TEACHING AND SUFFERING: A STUDY ABOUT TEACHERS' STRESS AND BURNOUT

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1. Introduction

According "Health-Promoting Schools" model (World Health Organization (1998), teachers have a double role: educators applying these principles and workers suffering consequences of this application, since their physical work context is school. Recently, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2014) created "Healthy workplaces" campaign, alerting for job stress/burnout as psychosocial risk. Teachers are a vulnerable group, since their tasks implies chronic demands from their students (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001), and interactions with colleagues, administrators and parents (Aloe et al., 2014). An European survey about teachers' work related stress (Nubling et al., 2011) included a Portuguese sample, and referred emotional demands, physical violence, burnout, general health state and work-family conflict as common factors. Teachers' burnout implies psychological suffering at job and burned-out teachers negatively affect themselves, their students and the educational system, having negative consequences on class quality and students' learning outcomes. Some studies (Aloe et al., 2014; Stoel & Thant, 2002; Whitaker et al., 2015; Zhang & Sapp, 2009) revealed that teacher burnout adversely impacted student state motivation and affective learning, and students perceptions about teacher burnout has a negative impact on perceived teacher competence, caring, and trustworthiness. It is crucial to study teachers' burnout in order to prevent it and avoid extreme suffering situations that leads burnout teachers to resign earlier, dropout, depression symptoms and even commit suicide (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Stoel & Thant, 2002). Web-forum discussions frequently referred teachers' low well-being and suicide rate as higher than other groups, presenting an recently increase (e.g. http://saveourschoolsnz.com; http://www.teachersolidarity.com). Burnout prevalence varies according countries and occupations, but is estimated between 3-16% (Maslach et al., 2001) and for teachers was reported between 25-35% in Europe, being 19,7% in Italy (Quattrin et al., 2010).

2. Aims

Due the social and cultural importance of teachers, we aim to analyze burnout levels and discuss stress sources of three samples of Portuguese high school teachers, with data being collected during 2006, 2009 and 2013, as part of a larger study about burnout, developed at FPCE-UP department.

3. Methods

Participants: 600 high school teachers, being 200 each year at 2006, 2009 and 2013, all were working at Porto public schools. Despite it was not possible to do a longitudinal study following the same participants, we paired socio-demographic and labor characteristics of each year sample. Participants' age varies between 24 to 60 years (M=42,5 and SD=6,1), with 10% of the sample having master grade. Concerning to marital status, 70% were married, and 67% had children. Work experience ranged between 2 and 38 years (M=16,7 and SD=9,3).
Measures: Questionnaire with socio-demographic (sex, age, marital status and children) and professional questions (academic degree and professional experience) and the Portuguese version of Maslach Burnout Inventory - Human Services Survey (Maslach et al., 1996), having 22 items organized in the dimensions emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.
Procedure: A self-completion printed questionnaire, anonymous and confidential was full-filled after formal authorization and voluntary participation. All questionnaires were fulfilled at school during researchers' visit/invitation and returned to a closed box to assure anonymous procedures and confidentiality. An inform consent was given with write instructions and contacts for details if participants want to know more about the research.

4. Results

Comparisons between the three years/moments (Figure 1) revealed non-significant statistically differences for burnout's dimensions, with low emotional exhaustion (near 2,5 in a 0-6 point scale), reduced depersonalization (minor than 1) and high personal accomplishment (near 4). However, the percentage of teachers presenting each dimension symptoms frequently (few times in a week or everyday) revealed that between 2006-2009 emotional exhaustion increases from 10% to 18% but personal accomplishment stays at 24% during 2006/2009 and increase near 31% during 2013 (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Dimension comparison among years

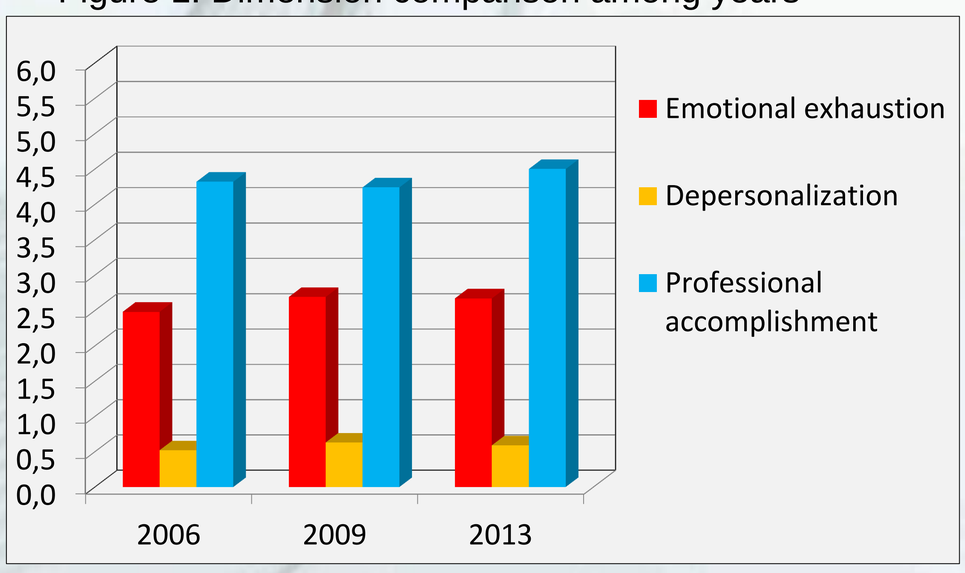
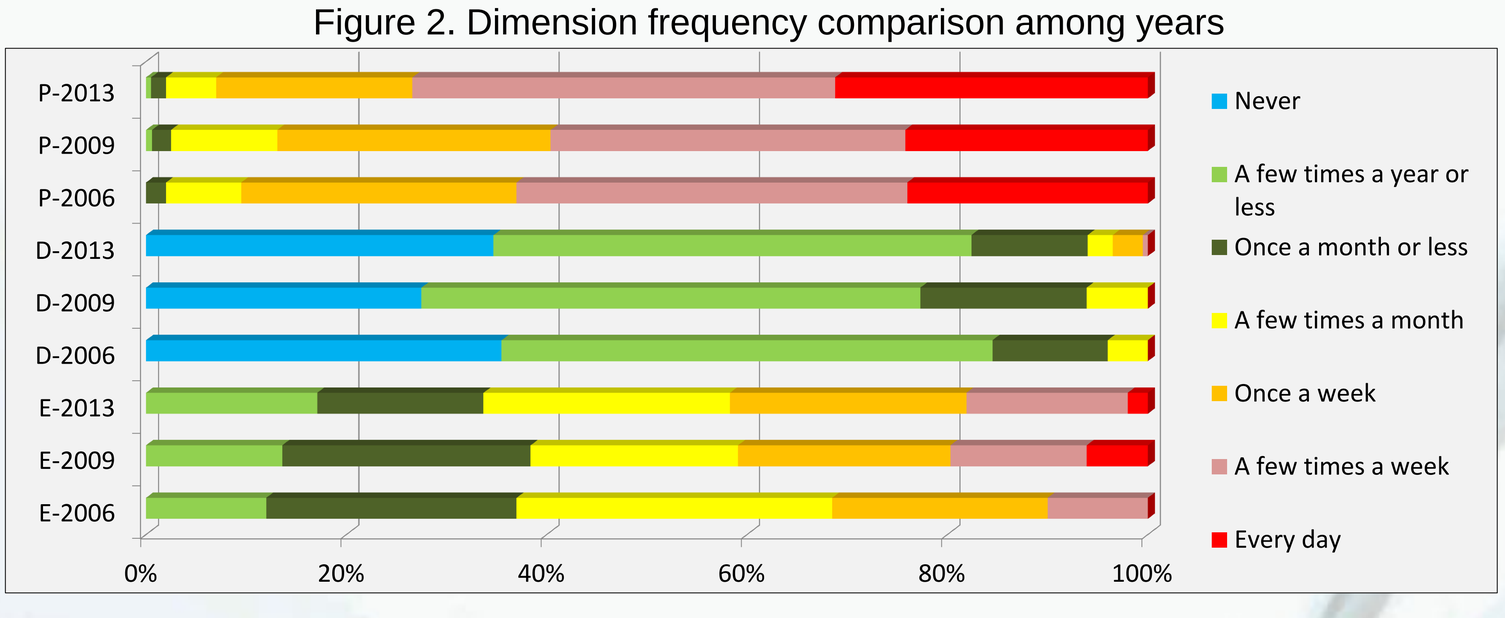


Figure 2. Dimension frequency comparison among years



5. Conclusions

Between 2006/2013 numerous administrative and politic changes were done in teachers' career/responsibilities, eliciting a high number of resign and dropout, as well public street concentrations near Portuguese government. Despite values revealed at 2013 teachers' adaptation or coping strategies to deal with stress, major stress sources are time pressure, management of students' discipline, job tasks' content and emotional demands. Burnout dimension's values were lower than other European studies, alerting for methodological limitations: data were collected with voluntary participation at school, and burnout teachers are more absent at home with diseases or more stressed at school refusing to participate, and many teachers had dropout or resigned earlier. Teachers' reports about their own health and students' information about teachers will help to identify burnout at earlier stages and doing preventive/restorative intervention (Evers et al, 2003). Programs already tested based on relaxation/mindfulness (Flook, 2013; Williams & Poel, 2006) and social/peer support (Ross et al., 2012; Westling et al., 2006), should be implemented to combat this phenomenon and ameliorate teachers' skills to cope with stress/burnout (Jesus, 2014; Kyriacou, 2001), since teachers' burnout affect themselves, but also learning quality of their students.

6. References

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