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Burnout, Job Satisfaction and Instructional Assignment-related Sources of Stress in Greek Special Education Teachers

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In the literature concerning Greek special education teachers, there is little evidence regarding the perceived levels of burnout, job satisfaction, and job-related stress factors. The present study focused on the above issues. A sample of 127 Greek special education teachers at the primary school level was tested with the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the Employee Satisfaction Inventory, and the Inventory of Job-related Stress Factors (an instrument created for this study). Results indicated that Greek special education teachers reported average to low levels of burnout. They reported moderately high levels of satisfaction with their job, the principal, and the school organisation as a whole; they also reported average satisfaction with work conditions and low satisfaction with prospects of promotion and pay. Four factors were identified on the job-related stress factors: teaching in a multi-category classroom, programme organisation and implementation, assessment of students, and collaborations with other special education experts and parents. The special education teachers perceived none of these issues as particularly overwhelming. Moreover, few significant effects of age, gender, and family status were identified. The above results are consistent with other studies that have focused on Greek regular education teachers, which have indicated that, in general, this group do not experience high levels of occupational stress.

Keywords: burnout; job satisfaction; special education; stress; teachers

Introduction

The occupational stress that teachers experience in the process of performing their professional responsibilities has been a subject of growing interest in recent years. One reason for the interest has been the finding that frequent and intense periods of such stress may lead to professional burnout (Embich, 2001; Mearns & Cain, 2003). Burnout has been described as a syndrome comprising emotional exhaustion (feelings of being overextended and exhausted by work), depersonalisation (negative, cynical attitudes toward the students), and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (negative evaluation of performance and achievement in the job) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). According to a prevailing view, in a person who is burned out, emotional exhaustion appears first and results in depersonalisation; the combined effect of those two constituent parts leads to a feeling of low personal achievement (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). In the teaching profession, burnout has been linked to dissatisfaction with the job (Chaplain, 1995; Kyriakou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Sari, 2004) and to negative affective and professional consequences (i.e., depression, impaired occupational functioning), not only for the teachers themselves but also for their families, students and schools (Mearns & Cain).

The intensity of teachers' job-related stress varies from one culture or country to the other; however, most of the research carried out in North European (Chaplain, 1995; Kyriakou &

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Sutcliffe, 1979; Travers & Cooper, 1996) and North American countries (Farber, 1991; Maslach & Scaufeli, 1993; Mearns & Cain, 2003) has shown high levels of occupational stress and/or burnout among primary and secondary school teachers. Research studies from other parts of Europe have produced similar findings. For example, in Malta 34% of the secondary education teachers surveyed rated their job as either stressful or extremely stressful (Borg & Riding, 1991a). Likewise, research in Australia (Kyriakou, 1987; Laughlin, 1984) and in New Zealand (Whitehead, Ryba, & O'Driscoll, 2000) confirmed that teachers experience higher levels of stress and distress than the general population. Special education teachers usually report a higher degree of job-related stress than regular education teachers (Billingsley, 2004; Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002; Singer, 1993; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Some, however, have found no significant difference in perceived stress between special education and regular education teachers (Sutton & Huberty, 1984); and in at least one study, special education teachers scored significantly lower than the regular education teachers in the depersonalisation and personal accomplishment dimensions of the burnout syndrome (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983).

Paradoxically, in Greece all studies examining occupational stress among educators unanimously report low levels of stress and/or burnout in both regular education teachers (Aventisian-Pagoropoulou, Koubias, & Giavrimis, 2004; Kantas, 1996; Kokkinos, 2006; Leontari, Kiridis, & Gialamas, 2000) and special education teachers (Motti-Stefanidi, 2000). In an analogous educational system to the Greek—that of Cyprus—more severe emotional exhaustion has been reported among regular education teachers, compared with their Greek colleagues, but not as severe as that of the North Europeans or the North Americans (Kokkinos, 2007). In line with the Greek and Cypriot findings, Israeli teachers also reported consistently low levels of burnout; this is attributed to the fact that the constantly threatening conditions under which they live assist them to see their lives as meaningful (Pines, 2004). Interestingly, in Turkey (Sari, 2004) special education teachers experience relatively high depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment, indicating a limited degree of burnout, but they do not experience severe emotional exhaustion.

Some studies indicate that teachers report relatively high levels of job satisfaction (Borg & Riding, 1991b; Kyriakou & Sutcliffe, 1979; Laughlin, 1984). Interestingly, in a comparison of regular and special education teachers, Sutton and Huberty (1984) found that the latter tended to show slightly more job satisfaction than the former group. In a study of Greek regular education teachers at the primary and secondary school level (Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001), the reported satisfaction scores ranged from low to moderate in reference to various facets of their job, such as satisfaction with their pay, promotions, their relationship with the principal, work conditions, and the job itself.

According to these studies, there is a negative association between job satisfaction and self-reported teacher stress; namely, high levels of occupational stress are related to low levels of job satisfaction (Borg & Riding, 1991b; Chaplain, 1995; Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001; Kyriakou & Sutcliffe, 1979). The factors that may have an impact on the relationships among occupational stress, job satisfaction, and their consequences include environmental and contextual elements (Byrne, 1998; Borg & Riding, 1991a; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), as well as demographic (Borg & Riding, 1991b; Chaplain, 1995) and personality characteristics of the teachers (Kokkinos, 2006; Mearns & Cain, 2003). In school contexts, working with children with special educational needs has been recognised as creating pressures for teachers (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), especially in the light of major educational reforms and moves towards integration (Chaplain, 1995).

Results concerning the importance of the factors implicated as sources of burnout and job dissatisfaction for teachers have not been always conclusive. Investigations of the impact of demographic factors (i.e., age, gender, years of experience, family status of the teachers) have produced various findings. For example, one relatively stable finding is that younger and/or less experienced teachers report an increased level of burnout compared with older and/or more

experienced teachers (Kantas, 1996; Mearns & Cain, 2003). Married teachers suffer less burnout than the unmarried teachers (Kantas, 1996; Scwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Females tend to experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion and greater job satisfaction than males, and males experience a higher level of depersonalisation than females (Byrne, 1998; Kantas, 1996; Sari, 2004). Among special education teachers, women report higher levels of job-related stress than men (Eichinger, 2000). Finally, environmental and contextual factors that contribute to burnout and/or job dissatisfaction include workload and time pressure, diversity of job-related tasks, lack of support from administrators or school leadership, low income and poor prospects of promotion, and lack of proper staff development (Borg & Riding, 1991a; Kyriakou, 1987; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Travers & Cooper, 1996).

Among the relatively stable findings of investigations of special education teachers is that those working with children with learning difficulties, multiple disabilities, and intellectual disability consistently report lower levels of stress, in comparison with those who work with students with emotional and behavioural disorders and students who have poor motivation (Fimian, Pierson, & McHardy, 1986; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Olson & Matuskey, 1982; Singer, 1993). Contradictory findings regarding special education teachers' reported stress arise in studies of teachers who teach students who belong to multiple categories of special needs, as well as of teachers who work with many children simultaneously (Billingsley, 2004; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

Educational researchers have categorised the stress-producing environmental and contextual factors into four domains: organisational, interpersonal interactions, professional training, and instructional assignments (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Considering the fact that some of the core variables of instructional assignments are assessment and diagnosis, organisation of individualised programmes, preparation and implementation of teaching, behaviour management, choice of instructional materials, and cooperation with parents and other professionals (Wisniewski & Gargiulo), it can be argued that, although each one of the four above-mentioned domains has a unique status, instructional assignments mirror and encompass the other three domains, since effective instruction depends on organisational factors, interpersonal interactions, and professional training.

Aims of the Present Study

In the Greek literature, there is little evidence about the burnout and job satisfaction experienced by special education teachers (Motti-Stefanidi, 2000). The same holds true for factors said to be associated with job-related stress. Moreover, information that refers to stress resulting from instructional assignments is rare. Therefore, the present study aimed, first, to specify the level of perceived burnout and job satisfaction among a sample of Greek special education teachers at the primary school level and to elaborate on their relations. Second, it aimed to assess the role of a number of selected demographic variables (such as age, gender, teaching experience, and family status) in teachers' perceived levels of burnout and job satisfaction. The third aim of the study was to evaluate the stress factors related to instructional assignments, as Greek special education teachers perceive them. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a better understanding of teachers' circumstances and, subsequently, to more effective designs of intervention in the field of special education.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 127 primary teachers holding full-time positions in special classes in public schools and in special schools in the regions of Northern Greece. There were 49 males (38.6% of the sample) and 78 females (61.4%). The age range of the sample was 23–56 years,

with a mean of 39.6 years. An inspection of the age distribution suggested that participants should be grouped into three age categories: the younger group (23–37 years), the middle age group (38–43 years), and the older group (44–56 years). Three categories were also formed in reference to the participants' years of teaching experience: the low teaching experience group (up to 4 years of teaching; 68 participants, 53.5% of the sample), the moderate teaching experience group (5–9 years of teaching; 32 participants, 25.2% of the sample), and the high teaching experience group (10–23 years of teaching; 27 participants, 21.2% of the sample). Eighty-five participants were married (66.9%), 39 participants (28.3%), were single and six participants (4.7%) were divorced (and not currently married).

Research Instruments

Maslach Burnout Inventory

A Greek version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1996) was used, which was translated by Kokkinos (2006), to assess the three dimensions of teachers' burnout syndrome: emotional exhaustion (nine items), depersonalisation (five items), and personal accomplishment (eight items). Participants were asked to rate how frequently they experienced feelings associated with these dimensions on a seven-point scale, ranging from 0 (*Never*) to 6 (*Daily*). High scores on the emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation subscales reflect increased distress. High scores on the personal accomplishment subscale reflect satisfaction in this area. In previous studies, internal consistency of the Maslach Burnout Inventory has ranged from .63 to .90 (Aventisian-Pagoropoulou et al., 2004; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Sari, 2004). In the current study, Cronbach's α was .85 for emotional exhaustion .81 for depersonalisation, and .58 for personal accomplishment.

Employee Satisfaction Inventory

The Employee Satisfaction Inventory was developed by Koustelios and Bagiatis (1997) to measure job satisfaction of Greek employees. For the purpose of this study, the version for teachers was used (Koustelios & Kousteliou, 2001). It contains 24 items that assess satisfaction in six job-related dimensions: work conditions (five items; e.g., "My work place is pleasant"), pay (four items; e.g., "I'm paid for what I do"), promotion (three items; e.g., "My experience increases my prospects for promotion"), the job itself (four items; e.g., "My job is worthwhile"), relationships with the school principal (four items; e.g., "The school principal stands up for me when I need him/her"), and the organisation as a whole (four items; e.g., "There is too much favouritism at school"). Teachers responded to each item on a five-point scale (0 = *I fully disagree* and 4 = *I fully agree*). Reversed scoring was undertaken where necessary so that higher scores indicate greater satisfaction. Internal consistencies for the six subscales of the ESI as found in the study were as follows: work conditions $\alpha = .82$, pay $\alpha = .84$, promotion $\alpha = .61$, the job itself $\alpha = .73$, relationships with the school principal $\alpha = .83$, and the organisation as a whole $\alpha = .72$.

Inventory of Job-related Stress Factors

This inventory was designed by the authors for the purpose of the current study. It assesses the job-related factors that cause stress to special education teachers, and which are related to instructional assignments. It consists of 22 items, describing task demands that teachers commonly encounter, such as student assessment, programme organisation, behaviour management and collaboration with parents and other school-related experts. Participants are asked to rate how stressful they perceive each task demand to be on a five-point scale (0 = *No stress at all* and 4 = *Excessive stress*). The items of the Inventory are presented later in Table 4.

Data Analysis

Initially, descriptive analyses were conducted for the three burnout dimensions and the six job satisfaction subscales. Participants were then classified into three groups for each of the three burnout dimensions (high, average, and low), following the cut-offs given by Maslach et al. (1996). Correlations between all the burnout and the job satisfaction variables were computed. A series of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) was run to examine the effects of gender, age, teaching experience, and marital status on teachers' perceived levels of burnout and job satisfaction. A follow-up Scheffé test was used when significant differences were present. Eta-square values were used to estimate effect sizes for each paired comparison in all ANOVAs. According to Green, Salkind, and Akey (2000), eta-square values of 0.01, 0.06, and 0.15 represent, respectively, small, medium, and large effect sizes.

Data from the Inventory of Job-related Stress Factors were reduced by a means of an explanatory factor analysis with varimax rotation, so that the teachers' responses could be grouped into fewer meaningful categories (factors). The reliability of the factors were computed and expressed as Cronbach α coefficients. Next, the means of the item means for each of the emerging factors were computed. Correlations of these factors with all the burnout and job satisfaction variables were obtained. Analyses of variance were employed (followed by post-hoc analyses with the Scheffé test when necessary) to examine gender, age, teaching experience, and marital status differences in the emerging job-related stress factors. Finally, a series of ANOVAs was employed to investigate how stressful special education teachers perceive the instructional assignment-related factors, in relation to their self-reported level of burnout (which is defined as high, average, and low, according to the cut-offs given by Maslach et al., 1996).

Results

Perceived Burnout and Job Satisfaction of Greek Special Education Teachers at Primary School Level

The first aim of the study was to assess the perceived level of burnout in Greek special education teachers at the primary school level. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics alongside the findings of other Greek studies that involved primary school teachers. Evidently, participants of the current study did not experience high levels of stress in any of the three burnout dimensions. Perceived levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation were quite low ($M = 18.66$, $SD = 9.07$ and $M = 3.92$, $SD = 3.81$, respectively), while the feeling of personal accomplishment was high ($M = 30.07$, $SD = 5.52$).

Participants were grouped into three groups (high, average, and low, according to the cut-offs given by Maslach et al., 1996) using their scores on each of the three dimensions of the Burnout Scale. As can be seen in Table 2, 19.7% of the sample belonged to the group experiencing high emotional exhaustion; however, only 3.1% and 7.9% of the participants were classified as reporting high depersonalisation and low personal accomplishment, respectively. These findings show that the majority of Greek special education teachers in these primary schools do not report high levels of burnout. However, attention is drawn to the finding that one-fifth of our special education teachers experienced a high level of emotional exhaustion, which potentially may lead to a generalised experience of burnout (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

Greek special education teachers' reports varied across the six subscales of the Employee Satisfaction Inventory. According to the mean of the item means of each subscale, special education teachers reported moderately high satisfaction with their job itself ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.57$), the school principal ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.75$), and the organisation as a whole ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.71$). They also reported moderate satisfaction with their work conditions ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.93$).

Table 1. Teachers' reports on the three burnout dimensions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory in the current study and other Greek studies.

Burnout dimension	Current study ^a (n = 127)	Motti-Stefanidi (2000) ^a (n = 96)	Kantas (1996) ^b (n = 143)	Koustelios and Kousteliou (2001) ^c (n = 100)	Aventisian-Pagoropoulou et al. (2004) ^b (n = 411)
Emotional exhaustion	18.66 (9.07)	13.65 (7.61)	18.3 (9.9)	14.99 (5.43)	18.76 ^d
Depersonalisation	3.92 (3.81)	2.24 (2.70)	3.4 (3.7)	3.86 (2.34)	4.79
Personal accomplishment	39.07 (5.52)	39.40 (5.56)	39.8 (6.1)	39.71 (5.45)	40.43

Notes: Data presented as the mean (standard deviation). ^aStudy includes special education teachers at the primary school level. ^bStudy includes regular education teachers at the primary school level. ^cStudy includes regular education teachers at the primary school level (n = 56) and at the secondary school level (n = 44). ^dNo standard deviations provided in the report.

Table 2. Special education teachers in the groups of high, average, and low perceived stress^a and the respective means (standard deviations) in the three dimensions of burnout.

Burnout dimensions	Classification		
	High	Average	Low
Emotional exhaustion	25 (19.7%)	50 (39.4%)	52 (40.4%)
<i>M (SD)</i>	32.60 (5.0)	20.48 (2.7)	10.21 (3.6)
Depersonalisation	4 (3.1%)	10 (7.9%)	111 (89%)
<i>M (SD)</i>	15.25 (1.5)	10.30 (1.6)	2.96 (2.6)
Personal accomplishment ^b	10 (7.9%)	21 (16.5%)	96 (75.6%)
<i>M (SD)</i>	26.30 (4.7)	34.14 (1.4)	41.47 (2.6)

Notes: ^aData presented as the number (percentage). ^bLow scores indicate high dissatisfaction with personal accomplishment.

Finally, they reported a lower level of satisfaction with the prospects of promotion ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 0.77$) and their pay ($M = 1.91$, $SD = 0.93$).

The study also investigated the association among the burnout dimensions and the job satisfaction subscales. The inter-correlations of these variables are presented in Table 3. Significant correlations were found between a number of the burnout dimensions and job satisfaction subscales. Specifically, one or more of the burnout dimensions had low to moderate correlations in expected directions with the following subscales: satisfaction with the job itself, the prospects of promotion, the organisation as a whole, and their relationship with the school principal. On the contrary, no significant correlations were obtained for the burnout dimensions and satisfaction with work conditions and pay.

Individual Differences in Relation to Perceived Level of Burnout and Job Satisfaction

The second aim of the study was to assess the role of a number of selected demographic variables in teachers' perceived levels of burnout and job satisfaction, in order to specify whether these variables are implicated in individual differences. A series of ANOVAs followed by post-hoc analyses was employed, in which the dependent variables were the dimensions of burnout and job satisfaction and the independent variables were the demographic characteristics of the sample (i.e., age, gender, years of teaching experience, and marital status).

Gender was not found to be a significant predictor of individual differences among our sample, with one exception: in the "satisfaction with pay" subscale, males ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.83$) appeared to be significantly less satisfied than their female counterparts ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 0.97$), but the effect size of their difference was small, $F(1,125) = 5.39$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .041$.

In relation to age, as indicated by the post-hoc analyses, the older group of special education teachers (44–56 years) reported a significantly higher feeling of personal accomplishment ($M = 40.83$, $SD = 4.78$) than the younger group (23–37 years; $M = 37.64$, $SD = 5.82$); however, the effect size value was small to medium ($F(2,124) = 3.46$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .053$). Regarding satisfaction with pay, the lowest scores were reported by the middle age group (38–43 years) ($M = 1.68$, $SD = 0.85$), followed by the older age group ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.89$), and, last of all, the younger age group ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.96$). The Scheffé test indicated that there were significant differences in satisfaction with pay between the younger age group and each of the others, the older and the middle age groups, $F(2,124) = 5.92$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .087$. In relation to teaching experience, no significant effects were obtained.

Table 3. Correlations between the three burnout dimensions, the six subscales of job satisfaction, and the four job-related stress factors.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Burnout dimensions													
1 Emotional exhaustion	–												
2 Depersonalisation	0.472**	–											
3 Personal accomplishment	-0.448**	-0.375**	–										
Employee satisfaction subscales													
4 Work conditions	-0.115	-0.169	0.031	–									
5 Pay	-0.157	0.011	-0.061	0.216*	–								
6 Promotion	-0.15	-0.27**	-0.19*	0.345**	0.286**	–							
7 The job itself	-0.45**	-0.28**	0.40**	0.243**	0.075	0.144	–						
8 School leadership	-0.25**	-0.12	0.10	0.463**	0.076	0.215*	0.174	–					
9 Total organisation	-0.25**	-0.18*	0.08	0.516**	0.144	0.214*	0.253**	0.700**	–				
Job-related stress factors													
10 Programme organisation	0.094	0.126	-0.156	0.114	-0.126	-0.042	-0.010	0.239**	0.195*	–			
11 Collaborations	-0.233**	0.085	-0.157	0.100	0.075	0.076	-0.214*	-0.083	-0.071	0.393**	–		
12 Multi-category teaching	0.157	0.068	-0.251**	-0.145	-0.091	-0.081	-0.208*	-0.059	-0.065	0.448**	0.334**	–	
13 Students' assessment	0.144	0.044	-0.066	-0.033	0.010	-0.127	-0.122	-0.019	-0.073	0.568**	0.422**	0.533**	–

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Finally, a higher feeling of personal accomplishment was reported by the married teachers ($M = 40.67$, $SD = 4.67$) than the single teachers ($M = 37.36$, $SD = 5.53$), $F(1,119) = 7.42$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .059$. Divorced participants were very few; therefore they were excluded from the analysis.

Job-related stress factors

To determine any underlying factor structure in the Inventory of Job-related Stress Factors, we performed a principal components factor analysis followed by varimax rotation on participants' self-reports to the 22 items of the Inventory. Results revealed four factors with an eigenvalue >1 , which explained 57.6% of the total variance (factor analysis results are presented in Table 4). The factors can be described as follows: nine items loaded on the first factor, which was concerned with stress related to programme organisation and implementation ($\alpha = .87$); five items loaded on the second factor, which reflected stress caused by collaboration with other special education experts, colleagues, and parents ($\alpha = .75$); five items loaded on the third factor, which was concerned with the stress caused by simultaneously teaching students with multiple categories of special needs ($\alpha = .72$); and the fourth factor, on which three items loaded, was related to the assessment of students ($\alpha = .87$). As the Cronbach's α coefficients indicate, internal consistency of the four job-related stress factors was adequate. Subsequently, the means of the item means for each factor were computed and four scores were obtained. High scores in each factor reflect high stress.

According to these scores, Greek special education teachers experienced, in general, low to average levels of job-related stress; also, no single factor of instructional assignments was perceived as particularly overwhelming. The stress-producing factors considered as relatively more serious were, in descending order, teaching in a multi-category classroom ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.79$), programme organisation and implementation ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.68$), assessment of students ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 0.85$), and collaborations ($M = 1.40$, $SD = 0.76$).

Interestingly, the four stress factors that are related to the instructional assignment did not extensively correlate with the burnout and job satisfaction subscales. As presented in Table 3, the "programme organisation and implementation" factor was significantly correlated with the "school principal" and the "organisation as a whole" subscales of job satisfaction, but the correlations were low. Collaborations and multi-category teaching stress factors were related positively with emotional exhaustion and negatively with personal accomplishment, respectively. Finally, both factors have negative correlations with the "satisfaction with the job itself" subscale.

In order to study the effects of demographic variables on the four factors of instructional assignment-related stress, we applied a series of ANOVAs to the data followed by post-hoc analyses. Results revealed very few significant differences with small to medium effect sizes. Specifically, in the programme organisation and implementation factor, male participants reported a higher level of stress ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.58$) compared with females ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.68$), $F(1,125) = 4.49$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Regarding teaching experience, the only significant difference we noticed was in the multi-category teaching factor. As the Scheffé test indicated, the low experienced group of special education teachers reported higher level of stress ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.77$) than the high experienced group ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 0.80$), $F(2,124) = 3.60$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. No significant differences were noticed in terms of age groups and marital status.

To explore the question of how special education teachers perceive the instructional assignment-related stress factors, in relation to their self-reported level of burnout, we ran a series of ANOVAs. We used as independent variables the participants' classification in the high, average, or low group in relation to the three burnout dimensions. Significant differences were obtained in two factors; the collaboration with other professionals and parents, and the multi-category teaching. The Scheffé test indicated that the collaboration factor was perceived as more stressful by the group

Table 4. Principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation of the Job-related Stress Factors Inventory.

Item	Programme organisation and implementation	Collaborations	Multi-category teaching	Assessment of students
Programme organisation for learning strategies acquisition	0.744			
Coping with behavioural problems	0.732			
Programme organisation for enhancing psychological and physical development	0.731			
Programme organisation for life skills training	0.698			
Students' self-esteem improvement	0.643			
Defining learning goals for individual students	0.628		0.455	
Programme organisation for coping with reading, writing, and mathematics difficulties	0.579			
Accessing learning resources and instructional material	0.512			
Adapting learning methods according to the students' special needs	0.504			
Collaboration with special education experts		0.764		
Collaboration with the Special Education School Advisor		0.737		
Collaboration with regular education teachers		0.729		
Collaboration with parents		0.606		
Converting assessment findings of other experts into instructional practice		0.517		
Teaching simultaneously students with multiple more types of special needs			0.808	
Teaching simultaneously students with one to two types of special needs			0.750	
Realising that expertise acquired from training programmes is difficult to be applied in the daily practice		0.408	0.620	
Realising that college education is not enough to help the teacher cope with the students' multiple special education needs			0.562	
Teaching of more than five students with special needs at the same time			0.430	
Assessment of students' level of knowledge in various subjects				0.874
Assessment of students' general cognitive strengths and weaknesses				0.813
Changing of students' attitudes on certain programme subjects	4.43	2.88	0.422	0.497
Eigenvalues	20.13	13.11	2.28	2.48
Percentage of explained variance			13.05	11.27

Note: Items with factor loading >.40 were used as a basis for explaining the four factors.

with high emotional exhaustion ($M=1.75, SD=0.75$) than the group with low emotional exhaustion ($M=1.19, SD=0.61$), $F(2,124)=5.42, p<.01, \eta^2=.08$. The multi-category teaching factor was perceived more stressfully by the group with low personal accomplishment ($M=2.77, SD=0.78$) compared with the group with average personal accomplishment ($M=2.32, SD=0.71$), $F(2,124)=3.199, p<.05, \eta^2=.05$.

Discussion

Greek Special Education Teachers are Not Burned Out and are Moderately Satisfied with Their Job

The present study was carried out in a sample of Greek special education teachers at the primary school level with the following aims: to assess the level of their perceived burnout and job satisfaction; to study the role of demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, teaching experience, and family status) in teachers' perceived levels of burnout and job satisfaction; and to evaluate how stressful they perceive specific factors that are related to instructional assignment.

It was found that participants in our study did not experience high levels of stress in any of the three dimensions of burnout; similar (or somewhat lower) levels of burnout are reported in the Motti-Stefanidi (2000) study, regarding Greek primary teachers of special education. It must be noted that, until the present article, Motti-Stefanidi's study was the only published study regarding Greek special education teachers, as Greek researchers have only very recently begun to investigate this subject. Both our own study and that of Motti-Stefanidi would seem to support the conclusion that the levels of perceived burnout of the Greek special education teachers are lower than those reported by their North American and North European colleagues (Billingsley, 2004; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). This finding is also consistently emerging in relevant studies concerning Greek regular education teachers both at the primary (Aventisian-Pagoropoulou et al., 2004; Kantas, 1996), and the secondary school levels (Leontari, Kiridis, & Gialamas, 1996). On the whole, the finding may be attributed to the fact that, in Greece, teachers hold permanent positions and, at least for the time being, they are not being evaluated in any way that could significantly affect their position; this seems to eliminate the insecurity regarding their job and income and is likely to alleviate any feelings of high stress and pressure.

Job satisfaction of the Greek special education teachers at the primary school level was perceived as moderately high in certain facets of their job, such as satisfaction with the job itself, with the school principal, and with the organisation as a whole. Satisfaction with the work conditions was average, but their satisfaction with prospects of promotion and with pay was low. It is interesting to note that results reported in the Koustelios and Kousteliou (2001) study regarding job satisfaction of the Greek regular education teachers are quite divergent. In that study, teachers appeared to be the most satisfied with their pay ($M=3.91$) and prospects of promotion ($M=3.75$), and the least satisfied with the job itself ($M=1.84$) and their relationship with the school principal ($M=2.05$). On the satisfaction with the organisation as a whole and the satisfaction with the work conditions subscales, their scores were closer to those reported by special education teachers in the present study ($M=3.18$ and $M=2.84$, respectively).

In order for the above discrepancy to be explained, some of the peculiarities of the Greek educational system should be taken into account. One such peculiarity constitutes the fact that special education teachers have considerably less opportunity to be promoted to a leading position compared with their regular education counterparts. Teachers who work in special classes cannot apply for the position of a school principal, unless they resign from their position as a special education teacher (one cannot be a school principal and a special class teacher at the same time). Their only real outlet to a leading position is to become a special education School

Advisor, but the respective places are very few (i.e., 16 for the whole of Greece). Special education teachers working in primary schools can become principals of their schools (or another special school for that matter), but again the number of these positions is very low. Regarding the administrative positions (heads of local educational authorities), all teachers can theoretically apply for one of them, but in practice the probability of a special education teacher being promoted to such a position is extremely low, due to lack of the appropriate qualifications (i.e., studies in management).

On the other hand, however, special education teachers have a relatively independent role within schools, especially in terms of professional decision-making, which minimises the frictions with the school principal (and the School Advisor). We believe that the above-mentioned conditions may provide a credible explanation of the low satisfaction with the prospects of promotion, as well as of the high-perceived satisfaction with the school principal, reported by the Greek special education teachers.

Another issue worthy of discussion concerns the finding that the special education teachers in the current study reported minimum satisfaction with their pay, compared with the other job satisfaction subscales, whereas regular education teachers (in the study by Koustelios and Koustelios, 2001) appeared the most satisfied with it. This seems odd, considering the fact that special education teachers receive an additional allowance of €195 (AUS \$ 306) per month, which is not given to the regular education teachers. Obviously, special education teachers feel that this extra income does not compensate for the demanding and challenging job of teaching children with special needs.

However, special education teachers are more satisfied with their job itself than their colleagues in regular education. Maybe the teachers who have made a career choice to work in special education had been aware of the job difficulties and challenges, and were prepared to face up to such emotional load and workload. It is possible that this predisposition protects them from overwhelming feelings and keeps them satisfied with the work itself. Another possible explanation for this finding is that special education teachers in Greece, especially those working in special schools exclusively attended by children with low incidence disabilities, enjoy respect and high social acceptance just for their willingness to cope with the demanding task of supporting these children, and irrespective of the actual educational outcomes they might achieve. This fact offers them feelings of uniqueness, fulfilment, and satisfaction, while the absence of any kind of formal evaluation prevents them from frustrations.

Regarding the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction in our sample, it was found that high-perceived satisfaction with the job itself, the system organisation as a whole, the school principal, and the prospects of promotion were significantly correlated to low levels of burnout. This finding is in line with the Koustelios and Kousteliou study (2001), who found that the "satisfaction with the job itself" subscale was a significant predictor of teachers' burnout, and coincides with results from other relevant studies, with regard to the correlations between burnout and job satisfaction variables (Borg & Riding, 1991b; Kyriakou & Sutcliffe, 1979).

On the other hand, no significant correlations were obtained for the burnout dimensions and satisfaction with pay and with work conditions. Similar findings are reported in the Koustelios and Kousteliou (2001) study. It is interesting to note that, in the present study, scores on the "satisfaction with pay" subscale were quite low compared with those obtained in the Koustelios and Kousteliou study. This finding implies that, in the case of special education teachers, (dis)satisfaction with pay is not significant for increasing (or for that matter eliminating) the association with occupational stress; apparently, other factors, such as satisfaction with the job itself, the organisation as a whole, and the prospects of promotion, are more strongly related to that association. In conclusion, it seems that job (dis)satisfaction does not always relate to high occupational stress (Chaplain, 1995).

Demographic Characteristics Associated with Burnout and Job Satisfaction

The second aim of our study considered the role of demographic variables in teachers' perceived levels of burnout and job satisfaction. Most of our conclusions are in line with those reported in other relevant studies. Regarding burnout, gender and teaching experience were not significantly related to any of its dimensions (Aventisian-Pagoropoulou et al., 2004; Billingsley, 2004; Green-Reese, Johnson, & Campbell, 1991); older age was associated with lower burnout, but in other studies findings related to age have been mixed (Billingsley, 2004; Kantas, 1996; Motti-Stefanidi, 2000). Finally, married individuals consistently report low levels of burnout (Aventisian-Pagoropoulou et al., 2004; Kantas, 1996). Regarding job satisfaction, male and middle-aged teachers (38–43 years) seemed less satisfied with pay compared with their female and younger counterparts. Further relevant data from Greece are not available, whereas the respective findings reported in the international literature are mixed (Borg & Riding, 1991a; Green-Reese et al., 1991; Sari, 2004).

Middle-aged and older aged individuals are more likely to have families than are younger people, and the probability for them to show an increased sense of personal accomplishment and a stronger dissatisfaction with their income is higher (Aventisian-Pagoropoulou et al., 2004; Kantas, 1996). While it might have been anticipated that older and more experienced teachers would feel more confident with their job performance and, as a result, would report an increased sense of personal accomplishment, there was no significant correlation between experience and burnout or job satisfaction. In relation to gender, the above finding probably reflects the prevalent (in the Greek culture) view that men, more than women, are responsible for providing for their families and they are, therefore, likely to perceive their financial needs as more demanding.

Instructional Assignment-related Factors and Implications for Teachers' Training

The third aim of our study was to evaluate the stressors related to instructional assignment, as Greek special education teachers perceive them. Four such factors were identified: stress related to programme organisation and implementation; stress related to collaborations with other special education experts, colleagues, and parents; stress related to teaching students with multi-category special needs; and stress related to assessment of students. Results suggested that these factors were perceived as moderate to low intensity sources of stress by our sample.

The reported low levels of stress on the above factors could be due to special education teachers' psychological readiness to deal with the difficulties resulting from a profession they have consciously chosen; in addition, it could be the reflection of a "compromised" pedagogical philosophy, according to which the improvement of children with special needs is beyond the power or the ability of any teacher. Further explanations of the same finding are to be sought in the Greek educational tradition, according to which, for example, programme organisation is considered a task reserved for centrally situated services and authorities like the Pedagogical Institute. Hence, teachers tend not to undertake any systematic actions toward programme organisation, even when such a programme is not available, but they rather rely either on common practical applications traditionally used by older colleagues or on their own improvisations. A similar explanation could elucidate the relatively low stress resulting from the need to assess students: most Greek teachers regard this task as peripheral to their profession and as a main part of the work of a psychologist. In the case of collaboration with other professionals and the parents of children with special needs, the moderate to low stress could be seen as a function of the independence enjoyed by Greek special education teachers regarding their decision-making. Finally, the relatively low stress resulting from teaching students with multiple categories of special needs can be explained as a function of the belief that the heavy instructional demands posed by such a task would prevent almost any teacher from presenting educational achievements

of high quality, and thus each individual teacher could accept a possible failure without having to question his/her capability.

Of course, the moderate to low stress exhibited by Greek special education teachers would be considered asset, provided that research could establish the fact that these teachers do possess the knowledge and the experience necessary to offer their students the appropriate education. Whether this really happens or not is a question to be answered by future research, since data of this kind are not currently available in Greece. Based on their experience, the present authors are inclined to support the view that the low stress levels exhibited by Greek special education teachers are, rather, a function of a distorted pedagogical philosophy and a diminished professional self-efficacy, which result from inadequate initial and inservice training, as well as from the “imperfect” structure of the special education school system. Obviously, measures for coping with those problems would include the substantial improvement of teacher training, both in terms of philosophy and specific capabilities; and structural change to the educational system, both in terms of teachers’ professional development and of introducing some control of the quality of instruction offered.

Finally, the difference between male and female teachers, with regard to how stressfully they perceive certain job-related factors, in this case programme organisation and implementation, is a puzzling finding that may be attributable to many parameters such as the interest for the work and the demands posed by the educational and social system on each gender. The difference between men and women regarding programme implementation warrants a more in-depth study.

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