

## **Exploring Stress, Burnout, and Job Dissatisfaction in Secondary School Teachers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to identify, from an integrative approach, the main predictors of different manifestations of occupational malaise (stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction). The sample consists of 1,386 teachers from compulsory secondary education. The results from statistical analysis conducted (correlation and regression) strongly support the existence of (personal, psychosocial and contextual) determining factors common to all three phenomena. Specifically, support by colleagues, optimism, hardiness, daily hassles and life events are valid predictors of stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction in secondary school teachers. Other variables (a type A behavioral pattern, family support, conscientiousness) also show that account for the specificity of each of the phenomena. Finally, the implications of the findings are discussed and possible courses of action are suggested at the preventive/intervention level.

*Key words:* occupational stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, secondary education teachers, personal, psychosocial and contextual variables.

### **RESUMEN**

El objetivo del presente trabajo es identificar, desde un acercamiento integrador, cuáles son los principales predictores de distintas manifestaciones del malestar laboral (estrés, burnout e insatisfacción laboral). La muestra está formada por 1386 profesores de enseñanza secundaria obligatoria. Los resultados de los análisis estadísticos realizados (correlación y regresión) apoyan firmemente la existencia de determinantes comunes (personales, psicosociales y contextuales) entre los tres fenómenos. En concreto, el apoyo de los compañeros, el optimismo, la personalidad resistente, las contrariedades cotidianas y los acontecimientos vitales son predictores válidos del estrés, burnout e insatisfacción laboral de los profesores de secundaria. No obstante, también se constata que otras variables (patrón de conducta tipo A, apoyo de la familia, responsabilidad) dan cuenta de la especificidad de cada uno de los fenómenos. Finalmente, se discuten las implicaciones de los hallazgos y se sugieren, a nivel preventivo y/o de intervención, posibles vías de actuación.

*Palabras clave:* estrés laboral, burnout, insatisfacción laboral, profesores de enseñanza secundaria, variables personales, psicosociales y contextuales.

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Over the last few decades, one of the issues that has received the greatest attention by researchers within the field of social sciences has undoubtedly been the health-work pairing. Indeed, although the concern for health (or to be more precise, for the lack of health) has a 'long past' and has characterized the historical evolution of our discipline, its link with the occupational domain can only be described as belonging to a 'near present'. With these characterizing features, occupational malaise emerges with an unprecedented strength to become the cornerstone on which many studies interested in occupational health lay their foundations. Those in the teaching profession, as well as those from other professional areas (health workers, for instance) have placed themselves -according to the evidence available (see Kyriacou, 2001; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Zhang, 2009)- at the heart of the influence of occupational malaise. Furthermore, different studies (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Lackritz, 2004) have documented the growing incidence and prevalence of occupational malaise amongst secondary school teachers, the high (occupational, health, social) costs that this phenomenon entails, and, not less important, the urgent need to design preventive and intervention proposals whose efficiency is guaranteed. All this confirms this issue as one of the main contemporary challenges.

From the always necessary retrospective approach that provides us with an overview of the *status quo* of the phenomenon under study, thus enabling us to throw light on the main findings; the questions that need to be tackled as well as the lines of work that should be pursued in future research, we will be outlining some brief considerations on the strengths and weaknesses that characterize this field of work.

The difficulty in conceptually demarcating the field of study is one of the main obstacles of the study. Occupational malaise, judging from the review of empirical evidence, arises as a polysemous and pervasive notion (for some, occupational stress is its best instantiation, for others it is burnout while some others argue that job dissatisfaction is the closest indicator). In other words, occupational malaise is seen in the literature as an "omnibus" notion as it often covers a number of different adverse manifestations of occupational experience: occupational stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction. We concur with Esteve, Franco, & Vera (1995) when they claim that the term teaching malaise (*malestar docente*) "is used as the most inclusive notion of those found in current literature to describe the permanent, negative effects that affect the personality of the teacher" (p. 23).

Another weakness in the field, which is closely related to conceptual aspects, is the split or divide that exists between what is posited as healthy for achieving a true insight into this issue and what is actually done. Specifically, although at a theoretical level the suitability of distinguishing between the different manifestations of occupational malaise is upheld (see, for instance, Lens & Jesus, 1999; Rudow, 1999), in practice very few studies adopt this suggestion. Rudow (1999), in an outstanding review of the literature, points out that it is important for future research to determine the differences and commonalities between stress and burnout. The analysis of the associated variables in relation to each of the phenomena (stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction) is, in the opinion of many authors (e.g., Capel, 1987; Sharpley, Dua, Reynolds, & Acosta, 1995), yet another important hindrance for the field.

In any event, and as we have already noted, the evolution of this field of knowledge has encountered not only hindrances along the way but also important strengths that contribute to its vitality and expansion.

The confirmation of the 'multicausality' of occupational malaise has been one such strength that has consolidated the field of occupational malaise in the last few decades. Specifically, once stress and burnout (and in neighboring fields, job dissatisfaction) attained a nature of its own in the scientific domain to explain occupational malaise, studies began to be designed to identify the 'whys' (Otero López *et al.*, 2008; Xu, Zhu, & Huang, 2005). In short, the empirical confirmation that -regardless of what phenomenon is being studied (stress, burnout, dissatisfaction)- its causes are many and diverse meant an important breakthrough in the field.

Closely related to the latter point, another strength of the field has to do with the suitability of conducting studies that are 'integrative' in nature, covering the wide armory of findings generated from the isolated analysis of variables. The objective is to provide an answer to the need felt and shared by many researchers (see Kittel & Leynen, 2003; van Dick & Wagner, 2001) who defend moving from fragmentation to integration.

Another issue that generates consensus is the link between occupational malaise and the teaching practice. In this regard, the conclusions reached by studies -independently of their geographical location (Jamal, 1999; Otero López, Castro, Villardefrancos, & Santiago, 2009; Pithers & Soden, 1998); of the teaching stage analyzed (Byrne, 1991; Kokkinos, 2006; Matud, García, & Matud, 2006; Otero López, Santiago, & Castro, 2008); of the size of the samples selected (Lau, Yuen, & Chan, 2005; Travers & Cooper, 1994) and, even, regardless of the greater or lesser scientific rigor of the approaches- firmly indicate that teachers are vulnerable to any manifestation of occupational malaise.

Once the status quo of the field has been outlined, we move on now to the coordinates that demarcate this research and which, as it is only to be expected, have their referent and foundation in the considerations made above. Specifically, this study, echoing the suggestions and/or demands already put forward, is based on three aspects: the choice of a 'high risk' population (secondary school teachers), the opportunity of analyzing the phenomenon in other sociocultural contexts (in this case, the Autonomous Region of Galicia) and, lastly, the need for integrative approaches. Indeed, this study aims at including the different determinants that have an explanatory potential for the different occupational malaise indicators. In selecting them, and given the obvious impracticability of including them all, we have incorporated the 'internal' -the personal- (for instance, Type A behavioral pattern) but also the 'external' or interactional (for instance, friend support -self with others), the occupational (labor hours per week...) but without losing sight of the non-occupational domain (life events), the 'new' (optimism) as well as the 'old' (family support) and the 'seldom attempted' (conscientiousness). Each of the determinants will be briefly dealt with by detailing some considerations about its contextualization, notion and empirical evidence.

Such occupational variables as overwork and teacher's seniority (professional experience) have been connected to occupational malaise (Capel, 1987; Santiago, Otero López, Castro, & Villardefrancos, 2008; Travers & Cooper, 1997). As to the first issue

(overwork) there exists an important consensus on its positive covariation with stress and burnout (Chen, 2002; Lackritz, 2004). As to professional experience, although empirical evidence is less consistent, most studies (Lau *et al.*, 2005; Pierce & Molloy, 1990) conclude that it is a 'protective' factor from occupational malaise.

The psycho-social context that inspires the life of individuals (self-others interactions) has also figured prominently in this showcase of occupational malaise-related variables. In this regard, many researchers confirm its 'shield' effect in teacher stress and burnout (Blackburn, Horowitz, Edington, & Klos, 1986; Greenglass, Burke, & Konarski, 1997; van Dick & Wagner, 2001). By way of example on this regard, Fang and Yan (2004) conclude in their study that the lack of support amongst the members of the education community successfully predicts burnout amongst primary and secondary school teachers.

The characteristics of the 'actor' (the teacher) constitute another scenario from which occupational malaise has been approached. Evidence of the fact that the person (or more accurately, the variables that characterize them) acts as a sieve and a filter of the negative effect of work has had a great resonance within this field of research. Indeed, researchers have not ignored the prominence of personal patrimony in stress (Lazarus, 2000), in burnout (Kokkinos, 2007) and occupational malaise (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2006). The menu of potential influences has been varied (Type A behavioral pattern, self-efficacy, locus of control, motivational factors, hardiness, optimism, self-esteem, neuroticism), but in this study we will only resort to some of them that exemplify different avenues followed by research: the personality-health link, the trait approaches (the Big Five model as their most representative example) and Positive Psychology.

From a research approach focused on the search for personality patterns associated with specific types of disease, one of the most studied has been Type A personality pattern. This is a behavioral pattern characterized by competitiveness, impatience and hostility that increases vulnerability to stress and its negative consequences. Different studies, which have used teachers as their sample group, have reported that this personal pattern is a 'risk factor' for stress and/or burnout (Jamal, 1999; Sharpley *et al.*, 1995; Travers & Cooper, 1997).

As to structural variables, the Five-Factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1999) is the taxonomy that has aroused the greatest acceptance (the fact that it has been used in different socio-demographic contexts and proved its usefulness in the different domains applied are only some of its strengths). Some of the five domains, such as Extraversion, Neuroticism and Agreeableness have been related to burnout dimensions (e.g., Kokkinos, 2007). Nonetheless, in this study we will be discussing only the impact of one of the factors -Conscientiousness- whose link with the occupational domain seems to be completely uncontroversial.

A final front from the individual domain has to do with the emerging field of Positive Psychology, which underscores human strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This trend includes a wide armory of 'positive' personal constructs of which hardiness and optimism will be used for this study.

The hardiness construct has been defined (e.g., Maddi, 2002) as a set of attitudes and skills that increase the ability to adapt when facing stressing situations. In the teaching environment, and independently of the education level analyzed, teachers with high scores in this personal characteristic have been shown to be less vulnerable to burnout (Chan, 2003; Moreno, Arcenillas, Morante, & Garrosa, 2005; Moreno, Garrosa, & González, 2000).

Optimism is yet another personal variable that, in contemporary research, emerges with an undeniable prominence in the occupational health domain (Carver & Scheier, 1992). Indeed, the stable, generalized belief that good things will happen in life (dispositional optimism) has been positively associated to 'salutogenic' indicators such as personal control, active coping with difficulties, achievement, self-efficacy and social support (Avia & Vázquez, 1998). In short, 'facing life positively' has a bearing on our physical and psychical well-being (Chan, 2009) and, consequently, acts as a powerful cushion for occupational malaise (e.g., Mäkikangas & Kinnunen, 2003; Moreno *et al.*, 2005).

A final domain of interest to be taken into account refers to the (minor or major) circumstances that may have an effect -whether directly or indirectly- on occupational performance. Specifically, we are speaking of daily hassles (minor problems or daily setbacks) and life events (low frequency, important experiences that interrupt the subject's habitual activities and call for some type of adjustment or change of behavior). In this regard, and although the contribution of these factors has been eclipsed by other types of (personal, psychosocial) variables several studies have confirmed their negative influence on the occupational malaise experienced by secondary school teachers (e.g., Bhagat, Allie, & Ford, 1991; Chen, 2002) and university professors (e.g., Santiago & Otero López, 2005).

To sum up, echoing the state of the art in the field and as a function of the coordinates presented above, the main objective of this study is to identify the main correlates and/or predictors -selected from different domains (i.e. personal, psycho-social, occupational and non-occupational) -of stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction in secondary school teachers. The ultimate objective is to throw light into the existence of common and/or specific predictors of the different manifestations of occupational malaise.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

The sample consists of 1,386 teachers from the Autonomous Region of Galicia who teach compulsory secondary education (ESO). The collection of a self-represented sample by saturation of the sampling group was selected (an attempt was made to include the greatest number of teacher and schools) as the best strategy. In total, during 2005, data were collected in 244 schools (79.9% of the total number). The sample was distributed according to type of schools (IES-secondary and CPI-primary); according to habitat (urban, rural coastal, and interior rural) and gender (for further details see

Otero López *et al.*, 2006). As to the respondents' characteristics, the following should be noted: 823 female teachers (59.4%) and 563 male teachers (40.6%), the range of age is between 26 and 65 years of age (mean age 38.6), 82.5% are government employees (tenured) while 17.5% are temporarily hired and finally 35.8% teach in the first and second grade of ESO (compulsory secondary education) while 64.2% teach in the third and fourth grades.

### *Variables and Instruments*

Occupational stress was evaluated using the Inventory of Occupational Stressors of Secondary School Teachers (Inventario de Estresores Laborales para Profesores de Secundaria -IELPS-; Otero López *et al.*, 2006). The questionnaire consisted of 78 items. An exploratory factorial analysis was conducted (main components, varimax rotation) in a sample of 3,281 secondary school teachers, yielding 10 factors that group 66 items and contribute to accounting for 51.9 % of total variance (for further details see Otero López *et al.*, 2006). The internal consistency indexes of these factors, calculated using Cronbach alpha coefficient ranged between 0.78 and 0.91. The summation of responses to the different items (Likert-type scale of 5 possibilities 'it causes me no tension', assigned value 0 up to 'it causes me a great deal of tension' value 4) is an indicator of teacher-perceived occupational stress.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES), developed by Maslach & Jackson (1986), in its Spanish version (Seisdedos, 1997), was used to evaluate the burnout syndrome. This questionnaire consists of 22 items dealing with frequency (Likert-type scale whose range is between 0 'never' up to 6 'daily') with which teachers experience specific feelings, thoughts and attitudes toward their work and their students.

Job dissatisfaction was assessed using an 11-item scale with 6 possible answers (0 'totally disagree' up to 5 'totally agree'), designed by Reig & Caruana (1990).

Type A behavioral pattern was measured using the Bortner Rating Scale -BRS- (Bortner, 1969). BRS consists of 14 bipolar items with continuous score from 1 to 11, yielding a Type A total score.

The self-report used to assess the hardiness personality pattern is the Personal Views Survey (PVS) designed by the 'Hardiness Institute' (1985). It consists of 50 items (range of answers: 'totally disagree'= 1 to 'totally agree'= 3).

The reviewed and translated version of Life Orientation Test -LOT-R- by Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994 (see Otero López *et al.*, 1998) was the instrument chosen to measure the optimism variable. The LOT-R consists of 10 items. The Likert-like answer scale ranges from 'totally disagree' (value 0) up to 'totally agree' (value 3).

Conscientiousness was evaluated from the adaptation to Spanish of the NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), an abbreviated version of the Personality Inventory NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1999) which consists of 60 items. It uses a Likert-like format of 5 points ('totally disagree' with an assigned value of 0, up to 'totally agree' with an assigned value of 4). For the purposes of this research, only the 12 items that evaluate the facet of conscientiousness have been used.

Social support was measured using the Provision of Social Relations (PSR) scale, written by Turner, Frankel, & Levin (1983). The PSR consists of 15 items grouped in two subscales which refer to two sources of social support: family and friends. Each of the items is evaluated from 6 answer options (0 'totally disagree' up to 5 'totally agree'). An ad *hoc item* was added, the aim of which was to find out what type of friends teachers had in mind when responding to PSR (answer options: colleagues, friends from outside the workplace, friends from both environments). In this regard, it is interesting to note that 92% of teachers marked the answer "colleagues".

The instrument selected to evaluate life events has been the Life Events Inventory (LEI), designed by Hammen & Mayol (1982). It consists of 56 items (Likert scale of 4 possible answers: 'no impact' -assigned value 1- 'great impact' -value 4).

The instrument of reference to assess daily hassles has been the Hassles Scale (HS) written by Holm, Holroyd, Hursey, & Penzien (1986). The instrument assesses the perceived seriousness (frequency and intensity) of 117 stressing daily situations. Specifically, for this study we have selected a total of 12 items that cover the different domains (work, health, finances, family, friends, the environment, practical issues and contingencies). The intensity of each of the hassles that took place in the last month was assessed using a three-point Likert scale (1= low, 2= moderate, 3= severe).

Lastly, a number of ad *hoc items* have been written to obtain information on both socio-demographic issues (such as gender, age, marital status) and occupational variables (number of labor hours per week, seniority in the profession).

### *Procedure*

Sample collection was made during the final semester of 2006 and the first quarter of 2007. Questionnaires were administered by both personnel from the research project and hired personnel, who, after a training period, collaborated on field work. The sequencing of the task was as follows: Schools were contacted (the principal or the director of studies) and a date for the visit was agreed when the project was briefly explained and the self-reports were distributed among volunteering teachers, guaranteeing the anonymity and confidentiality of reports. Three dates of collections were set with an interval of 20 days (some teachers preferred to mail them and they were given the mail address of the School of Psychology).

### *Statistical analyses*

Data were processed using the SPSS (version 15.0) package. At a first stage, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine the link between manifestations of occupational malaise (occupational stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction) and a set of selected variables. Next, given the interest in demarcating which of all the variables included in this research best predicts the three facets of teacher malaise, different stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted (using a level of reliability of .99) taking as criterion variables stress, burnout and dissatisfaction. The independent variables, taken from a variety of domains, were: labor hours per week, seniority in

the profession, Type A behavioral pattern, hardiness, optimism, conscientiousness, social support (colleagues and family), daily hassles and life events.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the measurements, typical deviations, Cronbach alpha and Pearson correlation coefficients of the variables in this study. As to the covariation between the different manifestations of occupational malaise, results show -as expected- a clear link: all associations are positive and highly significant ( $p < .001$ ). The greatest coefficient of correlation is that established between occupational stress and burnout ( $r = .65$ ), followed by the covariation between burnout and dissatisfaction ( $r = .51$ ) and, lastly, the lowest coefficient corresponds to the association between stress and job dissatisfaction ( $r = .42$ ).

As to the remaining associations, all variables evaluated in this study – with the exception of conscientiousness and occupational factors (weekly hours and seniority in the profession) are found to be significantly linked to occupational stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction. Furthermore, and equally important, these results confirm that the association pattern -as regards its orientation- is the same for all three phenomena analyzed. Specifically, social support (family and friends), optimism, hardiness and conscientiousness negatively covary with the different indicators of occupational malaise whereas Type A behavioural pattern, life events, daily hassles, seniority in the profession and weekly hours establish positive associations.

As to what variables show the highest correlation coefficients with the phenomena under study, social support from family and friends, optimism, hardiness, and Type A behavioral pattern are particularly prominent. Specifically, as regards peers and family support as perceived by teachers, covariation coefficients with stress, burnout and dissatisfaction range between  $-.37$  and  $-.56$ . Apart from social support, three personal

*Table 1.* Analysis of the correlation between occupational stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction and a set of variables from different domains (occupational, personal, psychosocial and non-occupational).

Variables	M (SD)	Alpha	Occupational stress	Burnout	Job dissatisfaction
Occupational stress	123.21 (12.57)	.83	1		
Burnout	3.61 (5.7)	.81	.65***	1	
Job dissatisfaction	18.29 (4.6)	.86	.42***	.51***	1
Labor hours per week	31.12 (3.7)	--	.01	.07**	.05*
Seniority in the profession	14.61 (7.1)	--	.04	.07**	.03
Type A behavioral pattern	89.74 (11.2)	.77	.37***	.43***	.23***
Hardiness	81.43 (7.8)	.86	-.39***	-.47***	-.41***
Optimism	10.49 (3.7)	.78	-.42***	-.50***	-.35***
Consciousness	22.53 (5.4)	.80	-.04	-.05*	-.07**
Family support	18.69 (3.02)	.76	-.39***	-.48***	-.37***
Friends support	30.78 (4.27)	.87	-.43***	-.56***	-.43***
Daily hassles	18.03 (3.9)	.75	.11***	.18***	.14***
Life events	9.72 (5.3)	.74	.16***	.21***	.18***

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

variables (optimism, hardiness and Type A behavioral pattern) show important covariations with the three phenomena evaluated in this study ( $r$  values between .23 and -.50). Lastly, other events (life events and daily hassles) are also significantly associated with the three indicators of malaise although covariation coefficients, when compared to the variables mentioned above, are slightly lower (their range is between .11 and .21).

In an attempt to study in greater depth the results obtained, it is interesting to point out that of the different indicators of malaise, burnout is -with the sole exception of conscientiousness- the one showing the highest correlation coefficients with all variables analyzed.

Regression analyses conducted for the sample of secondary school teachers, taking as predictors a set of (occupational, personal, psychosocial and non-occupational) variables and as criterion variables the different manifestations of occupational malaise (occupational stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction) are shown in Table 2.

A general review of results shows that all variables with the exception of occupational variables are valid predictors of occupational malaise. Specifically, and looking at what determinants contribute to explaining the three facets of occupational malaise, it should be underscored that psychosocial variables (particularly friend support), personal variables (optimism and hardiness) and non-occupational variables (life events and daily hassles) are selected to predict stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction in teachers.

*Table 2.* Stepwise regression analysis using as dependent variables occupational stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction, and as independent variables a set of (occupational, personal, psychosocial and non-occupational) variables.

Criterion/Predictors	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Incr. R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.
<b>Occupational stress</b>				
1. Optimism	.190	.190	282.87	.000
2. Type A behavioral pattern	.248	.058	199.10	.000
3. Hardiness	.292	.044	166.15	.000
4. Friends support	.309	.017	134.73	.000
5. Life events	.315	.006	109.87	.000
6. Conscientiousness	.319	.004	93.81	.000
7. Daily hassles	.322	.003	81.37	.000
<b>Burnout</b>				
1. Friends support	.319	.319	563.68	.000
2. Optimism	.385	.066	376.14	.000
3. Hardiness	.427	.042	298.36	.000
4. Type A behavioral pattern	.459	.032	254.94	.000
5. Daily hassles	.473	.014	215.30	.000
6. Family support	.475	.002	180.87	.000
7. Life events	.477	.002	156.04	.000
<b>Job dissatisfaction</b>				
1. Friends support	.169	.169	245.53	.000
2. Hardiness	.233	.064	182.83	.000
3. Daily hassles	.252	.019	132.58	.000
4. Conscientiousness	.268	.016	109.77	.000
5. Life events	.279	.011	92.80	.000
6. Optimism	.289	.010	81.24	.000

As to what variables best predict the different manifestations of occupational malaise, our findings confirm 'support by friends' and 'positive' personal variables as the best predictors (see Table 2). More specifically, 'support by friends' comes first as a variable to predict job dissatisfaction and burnout (16.9% and 31.9% of explained variance, respectively) and comes fourth as a predictor of occupational stress. As to personality variables, those which contribute to predicting all three phenomena under study are optimism and hardiness. Thus, optimism is the main predictor of occupational stress (19% of the variance explained). It comes second in predicting burnout whereas it comes sixth in predicting dissatisfaction. Hardiness comes second in predicting dissatisfaction (it increases the model 6.4%) while it appears as the third step in the analysis for occupational stress and burnout ( $R^2$  increase of 4.4% and 4.2%, respectively). Another result worth commenting is that both life events and daily hassles also contribute to predicting -albeit to a lesser extent- the three indicators of occupational malaise in secondary school teachers. A final similitude between the three phenomena is that none of the occupational variables included -labor hours per week and seniority in the profession- have enough predictive power to be selected for the different analyses.

However, and despite the marked coincidences as to predictors of the phenomena under study, it is also true that there are some differences. It should be mentioned, in this respect, that the conscientiousness trait only comes in the equation of stress and dissatisfaction. Lastly, Type A behavioural pattern is not selected for explaining job dissatisfaction, but it is indeed selected for burnout and stress.

By way of concluding remark, it should be noted that of all three phenomena studied, the best explained in terms of variance is burnout (47.7%), while dissatisfaction has the lowest percentage (28.9%).

## DISCUSSION

Occupational malaise has become one of the most researched topics in the field nowadays, and judging from the literature, it is the conceptual framework of the different negative manifestations derived from work (stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction). The field has been flooded with data and hypotheses that -from different approaches (some of them more clinical, some more social)- have made it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the potentially explanatory determinants of stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction. However, and despite the proven multicausality that characterizes each of these phenomena, no research attempt has been made to demarcate what is 'specific' from what is 'shared' from a predictive checking of the most widely accepted and empirically solid risk factors. This is, as it has already been noted, the purpose of this study. The objective is to select risk factors from different (personal, psychosocial, contextual) domains and study their predictive relevance for each of the manifestations of the malaise. In sum, the evidencing of the specificity of each of the phenomena or, alternatively, the establishing of the existence of common determinants (syndromic conceptualization) is -to our mind- an important breakthrough in designing and/or implementing preventive and/or intervention schemes with assurance of effectiveness.

Broadly speaking, the results obtained in this study not only confirm the covariation between the three manifestations of occupational malaise, but also the usefulness of the selected variables in their contribution to predicting them. Specifically, the statistical analyses conducted allow us to conclude that social support -particularly peer support- optimism, hardiness, daily hassles and life events, Type A behavioral pattern and conscientiousness are correlates and predictors of occupational malaise in secondary school teachers. More specifically, the discussion of results will be done by first focusing on what determinants have had enough predictive power to account for all three phenomena studied: stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction. In a second stage, attention will be paid to the particular 'idiosyncrasy' of each manifestation in the light of the selected predictors.

Social support by friends emerges, as expected, as one of the main sources of influence in occupational malaise. Specifically, it is the main predictor of burnout and job dissatisfaction and it is furthermore selected as the fourth predictor in accounting for occupational stress. The protective role of support -whether real or perceived- from peers against occupational malaise is one of the best empirically supported conclusions (Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997).

In sum, both the literature and the findings in this study leave no room for doubt as to the fact that social support is one of the predictive pillars of any manifestation of occupational malaise. It seems, therefore, that its occupational stress inhibiting role is uncontroversial. Further research is however required on what mechanisms it uses to exert its influence. Tentatively, the following hypotheses should be explored; specifically the others -the peers- could contribute, either directly or indirectly, to 'alleviating' occupational malaise by: a) having an influence on the evaluation, transcendence and threatening nature of certain occupational situations, b) increasing teacher motivation and positive attitudes, c) promoting the use of more effective coping strategies, and d) becoming a model for solving occupational conflicts.

With regard to the positive psychological constructs tested in this study (optimism and hardiness), results confirm their relevance for stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction. Specifically, both optimism and hardiness seem to act as a 'brake' on the negative consequences of teaching and effectively contribute to predicting occupational malaise. The empirical evidence available, although it is not particularly prolific as regards teacher samples, bears out our results in different educative stages. Thus, and as far as hardiness is concerned, while some authors using primary and secondary school samples (Chan, 2003; Moreno *et al.*, 2000; Moreno *et al.*, 2005; Pierce & Molloy, 1990) associate this construct with the burnout syndrome, others (Sharpley *et al.*, 1995) confirm its explanatory power for occupational stress in university professors and there are also some authors (Cencirulo, 2001, for instance) who have found that in primary school teachers, hardiness entails an attitude of professional satisfaction. As to optimism, our results are consistent with those of previous research; Mäkikangas & Kinnunen (2003) conclude that optimism (along with self-esteem) is confirmed as an important predictor of stress and burnout in a sample of Finnish workers which included teachers. In a later study Moreno *et al.* (2005) confirms the predictive power of optimism and hardiness in burnout dimensions in a primary school teacher sample.

It seems, therefore, judging from our results and the previous empirical evidence that hardiness and optimism are protective factors against occupational malaise. Let us make, therefore, some brief considerations that contribute to further elucidating the reason for this type of influence. Indeed, if we take into account that 'optimism is the result of certain positive tendencies in our mind, certain benign disfigurement in the way of assessing, feeling and remembering what we live' (Avia & Vázquez, 1998, p. 134), the hypothesis that a benevolent perception of reality has certain immunizing effects on the level of teacher malaise seems plausible. It is likely that optimists, unlike pessimists, without denying the difficulties entailed by teaching, think that there is always something else that can be done, envisage more alternatives of action, are more persevering and, in short, face and solve problems more effectively. The commitment with the task, the perception of control over situation and an attitude of challenge on the face of difficulties -all of them characteristics of teachers scoring high in hardiness- also contribute to understanding the positive effect of this personal dimension for occupational malaise. In short, promoting a positive perception of the teacher and reinforcing their ability to resist would be two aspects that should be incorporated in any prevention/intervention scheme on teacher malaise.

Life events and daily hassles contribute to predicting, although to a lesser extent than the variables above do, stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction in the group of teachers analyzed in this study. The influence of events, whether minor or major, in predicting teacher stress has already been pointed out in a number of studies (e.g., Chen, 2002). Consequently, and taking into account that what happens beyond the occupational context will occupy an important 'psychological space' increasing the vulnerability of the teacher to experiencing occupational malaise, further research is needed to demarcate the scope and modulating effect of these influences that have a more 'exogenous' nature to teaching.

In short, examining the resulting pattern as to predictive similarities in the selected variables for each of the phenomena analyzed (stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction), the following conclusions can be drawn: a) peer social support, hardiness, optimism, daily hassles and life events are valid predictors of the different phenomena, and b) occupational variables (at least when considered along with those of psychosocial, personal or non-occupational nature) do not have a significant role in the degree of stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction in secondary school teachers.

Beyond common determinants, it is important to consider, in view of the impact of 'some' explanatory variables, which are the specific and distinctive ones for each phenomenon. In other words, Type A behavioural pattern, conscientiousness and family support contribute to predicting some of the manifestations of the malaise but not others. Specifically, and as far as Type A behavioral pattern is concerned, it is found to predict stress and burnout. This finding is clearly in keeping with previous literature (e.g., Miller, 2000) in that temporal urgency and hostility (characteristics of this behavioral style) increase vulnerability to stress and burnout. As to the conscientiousness trait, it should be noted that it is a predictor of stress and job dissatisfaction (it does not contribute, in terms of variance, to explain burnout). This finding is very likely to be interpreted as Hogan & Ones (1997) postulate, in the sense that it is some of the

facets of this personal dimension (accomplishment, perseverance, competence) that have a positive incidence in job satisfaction and, in turn, in stress associated to this domain. It is, however, just a tentative hypothesis subject to confirmation in later research. Lastly, family support is only selected to explain the burnout syndrome. There is, on this regard, a wide body of research reporting the protective role of social support (both friends and family) in burnout (see, for instance, Greenglass, Fiksenbaum, & Burke, 1994; Schwarzer & Greenglass, 1999).

Globally considered, the results of this study are clearly in keeping with those of previous literature as to the associative and predictive power of some (personal, psychosocial, non-occupational) variables with the negative effects that are derived from work. Nonetheless, this study has studied in depth the so far unknown issue of what is 'specific' and what is 'shared' in stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction as regards the role of a wide set of potential determinants. Now, on the basis of common predictors, it should be noted if we want to reasonably explain stress, burnout or job dissatisfaction (the rubric seems to be of little consequence) variables such as peer support, hardiness, optimism, daily hassles and life events must be necessarily taken into account. With these variables, the best explained phenomenon is burnout (47%), whereas the lowest percentage of variance corresponds to job dissatisfaction (28.9%). As to the specific predictor of each phenomenon, it is important to take into account, although we should refrain from subordinating to previous influences in any intervention proposal, the Type A behavioural pattern (in the case of stress and burnout), conscientiousness (for stress and job dissatisfaction) and family support (for burnout).

In sum, and from the findings of this study, the conclusion may be drawn that occupational stress, burnout and job dissatisfaction are highly related phenomena that may be explained according to personal variables (optimism and hardiness), relational variables (peer support) and non-occupational variables (daily hassles and life events). From this front, it seems plausible (on the basis of the different percentages of explained variance) to hypothesize a 'syndromic conceptualization' from which the phenomena may be placed along a single continuum (job dissatisfaction → stress → burnout). On the other hand, and as regards the influence of specific variables (Type A behavioral pattern, conscientiousness and family support) it might be possible to speak of certain 'specificity' for each of the phenomena. The objective is to adequately integrate both fronts of analysis, with the assurance that both hypotheses -far from being incompatible- are complementary. One of the tasks for future research will probably be the study of shared vs. non-shared determinations in the phenomena analyzed in the assurance that any empirical gain in the understanding of the occupational malaise of teachers will be welcome for the task of effectively dealing with a problem that affects us all.

At this point, and in the hope that these findings are confirmed by future research, it seems necessary to mention some of the potential constraints of this study: the correlational nature of the study makes it impossible to establish causal relations, the self-selection of the sample, the possible multicollinearity of some predicting variables, and the low rate of response by teachers, which makes it difficult to evaluate the biases that non-response may entail. However, the design of longitudinal studies, the use of teacher samples from different educational stages, the incorporation of other

explanatory determinants, the clarification of the role of gender, age and sociocultural context would be, to our mind, healthy breakthroughs for this field of study. There only remains to indicate some guidelines that might contribute to strengthening any preventive and/or intervention proposal in occupational malaise suffered by secondary school teachers. A good starting point, judging from the results of this study, would be to promote networks of social support within the workplace, peers being a focal target of any initiative. Promoting interpersonal skills (training in facing potentially conflictive situations) and improving communication skills (training in assertiveness, for example) would be some of the possible strategies to establish affectively positive relationships with the 'others' which no doubt would curb occupational malaise. More courses of action are indeed possible. Thus, a realist view (as opposed to an alarmist view) of compulsory secondary education should be encouraged that communicates a pleasant feeling of truthfulness, prevents the deeply rooted tendency to make teachers responsible for -turning them into 'scapegoats'- the ills of the education system, and encourages the awareness that the education task is a commitment that must be undertaken by different social groups (parents, teachers, politicians, lawmakers...). These are some suggestions that would probably help teachers be more optimistic and resilient to any manifestation of occupational malaise. May that be so.

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