

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE IN THE SAMPLE OF LITHUANIAN SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Teacher's job is considered to be not attractive as it contains emotional strain and stress and schools in Lithuania face a shortage of teachers (TALIS, 2018; Merkys & Balčiūnas, 2019). Research on the social emotional health and resilience of teachers is important, especially in the face of the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Research on social emotional health and resilience of Lithuanian teachers was conducted as part of the ERASMUS+ project 'Supporting teachers to face the challenge of distance teaching' (2020-1-LV01-KA226-SCH-094599).

Methodology. The aim of this research was to assess the social emotional health and resilience of secondary school teachers in post-pandemic times. 400 respondents from Lithuania participated in the research. The results are based on data from the 'Social and emotional health survey for teachers' (SEHS-T) (Furlong & Gajdasova, 2019) and the 'Resilience scale' (RS14) (Wagnild & Young, 1993; Wagnild, 2016).

Results. Teachers reported a sufficiently high level of overall indicator of Social and Emotional Health (SEHS-T) as well as its domains: Belief-in-Self, Emotional Competence, Engaged Living. The level of teacher Resilience reached a moderate level. Significantly high positive correlations were established between teacher resilience and the overall social emotional index ($r_s = .585, p = .000$), as well as between the resilience and social emotional domains: Engaged Living ($r_s = .560^*, p = .000$), Emotional Competence ($r_s = .448^*, p = .000$) and Belief-in-Self ($r_s = .515^{**}, p = .000$). The research did not find statistically significant differences by age, sex, or work experience.

Conclusions. The teachers demonstrated a rather high level of social emotional health, a moderate level of resilience, and weak Belief-in-Others. It is recommended that teachers' resilience is strengthened through interventional activities such as stress coping strategies, emotional awareness, and peer support skills training during the Covid-19 pandemic times.

Keywords: *social-emotional health, belief-in-self, belief-in-others, emotional competence, engaged living, resilience, teachers, Lithuania sample*

Introduction

Theoretical background

There is a massive shortage of teachers and educational support specialists in Lithuania. Teachers do not tend to come to school, because this workplace is not attractive, and this work contains emotional stress (Bubelienė & Merkys, 2016; TALIS, 2018; Merkys & Balčiūnas, 2019). Teachers in Lithuania have suffered from the highest level of stress in the European Union. According to the research data of EURYDICE (2021), a high-level stress is characteristic of 47% of teachers.

According to the report announced by the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE, 2011), based on research in 30 European countries, there are four main stressors of the work environment at the teacher's work: high workload and intensity, role overload, too many learners in the classroom, inappropriate student behaviour in the classroom. All these factors can lead to the burnout and various health problems of teachers.

Stress is associated with psychological resilience. Being psychologically resilient, teachers can work more efficiently and develop the resilience of their students (Bouillet, Ivanec, Miljević-Riđički, 2014). Psychological resilience is perceived as the process of overcoming difficulties, adverse conditions, or trauma. Resilience is a certain adaptation to innovations or complex situations, psychological immunity, and personal strengths that are based on positive experience and support (Nikolaou et al., 2021). The construct of resilience is a set of certain abilities and the ability to understand a stress situation, to really evaluate own abilities, and to act efficiently is seen as one of the most essential ones (Beardslee, 1989; Caplan, 1990; Rutter, 1999). It should be noted that the resilience construct is highly complex and encompasses cognitive, social, and other behavioural factors, and their evaluation is rather challenging (Pendergast, 2017). As it is shown by several studies there is a close correlation between the resilience, well-being and professional productivity (Svence & Majors, 2015). Emotional social competencies and resilience of teachers are especially evident in dealing with stress and anger situations (Johnson et al., 2005; Petrulyte et al., 2020), for example, external anger management has been found to be positively correlated with age and work experience.

Recent studies about resilience in education focus is on broader social, cultural, and political arenas' (Beltman et al., 2018). For the teacher, resilience is a very important good psychological climate at school and relationships with colleagues (Gibbs & Miller, 2014). It is necessary to point out that a supportive environment, emphatic relationships among colleagues, play a crucial role in an educational institution (Chollett, 2020). Polidore E. T. (2004), Cooper C.L., Flint-Taylor, J., & Pearn, M. (2013),

Mullen et al. (2021) argue that moral support, flexible and adaptive control locus, i. e., knowing that an individual has control over events, educational background, presence of positive relations, optimism, acceptance of changes and high professional competences, are of utmost importance for teacher resilience. Researchers Dreskinytė and Juškelienė (2020) emphasize that teachers increasingly need to strengthen well-being in school community, and their work requires more and more emotional resources.

Methodological background

This our study is based on the Resilience model of Wagnild and Young (1993) and the Social Emotional Health Model by Furlong (Furlong et al., 2014). The Resilience model by Wagnild and Young (1993) explained the phenomenon of resilience as a set of personality traits that facilitate the adaptation of the individual. The authors embrace six characteristics: a harmonious perspective of life; feeling the meaning of life; ability not to break down despite failures and obstacles; recognition of the individual's unique life path; acceptance of his/her life; belief in the self and own abilities. Individuals with high resilience are able to adapt, rebalance, and avoid the potentially harmful effects of stress in the face of depressing adversity (Wagnild & Young, 1993; Wagnild, 2016).

The Social Emotional Health Model by Furlong is to identify key positive indicators for prediction of mental health (Furlong et al., 2014). It is based on positive psychology and consists of 4 positive main domains and 12 subscales as psychological indicators of mental health. The Belief-in-Self domain consists of Self-Efficacy, Persistence, and Self-Awareness. The Belief-in-Others domain comprises Family Support, Institutional Support and Colleague Support. Emotional Competences consists of Cognitive Reappraisal, Empathy, Self-Regulation, and the last domain, Engaged Living, includes Gratitude, Zest and Optimism. In general, social emotional health is called Covitality.

At the beginning of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Lithuania (spring 2020), schools faced difficulties due to technical means and digital literacy competencies in all groups of participants in the teaching process, but the autumn of 2020 was slightly smoother compared to the spring period. It was also observed that if teachers valued distance learning more favorably, they were also more effective. The authors recommend that teachers use measures to ensure good physical health and emotional well-being for themselves and their students, share good practices with colleagues and, at the same time, solve the difficulties of distance education for children (Distance Education of Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Threats and Opportunities from an Ecosystem Perspective, 2021).

There is not enough psychological research on teacher social-emotional health and resilience in Lithuania, because the teaching profession faces greater demands for coping and adapting in times of pandemic. The **aim** of the present research was to evaluate the social emotional health and resilience of secondary school teachers in post-pandemic times.

The study involved 400 teachers from different Lithuania district schools (primary and secondary), among them by sex: 91 men (22.7%) and 309 (77.3%) women. by age: 26 (6.5%) were 20–30 years old, 73 (18.3%) – 31–40 years old, 138 (31.4%) – 41–50 years old, 118 (26.8%) – 51–60 years old and 45 (10.2%) were > 60 years old. The age of most of the respondents is from 41 to 50 years (31.4%) and from 51–60 years (26.8%) (see Figures 1 and 2).

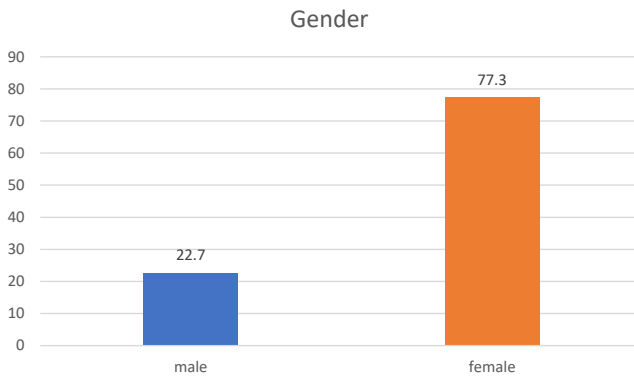


Figure 1. Distribution of teachers by gender (percentage values)

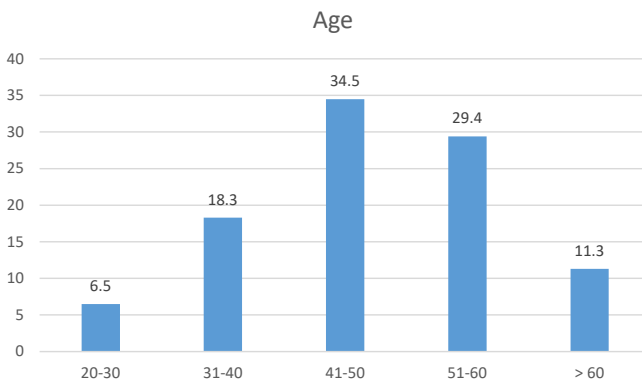


Figure 2. Distribution of teachers by the age (percentage values by age groups)

Methodology

The results are based on the data from the Social and Emotional Health Survey for Teachers (SEHS-T) (Furlong, 2014; Furlong & Gajdosová, 2019) and the short version (14 questions) of the Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993; Wagnild, 2016). The Social and Emotional Health Survey for Teachers (SEHS-T) and the Resilience Scale were translated into Lithuanian by two independent translators. Permission to use it was obtained from the original authors. The (double) translation of methodologies was carried out by A. Petrulytė and J. Bagdonavičiūtė. In the first, the ‘pilot’ study of teachers according to the Social Emotional Health and Resilience (2021 March–April). V. Guogienė (a psychologist of the Švenčionys District Education Support Service) helped to conduct the survey in schools.

Social-Emotional Health Survey-Teachers (SEHS-T) measures the level of general social-emotional index Covitality and its 4 domains (Belief-in-Self, Belief-in-Others, Emotional Competence, Engaged Living). SEHS-T has 12 subscales representing unique positive social-emotional health constructs associated with four general positive social-emotional health domains. The first domain, Belief-in-self, consists of three subscales: self-efficacy, persistence, and self-awareness. The second domain, Belief-in-Others, has three subscales: family support, institutional support, and colleague support. The third domain, Emotional competence, consists of three: a cognitive reappraisal, emotional regulation, empathy, and self-regulation. Engaged living comprises three subscales: gratitude, zest, and optimism. SEHS-T contains 48 items rated on a six-point scale with a general index – Covitality score ranging between 48 and 288.

The research methodology tools of the previous “pilot” study: the SEHS-T (Furlong, Gaidosova), the 14-Item Resilience Scale (Wagnild), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener). The study involved 142 teachers from schools in Švenčionys district: 15 men, and 127 women, and their ages ranged from 29 to 72 years (the average age – was 49.5 years). Therefore, the internal consistency of the questionnaire is appropriate for all Cronbach’s alpha criteria. The data collected from the participants was not normally distributed. Significant positive relations were found between social emotional health, resilience, and satisfaction with life ($p = 0.000$). All research tools are sufficiently valid and appropriate to assess social, and emotional health, and resilience in Lithuania.

The 14-Item Resilience Scale (14) is a short version of the Resilience Scale (Wagnild, 2011) (25 questions). The short version consists of 14 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale with two anchoring statements from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘strongly agree’ (7). The possible total scores of RS range from 14 to 98. Higher scores are indicative of resilience. Scores of 56

and below are considered to reflect very low resilience, scores from 57 to 64 refer to low resilience, 65 to 73 at the low end, 74-81 moderate, 82 to 90 moderately high, and 91 to 98 high resilience (Wagnild, 2011). The short version RS-14 was used in the Lithuania sample. The RS has demonstrated very good validity and reliability characteristics (Ahern et al., 2006; Portzky, Wagnild, et al., 2010). According to Mesarošová, Hajdúk, Heretik (2014), the RS shows good psychometric properties including acceptable reliability (Cronbach Alpha .818).

Data analysis

Data were analysed using the IBM SPSS 21. Data for internal consistency of study questionnaires were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha. Differences in significance of variables were assessed using the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U test. Correlations between variables were examined using the Spearman correlation coefficient.

Results

The present research shows good reliability characteristics of the teacher research tools: SEHS-T (Covitality) and Resilience Scale (RS-14) (400 respondents) (see Table 1).

Examination of the results of SEHS-T Covitality and teachers Resilience showed that the data were not distributed according to the law of normality (see Table 2).

The average score of the level of the general SEHS-T Covitality index in Lithuanian teachers is equal to $M = 230.34$ (theoretical score range: 48–288, empirical range: 69–287, $SD = 24.85$, minimum 69.00, maximum 287.00), indicating a high level of Covitality (see Table 3).

The total score of teacher Resilience (RS-14) varied from 14 to 98 ($M = 72.93$, $SD = 13.05$), which indicates a moderate level (see Table 4).

Table 1. Reliability of SEHS-T Covitality and Resilience (Cronbach Alpha) in the Lithuanian teacher sample

Social Emotional Health (SEHS-T Covitality)	.950
Belief-in-Self	.894
Belief-in-Others	.862
Emotional Competence	.839
Engaged Living	.896
Resilience	.786

Table 2. Tests of normality SEHS-T CoVitality and Resilience in the Lithuanian teacher sample

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistics	N	p	Statistics	N	p
Belief-in-Self	.111	399	.000	.935	399	.000
Belief-in-Others	.083	399	.000	.958	399	.000
Emotional Competence	.078	399	.000	.940	399	.000
Engaged Living	.106	399	.000	.947	399	.000
SEHS-T CoVitality	.078	399	.000	.932	399	.000
Resilience	.121	399	.000	.951	399	.000

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the SEHS-T Covitality and its psychological indicators in the Lithuanian teacher sample

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Self-efficacy	8.00	24.00	19.53	2.39
Persistence	5.00	24.00	19.26	2.80
Self-awareness	4.00	24.00	19.74	2.55
Belief-in-Self	17.00	72.00	58.53	6.51
Family support	4.00	24.00	19.42	3.91
Institutional support	6.00	24.00	17.46	3.12
Colleague support	4.00	24.00	18.79	4.02
Belief-in-Others	15.00	72.00	55.67	8.38
Cognitive reappraisal	8.00	24.00	17.88	3.12
Empathy	5.00	24.00	20.24	2.50
Self-regulation	5.00	24.00	20.24	2.48
Emotional Competence	19.00	72.00	58.36	6.30
Gratitude	4.00	24.00	21.57	2.55
Zest	5.00	24.00	18.35	3.50
Optimism	4.00	24.00	18.04	3.45
Engaged Living	18.00	72.00	57.95	7.99

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of Resilience (RS-14) in the Lithuanian teacher sample

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Resilience	14.00	98.00	72.93	13.05

Social Emotional Health (SEHS-T) and its psychological indicators in Lithuanian teacher’s analysis

Four domains of the SEHS-T Covitality and its psychological indicators (subscales) can be seen in the pictures below (Pictures 3–7).

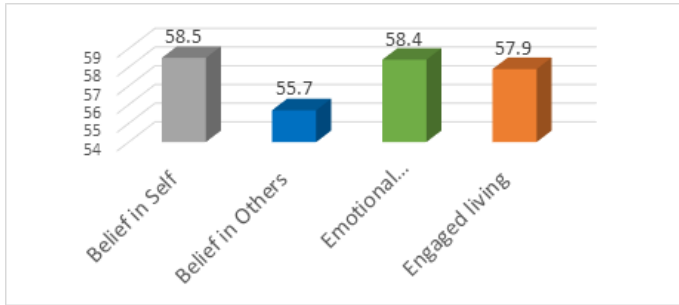


Figure 3. Means of SEHS-T main domains: Belief-in-Self, Belief-in-Others, Emotional Competence and Engaged Living

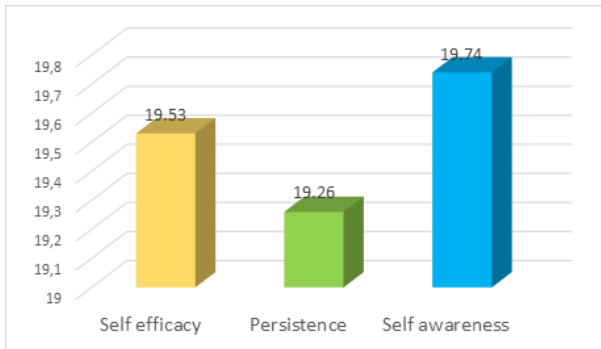


Figure 4. Means of subscales of SEHS-T – Belief-in-Self

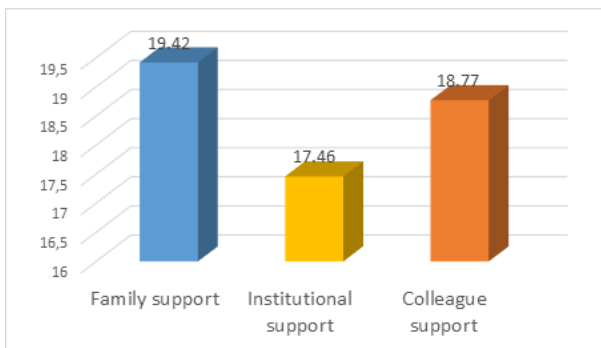


Figure 5. Means of subscales of SEHS-T – Belief-in-Others

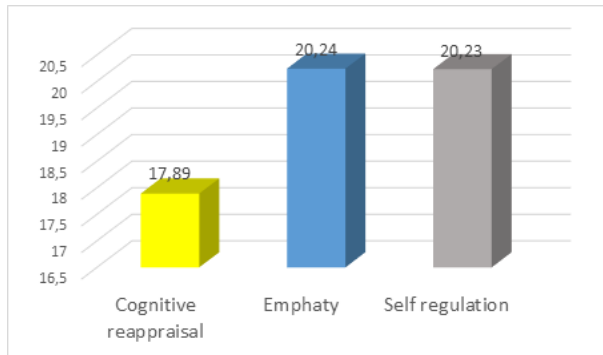


Figure 6. Means of subscales of SEHS-T – Emotional Competence

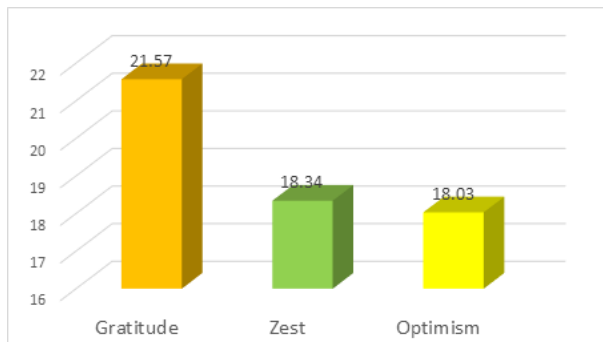


Figure 7. Means of subscales of teachers SEHS-T – Engaged Living

Several indicators of the SEHS-T – self-efficacy, cognitive re-appraisal, empathy, self-regulation, gratitude and optimism were found to be at a high level (>18) in the Lithuanian teacher sample. However, other SEHS-T indicators, such as institutional support, and colleague support reached only a moderate level ($M = 17.46$ and $M = 17.88$ respectively).

Analysis by sociodemographic variables of teachers shows that no significant differences were found in scores of SEHS-T Covitality and Resilience (RS-14) ($p > 0.05$) according to the gender, age, and work experience (see Tables 6–11).

Table 6. Sociodemographic variables of teachers Covitality by gender

Gender	Mean	SD	Median	Z	p
Male	231.30	21.12	233.00	-.118	0.906
Female	230.27	25.88	233.00		

Table 7. Sociodemographic variables of teachers Covitality by age

Number of years of experience	Mean	SD	Median	Kruskal-Wallis H	p
less than 5	227.08	26.76	230.00	0.687	0.953
6–10	225.67	25.65	227.00		
11–20	231.04	27.04	233.00		
21–30	233.41	19.80	236.00		
more than 30	228.86	27.22	232.00		

Table 8. Sociodemographic variables of teachers Covitality by years of work experience

Number of years of experience	Mean	SD	Median	Kruskal-Wallis H	p
less than 5	227.08	26.76	230.00	3.540	0.472
6–10	225.67	25.65	227.00		
11–20	231.04	27.04	233.00		
21–30	233.41	19.80	236.00		
more than 30	228.86	27.22	232.00		

Table 9. Sociodemographic variables of teachers Resilience by gender

Gender	Mean	SD	Median	Z	p
Male	71.92	14.75	73.50	-.167	0.867
Female	73.23	12.51	73.50		

Table 10. Sociodemographic variables of teachers Resilience by age

Number of years of experience	Mean	SD	Median	Kruskal-Wallis H	p
less than 5	72.37	16.30	74.55	3.263	0.515
6–10	71.37	12.96	70.00		
11–20	72.43	14.34	73.50		
21–30	73.78	11.16	73.50		
more than 30	75.12	11.58	78.40		

Table 11. Sociodemographic variables of teachers Resilience of number of years of work experience

Number of years of experience	Mean	SD	Median	Kruskal-Wallis H	p
less than 5	71.77	14.15	73.15	1.093	0.895
6–10	72.18	12.24	73.50		
11–20	72.59	13.93	73.50		
21–30	73.24	13.09	75.60		
more than 30	73.51	12.05	73.50		

Teachers SEHS-T Covitality and Resilience correlations in the Lithuanian teacher sample

Significantly positive correlations were found between the teacher Resilience and the overall Social Emotional Index Covitality ($r_s = .585, p = .000$) as well as between the resilience and social emotional domains: Engaged Living ($r_s = .560^*, p = .000$), Emotional Competence ($r_s = .448^*, p = .000$), Belief-in-Self ($r_s = .515^{**}, p = .000$) and Belief-in-Others ($r_s = .397^{**}, p = .000$) (see Table 12).

Table 12. Correlations between Resilience and SEHS-T Covitality indicators in the Lithuanian teacher sample

SEHS-T	Resilience (RS14)
CoVitality	.585**
Belief-in-Self	.515**
Belief-in-Others	.397**
Emotional Competence	.448**
Engaged Living	.560**
Self-Efficacy	.439**
Persistence	.392**
Self-Awareness	.396**
Family Support	.268**
Institutional Support	.366**
Colleague Support	.283**
Cognitive Reappraisal	.442**
Empathy	.272**
Self-Regulation	.247**
Gratitude	.308**
Zest	.525**
Optimism	.538**

Note. Correlation is significant at the ** $p < .01$.

The frequency analysis of teacher resilience shows that although teacher responses (assessments of scale statements) seem good, some limitations of teachers were found on these two items:

- ‘I have enough energy to do what I have to do’: 66% of the teachers provided negative ratings to this item;
- ‘When I am in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it’: 68% of the teachers responded to this item with low responses (lower than 5) and reported problems in solving of difficult situations.

Discussion

The main aim of the present study was to investigate the social emotional health and resilience of teachers and to verify whether there are correlations between social emotional health and resilience in the Lithuanian sample. At the same time, to evaluate the psychometric properties of Lithuanian teachers, the SEHS-T Covitality and the short version of the Resilience Scale (RS-14) were used.

Significant correlations were found between social emotional health indicators and teacher resilience. Teachers use various internal and external resources in the process of coping with stress. This complies with the data obtained by other researchers (Everall, Altrows, Paulson, 2006; Fergus, Zimmerman, 2005; Mesárošová et al., 2014; Hayter & Dorstyn, 2014; Greškovičová., Boleková, Szobiová, 2016; Daigneault et al., 2013; Yıldırım, Arslan, 2000).

The general SEHS-T index reached the high level. Discussing one of the weaker aspects of social emotional indicators, i. e. “Belief-in-Others” and its indicators /subscales such as Institutional Support and Colleague Support, identified among teachers investigated according to Covitaliy, the results of the presented research comply with those of the new national research (Factors Influencing Learning Achievement and Reducing Psychosocial Risks in the School Community and Leadership, 2021). Although 62% of teachers in the country trust their school community, only 45% of them express favourable attitude towards communality within their school community; support received by school learners from the school community, i. e. teachers, other specialists and school authorities, is linked to their better psychological well-being and lower psychological distress.

The mean score of RS-14 in Lithuanian population fell in the category of moderate resilience, similarly to other studies (Abiola & Udofia, 2011; Losoi et al., 2013; Wagnild, 2011, Mazulyte, 2016). Most of the resilience levels of the current sample ranged from low end to moderately high resilience, similar to the original RS-14 study (Wagnild, 2011). The Cronbach alpha

coefficient of internal consistency in the present research was similar to the original English version of the RS-14 (Wagnild, 2011).

In this investigation, there were no significant differences in the SEHS-T Covitality and Resilience by the teacher's demographic variables, such as gender, age and work experience. The results of the current study did not support previous findings on a significant relationship between resilience and age (Damásio et al., 2011; Losoi et al., 2013; Lundman et al., 2007; Portzky et al., 2010; Abiola, T., & Udofia, O., 2011; G. Svence et al., 2021). It can be argued that the short-version RS14 is a measure aimed at ensuring the resilience of traits, which is supposed to be a characteristic of a stable person characteristic; therefore, no effect of age is understandable (Mazulyte, 2016). However, as other studies observed, the relationship between RS-14 and age, as well as cultural differences, cannot be excluded.

The results of the teacher resilience results are in line with the data of Juškevičienė (2021) that the psychological resilience of early childhood education teachers is of average level and that the resilience of teachers does not differ according to the working experience; that teacher resilience significantly positively correlates with the stress coping strategy of problem solving. Regarding the association with gender, the results of our study supported the findings of previous studies, which did not find such an association (Damásio et al., 2011; Losoi et al., 2013; Ruiz – Párraga et al., 2012; Mazulyte, 2016). Regarding the teaching experience, our results partially align with the study by Mazulyte (2016) – there is a significant association between resilience and education, with more educated people scoring higher on resilience than those with a lower education level. A similar result was found in the Dutch sample, where the authors found that successfully mastering higher education is likely to increase self-esteem, which is an integral part of resilience (Portzky et al., 2010).

Limitations and future research: the present research could have included a larger and more representative sample by age, gender, and work experience; we should conduct longitudinal research of resilience in post-pandemic times.

It is recommended that the social-emotional health and resilience of teachers are strengthened through interventional activities such as stress coping strategies to prevent burnout, using emotion awareness exercises 'Mindfulness', increasing the support and cooperation of colleagues at school during the pandemic and other times of crisis. To reduce teacher stress and other negative emotions in the teaching process, teachers are recommended to carry out the following actions: understand the reason for negative emotions, try to solve a problem, discuss the problem with colleagues, that is, social support, create a life that does not relate to work, learn to distance yourself from work-related pressure, make attempts to

prevent conditions in the classroom that can cause anger and identify ‘triggers’ of anger, create an algorithm to cope with such situations, avoid emotional outbursts, use fast stress-reducing practice.

Conclusions

1. Teachers SEHS-T general index Covitality reached the high level and in subscales of Institutional support and Colleague support are at the moderate level, and also the Resilience are at the moderate level.
2. No significant differences were found according to teacher gender, age and work experience in SEHS-T Covitality and Resilience.
3. There are significantly positive correlations between teacher Resilience and the Social Emotional health.

Generalizing results from this study, the Lithuanian version of SEHS-T and RS-14 is enough valid and reliable instrument which can be used to measure social emotional health and resilience in the Lithuanian teacher population.

It can be stated that the better relations and communication among teachers in the school community are observed, the better their psychological resilience and effective applied stress coping strategies are. This acquires a particular significance in the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic and other challenges.

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