The aim of this research is to determine the level and structure of multidimensional work addiction among the surveyed secondary school teachers. The main research question is: What is the level and structure of multidimensional work addiction among the surveyed secondary school teachers?

Research Methods: The empirical material was collected using a diagnostic survey approach. The primary tool utilized was the *Multidimensional Workaholism Questionnaire (WKOP)*, developed by Szpitalak (2012).

Structure of the Article: The article begins with an introduction to the research that describes the phenomenon of teachers' work addiction and characterizes the teaching profession. The empirical section outlines the research program and methodology. This is followed by an analysis of the results, verification of the working hypotheses, and a summary.

Research Findings and Their Impact on Educational Sciences: The analysis of the research results confirmed the validity of the adopted research assumptions.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The results prove the high professional commitment of teachers, with diagnosed work addiction ranging from

positive commitment and intrinsic motivation to potentially destructive effects on their health (cf. Golińska, 2008). It is essential to implement a transparent motivation system that ensures respect for teachers, supports their professional development, and provides them with a sense of agency and purpose.

Keywords: career, upper secondary school teacher, work addiction

Introduction

It is commonly believed that the teaching profession is hard and highly responsible, with teachers expected to fulfill numerous vital roles within the education system. These roles are related not only to education itself but also to upbringing, childcare, community involvement, research, and providing life guidance to youth. Each of these functions entails specific tasks and responsibilities that teachers are expected to carry out. Scholars frequently emphasize that teaching requires self-reliance, creativity, and the development of personalized strategies. As a result, the professional activity of a teacher is often likened to art, which is highlighted by the creative nature of their work (Lewowicki, 2007, p. 57).

Teacher's responsibilities primarily include supporting student growth and creating an environment conducive to this in consideration of available resources and conditions (Szempruch, 2001, p. 107). Bogusław Śliwerski describes teachers as "professionals whose activities involve transmitting knowledge, shaping attitudes, and skills as specified in curricula. According to Śliwerski, a teacher is "one of the essential factors in the learning process, being a vocationally trained educator who shares responsibility for the preparation, organization, and outcomes of this process" (Śliwerski, 2006, p. 295).

Teachers are expected to exhibit "a wide array of qualities, such as intelligence, brilliance, creativity, resourcefulness, innovation, and courage. In fulfilling their entrusted tasks, teachers should be active, hard-working, responsible, conscientious, modest, reliable, systematic, practical and diligent. In their relationships with students, they should be fair, demanding

yet supportive, empathetic, friendly, kind-hearted, tolerant, patient, well-intentioned, and open-minded. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to be dynamic, self-directed, well-organized, aspirational, genuinely passionate about their vocation, honest, open to change, practical, down-to-earth, dignified, culturally aware, and attuned to the modern world. A healthy sense of self-esteem is essential for teachers to maintain authenticity in their roles (Zubrzycka-Maciąg & Kirenko, 2015, p. 7).

According to Wincenty Okoń, teachers educate, nurture, and support the development of students under their care. The effectiveness of their work depends on the learners, the education system, and, most importantly, the teachers themselves (Okoń, 1998, p. 761). This can lead teachers who are passionate about working with young people, deeply engaged, and fascinated by their jobs to lose balance in their professional lives. Striving for perfection and driven by an inner compulsion to work, they may overextend themselves in their quest for conscientiousness and diligent performance. In extreme cases, this imbalance can lead to reliance on psychoactive substances to boost productivity or compensate for dissatisfaction with their job performance.

Classical work addiction in teachers can also manifest as continually escalating demands on themselves, taking on new challenges and responsibilities, or being overly critical of their peers. Work addicts of this kind are often perceived by others as seeking to control those around them while simultaneously craving acknowledgment and acceptance (cf. Rowicka, 2015, pp. 140–160). Teacher work addiction can be examined on three levels: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. The behavioral aspect encapsulates indicators such as working overtime, working on weekends (e.g., grading assignments or preparing lessons), and sacrificing personal time for professional tasks. While these behaviors alone do not definitively signify work addiction, they often indicate excessive work habits.

Cognitive work addiction, on the other hand, involves a compulsive need to work, driven by an inner urge to stay constantly productive. It may include incessant rumination about work the moment it is discontinued, loss of control over one's work habits, irrational beliefs about work, and work-related thoughts overshadowing other aspects of life. Emotional

indicators of work addiction include experiencing positive emotions, such as satisfaction or excitement, while working and negative emotions, such as frustration, anger, or irritation, when not working (cf. Paluchowski et al., 2014; Malinowska, 2015).

The phenomenon of work addiction, as examined here, may progress at varying paces. In the case of teachers, its development depends on their personality, values, and attitudes, as well as on the school environment and educational policies. Three stages of this disorder can be identified. In the first stage, referred to as the *prodrome*, individuals take on an increasing number of responsibilities, consequently spending more and more time at work. These behaviors gradually aggravate, even as the teacher begins to experience both psychological symptoms, such as stress, emotional tension, anxiety, or depression, and somatic symptoms, primarily manifested as gastrointestinal and cardiovascular system disorders. Affected individuals become excessively tired, have difficulty concentrating, suffer from headaches, and experience balance disturbances. Despite these warning signs, they often attempt to ignore them, which leads to the emergence of the second stage.

The second stage, referred to as the *critical stage*, is characterized by a strong internal compulsion to work. Failure to engage in work exacerbates anxiety, and the person feels mounting pressure to perform, becoming increasingly demanding of themselves, even without external expectations. Even during moments of rest, they think incessantly about their work and exhibit less control over their behaviors than in the first stage. Psychosomatic symptoms begin to develop into conditions requiring medical assistance, such as hypertension, peptic ulcers, myocardial infarction, or stroke. If the individual's attitude remains unchanged despite these symptoms, they begin to transition to the third stage.

The third stage of work addiction is referred to as the *chronic stage*. During this phase, the individual's life becomes entirely centered on work. Sleep and rest are reduced to a minimum, and the person has no time for anything other than work. They remain constantly focused on and constantly ruminate about their work, but instead of achieving satisfaction or fulfillment, they only experience heightened anxiety and tension.

Naturally, this leads to a decline in the quality of their work performance, which may result in physical exhaustion and the onset of fatigue-related illnesses. General health of the individual deteriorates rapidly, and such extreme exhaustion poses a growing risk of life-threatening consequences (cf. Mieścicka, 2002, p. 145; Wojdyło, 2003, pp. 124–126).

Long-term work addiction can have severe negative consequences for an individual's health, professional functioning, and social life. Work addiction must not only be acknowledged but also actively counteracted through proper diagnosis and the implementation of educational and psychotherapeutic measures (Nowosad, 2022). Considering various theoretical concepts, it is advisable to assume a holistic approach to the study of this issue, operationalizing workaholism as a multidimensional phenomenon. This is precisely the research approach that I adopted when designing this study. I referenced the concept proposed by M. Szpitalak (2012), which takes into account the typical aspects of work addiction.

Study Design

The purpose of this research was to examine multidimensional work addiction in upper secondary school teachers. I aimed to diagnose this phenomenon by assessing its overall level, structure, and the relationships between the salience of work, the compulsive need to work incessantly, and other analyzed factors of work addiction. This revealed the scope and prevalence of work addiction as well as the interrelations among its specific components.

The main research problem was framed as the following question:
What is the level and structure of multidimensional work addiction among the studied upper secondary school teachers?

Additionally, two supplementary research questions were posed:

1. What are the relationships between the salience of work, the compulsive need to work, and other aspects of work addiction among the responding teachers?

2. To what extent do demographic and social factors influence the study variables related to work addiction in the responding teachers?

Based on these research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **H1.** There are significant relationships between the salience of work, the inner compulsion to work, and the analyzed aspects of work addiction among the responding teachers.
- **H2.** Demographic and social factors significantly influence both the level of work addiction in the responding teachers and the analyzed components of this phenomenon.

The empirical data was collected using a diagnostic survey in the form of a questionnaire. The tool utilized for this purpose was the *Wielowymiarowy Kwestionariusz Pracoholizmu* (WKOP) [Multidimensional Workaholism Questionnaire], designed by Szpitalak (2012). The WKOP consists of 94 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale and encompasses 13 factors: 1) Salience (viewing work as a highly important value and prioritizing it above other activities); 2) Conscientiousness; 3) Difficulties Engaging in Activities Unrelated To Work; 4) Stress and Anxiety; 5) Stimulants (abuse of psychoactive substances); 6) Inability to delegate (a tendency to perform tasks independently due to a lack of confidence in others' abilities); 7) Strained Relationships; 8) Enthusiasm (experiencing work satisfaction and positive emotions); 9) Destructive perfectionism; 10) The need for predictability; 11) Strong sense of duty; 12) Preoccupation (being preoccupied with work and, consequently, forgetting about other significant activities); and 13) Inner compulsion to work.

To analyze the collected empirical data, I employed descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviation, and median) and correlational statistics, including Pearson's Chi-squared test and Spearman's rank correlation test. The study was conducted in the first quarter of 2023 in the Lublin region. A total of 128 teachers from general upper secondary schools participated, with the sample selected based on accessibility to

the research sites and the teachers' willingness to participate. Of these, 120 fully completed questionnaires were qualified for analysis. Female respondents accounted for 82% of the sample. The mean age of respondents was 32.6 years. Regarding professional experience, 35.8% of respondents had less than 5 years of experience, 41.7% had between 6 and 15 years, and 22.5% had more than 16 years of teaching experience. The average professional experience across the sample was 10.5 years. The mean tenure at the respondents' current workplace was 6.4 years.

Analysis of Study Results

The analysis of the collected data provides a general score for respondents' workaholism, calculated as the mean of scores for specific items rated on a scale from 1 to 7, as included in the subscales of the measure. The obtained general score is 3.86, which represents an average result. Therefore, the responding teachers assign an average level of importance to their profession and demonstrate moderate enthusiasm, work engagement, preoccupation with work, professional perfectionism, and inner compulsion to work. Thus, the respondents exhibit an average level of workaholism, which has a relatively limited influence on performing tasks that extend beyond their basic professional duties. It can therefore be concluded that this group is likely in the initial stage of developing work addiction (cf. Wojdyło, 2003).

The analysis further indicates that the overall level of work addiction among the responding teachers increases with the number of years they have worked as teachers ($p < 0.000$). However, no significant differences were observed with respect to the respondents' gender or the length of their employment at their current educational institution. In accordance with the adopted study design, work addiction among the responding teachers was examined as a multidimensional phenomenon, and specific factors displayed varying levels. The obtained data is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Analysed Factors of Work Addiction
in Responding Teachers**

Factors of work addiction	Descriptive statistics			
	N significant	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
Salience of work	120	3.45	3.40	1.06
Conscientiousness	120	4.22	4.22	1.06
Difficulty engaging in non-work activities	120	3.81	4.00	1.10
Stress and anxiety	120	3.80	3.78	0.92
Use of stimulants	120	2.72	2.50	1.39
Inability to delegate	120	3.82	3.83	0.98
Strained relationships	120	3.47	3.60	1.18
Enthusiasm for work	120	4.00	4.25	1.19
Destructive perfectionism	120	3.83	4.00	1.12
Need for predictability	120	4.87	4.83	1.03
Strong sense of duty	120	4.42	4.33	1.32
Preoccupation with work	120	3.78	3.83	1.29
Inner compulsion to work	120	3.98	4.00	1.01

The obtained data shows that the highest scores were reported for the *need for predictability* ($M = 4.87$), *strong sense of duty* ($M = 4.42$), *conscientiousness* ($M = 4.22$), and *enthusiasm at work* ($M = 4.00$). These scores place the above-mentioned factors above the average level on the 1–7 scale. It can, therefore, be concluded that nearly two-thirds of the responding teachers (64.2%) highly value transparency in their work environment. They want to maintain control, feel anxious when things are not going as they planned, and experience discomfort when they are surprised by unexpected situations and demands. Additionally, 61.7% of respondents feel enthusiastic about their work, find it satisfying and fulfilling, and view it as a means for professional growth. More than half of the respondents (55.8%) prioritize their duties over leisure; they demonstrate conscientiousness, dependability, adherence to deadlines, and diligence in their actions. These factors appear to constitute an important source of work motivation. Notably, conscientiousness is more frequently exhibited

by respondents with tertiary education compared to those with secondary education ($p < 0.000$) and by teachers with leadership roles ($p < 0.010$).

To a slightly greater than average extent, the responding teachers display *inner compulsion to work* ($M = 3.98$), *destructive perfectionism* ($M = 3.83$), *inability to delegate* ($M = 3.82$), *difficulty engaging in non-work activities* ($M = 3.81$), *stress and anxiety* ($M = 3.80$), and *preoccupation* ($M = 3.78$). Half of the respondents (53.4%) report feeling uneasy when not working; they experience anxiety and guilt as they perceive themselves as lazy and believe they are wasting valuable time, which generates strong feelings of guilt. Consequently, one-third of respondents (32.7%) strive to remain constantly active, always finding tasks to do even during their leisure time. More than half of the respondents (54.2%) exhibit *destructive perfectionism* in their work consisting in excessive attention to details at the expense of the general purpose and context of their duties. They often experience difficulty completing tasks as they are constantly dissatisfied with their quality. As a result, they spend so much time deliberating on how to perform a task and make so many continuous modifications that it makes it difficult for them to complete the task on time. Additionally, many respondents prefer to handle tasks themselves rather than delegate them, believing that others cannot achieve a satisfactory outcome. *Inability to delegate* is more frequently observed in male respondents than female respondents ($p < 0.005$).

This dynamic results in nearly half of the respondents (47.8%) leading extremely busy lives, often feeling tired, lacking time for leisure, and believing that their work engagement negatively affects their social and family lives, which could otherwise bring them greater satisfaction. This burden causes one-third of respondents (39.1%) to experience a lack of self-confidence and intense anxiety under time pressure. Although they wish to approach life with greater calm, their high preoccupation with work stands in the way.

Furthermore, one in four respondents (26.4%) admitted being so preoccupied with their work and teaching duties that they were unaware of what was happening around them. They often lose track of time. This tendency is most commonly observed in older individuals and those with the longest teaching experience ($p < 0.032$). Less-than-average scores

were reported for factors of work addiction such as *strained relationships* ($M = 3.47$), *salience* ($M = 3.45$), and *use of stimulants* ($M = 2.72$). It was found that nearly one-third of respondents (31.9%) prefer to read a book or watch TV rather than meet with friends. When invited to social gatherings, they often refuse as they believe that they have more important tasks to attend to. Additionally, they see little opportunity to establish new relationships outside of their schoolwork. Strained relationships were found to be more characteristic of older individuals ($p < 0.017$) and those with longer teaching experience ($p < 0.017$).

Approximately one in five respondents (19.2%) admitted to having used psychoactive substances, including difficulty refraining from consuming alcohol after a stressful workday. Some respondents reported relaxing with alcohol or smoking cigarettes as a way to unwind after the demands of their job. The next step in the research procedure involved identifying the significance of various aspects of workaholism in contributing to the *salience of work* and *inner compulsion to work*. These two factors have been shown in previous studies to exhibit the strongest associations with the overall score of work addiction (cf. Szpitalak, 2012). The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationships Between the Salience of Work and Inner Compulsion to Work among Respondents and Other Aspects of Their Work Addiction

Explanatory variables	Dependent variables			
	Salience of work		Inner compulsion to work	
	R	p	R	p
Salience of work			0.340	0.000
Conscientiousness	0.165	0.072	-0.147	0.108
Difficulty engaging in non-work activities	0.409	0.000	0.193	0.036
Stress and anxiety	0.109	0.235	0.314	0.000
Use of stimulants	0.093	0.314	0.214	0.019
Inability to delegate	0.403	0.000	0.183	0.046
Strained relationships	0.201	0.027	0.145	0.145

Explanatory variables	Dependent variables			
	Salience of work		Inner compulsion to work	
	R	p	R	p
Enthusiasm for work	0.267	0.003	-0.016	0.860
Destructive perfectionism	0.304	0.001	0.398	0.000
Need for predictability	0.373	0.000	0.130	0.016
Strong sense of duty	0.455	0.000	0.195	0.033
Preoccupation with work	0.522	0.000	0.312	0.001
Inner compulsion to work	0.340	0.000		

The study found that work, conceptualized by responding teachers as *salience*, is positively associated with *preoccupation with work* ($R = 0.521$; $p < 0.000$), *strong sense of duty* ($R = 0.455$; $p < 0.000$), *difficulty engaging in non-work activities* ($R = 0.408$; $p < 0.000$), and *inability to delegate* ($R = 0.402$; $p < 0.000$).

This indicates that as responding teachers become increasingly preoccupied with their work—meaning they become deeply absorbed in their professional tasks—they develop a stronger belief that duties should take precedence over leisure. This is accompanied by increasing difficulties engaging in activities unrelated to work and a growing tendency to perform tasks independently, spurred by the belief that others are less capable or will not carry out the tasks successfully. Consequently, the significance of work increases, with work becoming both an intrinsic value and an instrumental means to satisfy other needs and meet professional expectations.

Much weaker, but still positive associations were also observed between *salience* and other aspects of work addiction. These include *need for predictability* ($R = 0.373$; $p < 0.000$), *inner compulsion to work* ($R = 0.340$; $p < 0.000$), *destructive perfectionism* ($R = 0.304$; $p < 0.001$), *enthusiasm for work* ($R = 0.267$; $p < 0.003$), and *strained relationships* ($R = 0.201$; $p < 0.027$). The study found that the growing need for control among responding teachers—along with their desire to predict outcomes in their work environment, an exacerbating inner compulsion to work, and excessive

attention to details at the expense of the overall purpose of the task—is accompanied by the growing importance that they ascribe to their work.

This heightened significance of work also results from their passion for working with young people, the satisfaction from achieved outcomes, and their commitment to work, often at the expense of their social life and non-professional relationships. In addition, no significant relationships were found between the importance assigned to work by the studied teachers and their conscientiousness, experienced stress and fear, or the use of psychoactive substances. Subsequent analyses examined the relationships between inner compulsion to work and other factors of work addiction considered in the study. These analyses revealed that the inner compulsion to work exhibited by responding teachers showed the strongest positive associations with *destructive perfectionism* ($R = 0.398$; $p < 0.000$), *saliency* ($R = 0.340$; $p < 0.000$), *preoccupation with work* ($R = 0.312$; $p < 0.01$), and *stress and anxiety* ($R = 0.314$; $p < 0.000$).

The findings indicate that inner compulsion to work, as an internal drive, increases significantly with higher levels of destructive perfectionism, characterized by excessive attention to details that detracts from the essence of tasks. As teachers prioritize their work more in their lives and become increasingly preoccupied with their profession and job-related tasks, stress and anxiety build up, leading to chronic fatigue, reduced immunity, and, ultimately, career burnout. The data also reveals significant relationships between the *compulsion to work* and *the use of stimulants* in difficult situations ($R = 0.214$; $p < 0.019$), *strong sense of duty* ($R = 0.195$; $p < 0.033$), *difficulty engaging in non-work activities* ($R = 0.192$; $p < 0.036$), and *inability to delegate* ($R = 0.183$; $p < 0.046$). These relationships, while statistically significant, are relatively weak. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that in the context of teachers' work, an increased inner drive to perform tasks raises the likelihood of more frequent use of stimulants to relieve stress, voluntarily taking on additional responsibilities, neglecting non-professional activities (e.g., family life, socializing, participation in cultural activities, or sports), and completing all tasks independently due to a lack of confidence in others' abilities to perform them to a high standard or within a specified timeframe.

The analyses further indicate that the inner compulsion to work exhibited by the responding teachers was not associated with aspects of work addiction such as conscientiousness, strained relationships, enthusiasm for work, or the need for predictability in various situations.

Summary

The analyses of the obtained results confirm the validity of the research assumptions. The above-average level of work addiction observed among the responding upper secondary school teachers from the Lublin region is primarily characterized by a need for predictability in their professional environment, a strong sense of duty, conscientiousness, and enthusiasm for work. These factors coincide with the first stage of workaholism, which involves assuming an increasing number of responsibilities and devoting more and more time to completing them. This stage often leads to mental fatigue and, in some cases, somatic symptoms.

Respondents also reported experiencing an inner compulsion to work, destructive perfectionism, and an inability to delegate responsibilities, which stems from a belief that others will not perform tasks as effectively or within the required timeframe. These behaviors leave no time for non-professional activities such as family life, socializing, or other pursuits and lead to heightened anxiety and job-related stress. This engagement and preoccupation with work often cause respondents to feel disconnected from their personal lives.

Two significant aspects of work addiction—*salience of work* and *inner compulsion to work*—were found to be positively associated with numerous analyzed components of workaholism. *Salience of work* in the lives of the responding teachers is strongly linked to being preoccupied with work, prioritizing it above all else, and a strong sense of duty, which prompts them to take on additional responsibilities of their own accord. This leaves little time for family life or other non-professional activities and fosters a lack of confidence in others' abilities, compelling the respondents to perform tasks on their own. These behaviors are accompanied by

a need to control situations, inner compulsion to work, destructive perfectionism, enthusiasm for work, and withdrawal from social life, leading to isolation and strained relationships.

Inner compulsion to work, on the other hand, is primarily motivated by destructive perfectionism, the meaning of work in the lives of responding teachers (both intrinsic and instrumental), preoccupation with school-related tasks and professional duties, stress and anxiety about performance standards, and frequent use of stimulants (e.g., drugs). It is also influenced by a strong sense of duty, the absence of activities outside work, and an inability to delegate tasks and responsibilities to other teachers.

The obtained results indicate a high level of work engagement among teachers, wherein diagnosed work addiction manifests both as positive engagement and inner drive, as well as having harmful and detrimental effects on their health (cf. Golińska, 2008). This group can be classified as *caring workaholics*—individuals who place a high priority on promoting their students' growth and take personal responsibility for the outcomes of their teaching, upbringing, and caregiving work (cf. Wojdyło, 2003; Dudek, 2008).

The issue of work addiction, therefore, warrants careful attention and reflection by school authorities. While striving for high performance is commendable, it should not come at the expense of teachers' health. For this reason, system-level solutions have gained importance. Unhealthy competition and rivalry should be replaced by rational workloads and collaborative work environments based on cooperation (cf. Nowosad, 2022, p. 201). To achieve this, it is essential to develop a transparent system of incentives that promotes respect, supports professional growth, and empowers teachers with a sense of autonomy and agency. Further research is needed to explore this issue in greater depth and should be designed to provide representative data on the experiences of the entire population of upper secondary school teachers.

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