

THE TEACHER'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING IN GENERAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS

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Abstract. There are increasing demands on teachers in general education schools, their performance is analysed and evaluated, however the teacher's profession still lacks respect in our society. Persistent and occupational stress has a negative impact on the psycho-emotional health of teachers, but little attention is paid to this problem in our country. Publications of Lithuanian and foreign scientists in recent years are analysed and the study on teachers' emotional wellbeing and the microclimate of the school are presented in the article. The outcomes of the study revealed that teachers quite often experience emotional stress at work. The main causes of emotional insecurity among teachers are anxiety about the COVID-19 situation in the country, the introduction of distance learning, increased workload and lack of time due to the pandemic. It has also been found that the teacher's emotional wellbeing is affected by the microclimate of the school (relationships among community members, working conditions, etc.), the professional activities of the teacher and the constant change in education as well as the personal qualities of teachers. The outcomes of the study confirm the findings of foreign researchers on the challenges of emotional wellbeing of teachers and the need to provide psychological support to meet the needs of schools. It is obvious that there is the need for discussion and a more detailed study of the issue to reveal different aspects of emotional well-being of the teacher.

The key words: teacher's profession, emotional wellbeing, school microclimate.

INTRODUCTION

School is the place where our children spend a lot of their time, so it is very important that everyone is safe and has a good emotional environment, so that relations among all members of the school community are humane, benevolent, based on respect and trust, ("the concept of a good school", 2015). Unfortunately, in our society, there is an increasing inability to communicate, mistreatment and the lack of understanding and respect for others. It would be naive to expect that what is widespread or even common in our society, will not exist at schools.

The teacher is one of the members of the school community whose duty is to enable the learner to develop his/her personality and act creatively in the world. Therefore, at the centre of the educational process is the child whose safety and wellbeing we are constantly concerned about. The obvious proof of this is the year 2020, when the Year of Children's Emotional Wellbeing was declared in our country. And how do other members of the community feel? Is the teacher safe, what is his/her emotional wellbeing in the workplace?

The work of the teacher, as you know, in our country is not the most desirable. Although the aim is to make this profession prestigious in Lithuania by 2025, teachers still do not receive adequate recognition of respect and authority. All this negatively affects teachers' motivation, their social and psychological health, as well as the quality of education, which is being provided so much attention today. The requirements for the teacher are increasing, the limits of them are expanding and the roles are changing. Educational documents emphasize that educators must pursue professional excellence, constantly develop their general, didactic and subject competencies, etc. However it is a lot less common to talk about the psycho-emotional health of teachers. The list of the Lithuanian scientists who examined teachers' emotional wellbeing and safety is not long, of which there are: Žydzūnaitė, Bubnys, Mažuolytė and Mikelskienė (2009), Bobrova, Vaitkevičius and Bakanovienė (2013), Bubelienė and Merkys (2016), Martišauskienė and Vaičekauskienė (2016), Navaitienė and Danilovienė (2017), etc. In the reviews of the state of education in the country in recent years these issues have not discussed.

There are more foreign author publications on this topic. Quesel, Möser & Husfeldt (2014), Baeriswyl, Kunz Heim & Krause (2017), Klusmann & Waschke (2018), Luca, Nocentini & Menesini (2019), Dammerer & Kuntner (2020), Fesun, Nechytailo, Kanivets, Zhurat, & Radchuk, V. (2020), Guo, Liu, Zhao, & Wang (2020), Schneider (2020) and co analysed teachers' health, wellbeing and job satisfaction, the impact of the social environment on the school microclimate, as well as working conditions, and burnout syndrome of teachers.

Hypothesis of the study: Teachers in the workplace are not emotionally safe, and not enough attention is paid to their psychological health and emotional well-being in Lithuania;

Subject of the study – emotional wellbeing of teachers in general education schools;

Aim of the study – to analyse the emotional wellbeing of teachers working in general education schools.

Objectives:

- To discuss the main risk factors of the teacher's emotional wellbeing from a theoretical point of view;
- To evaluate the emotional wellbeing of general education teachers in their workplace;
- To identify the impact of the school microclimate on the teacher's emotional wellbeing;

THE MAIN RISK FACTORS OF THE TEACHER'S EMOTION WELLBEING FROM A THEORETICAL POIN OF VIEW

Psycho-emotional wellbeing in professional activities is generally understood by researchers as part of health, the state of mental normality, as emotional and spiritual resilience. The person's wellbeing depends on many things, in particular on personal psychological potential: autonomy, environment, personal growth, positive relationships with those around them, life goals and self-esteem (Carr, 2004).

In our society, the teacher is subject to high requirements, and the fact that the teacher's work, which requires a lot of intellectual and physical resources, is often analysed and evaluated, conditions constant emotional tension, can also cause professional "burnout" (Navaitienė and Danilovienė, 2017). Bobrova and others (2013), based on the study, conclude that the constant risk factors for the teacher's mental health include their professional activities, constant changes in education, financial problems and stress. "Educators are a very vulnerable social group. They are not able to adequately evaluate and respond to changes in the social environment and its extreme impacts", (Bobrova et al., 2013, p. 15).

According to Šileikytė (2020), studies carried out in different countries have revealed that educators are constantly under school stress. Stressful situations are determined by curriculum requirements, strictly regulated time, lack of motivation for learning, not always positive emotions at work, etc. This has been proved by studies of researchers from different countries in recent years. According to Klusmann & Waschke (2018), the teacher's negative health factors include stress and professional "burnout." Appropriate career choices, individual qualities of teachers, school context and requirements are important to reduce tensions (Klusmann & Waschke, 2018). The study by Swiss researchers Baeriswyl and co (2017) revealed that the teacher's wellbeing at work is also influenced by social and professional relationships, and that the causes of the stress experienced can be both objective, linked to professional requirements and the qualities of an individual, determined personality. According to Dammerer & Kuntner (2020), especially tensions have to be overcome by beginning teachers due to a lot of challenges, which are conditioned by dynamic activity and intensive involvement in the new social environment (colleagues, managers, pupils, their parents, etc.).

Constant tension, stress, emotional insecurity often cause "burnout" syndrome in teachers. "Burnout" is determined by a set of various factors, including the psychological characteristics of the individual, specific features of professional activity and emotional experiences. The consequences of this syndrome include emotional exhaustion, self-esteem, decrease in personal achievements (Fesun, Nechytailo, etc., 2020).

Schneider (2020) acknowledges that the risk factors for the teacher's health may include not only a lack of personal qualities or competence, but also working conditions, i.e. specific problematic stressful relationships. However, according to the researcher, teachers experience both stress and job satisfaction. All this depends on the interpretation of the role of their profession as well as the perception of their professional requirements and personal expectations (Schneider, 2020). The teacher's job satisfaction, as found in the study, correlates negatively with their workload, however, teachers often use difficult working conditions as a chance to prove their professionalism. On the other hand, favourable conditions do not guarantee success, recognition and positive self-assessment. Thus, there is a need for a deeper analysis of the problem in the long term (Quesel, Möser, Husfeldt, 2014). Changes in working and family conditions, global economic problems and, finally, fear for the future, demonstrate that the school, as an institution, needs psychosocial support.

Unfortunately, teachers, unlike other professions with intense interaction, and the school as an institution, are reluctant to rely on supervisions and coaching processes to ensure quality standards. The teachers' professional group may need a different management instrument to achieve these objectives (Schneider, 2020). The importance of support for teachers has also been confirmed by Chinese scientists,

proving in their study that focusing on the emotional wellbeing of the teacher would also help to strengthen the mental health of their pupils (Guo et al., 2020).

Therefore, summarizing both: the analysed publications of Lithuanian and foreign scientists, it can be said that the psycho emotional wellbeing of teachers depends on personal psychological potential as well as on the requirements of the profession itself and the organizational system. Data from a number of the above-mentioned surveys have confirmed that teachers experience a variety of experiences, both work satisfaction and emotional exhaustion or professional "burnout", which can be caused by persistent stress, heavy workload, high professional requirements, working conditions and etc. The authors emphasize the crucial role of the school microclimate for the teacher's wellbeing, and the need to ensure psychological support.

The analysis of the scientific literature has helped to clarify the factors determining the teacher's wellbeing at school, however more in-depth research into the problem is needed to reveal different aspects of mental emotional wellbeing.

STUDY ON THE TEACHER'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AT SCHOOL

Methods and organisation of the study: The study aimed to evaluate the emotional environment in general education schools of the Panevėžys city, to discern tendencies and better define the emotional safety situation of teachers and provide for measures to improve their wellbeing. The main method of the study has been a questionnaire survey. The target group of the survey there were teachers of Panevėžys general education schools. The questionnaire, which was placed in the electronic space, contained closed, semi-closed and open questions, i.e. respondents were invited to choose an answer from the submitted list or write their opinion. At the end of the questionnaire there was room for comments from teachers and suggestions on how to improve the emotional environment at school.

The research was carried out remotely. In October 2020, the link to the online survey was forwarded to all Panevėžys pro-gymnasiums and gymnasiums. 197 teachers responded to the invitation and filled out the questionnaires voluntarily. That accounted for nearly a quarter of the educators in basic positions who represented 20 schools of general education in the city.

The analysis of survey data was carried out using descriptive statistical methods and calculating the arithmetic average and percentage of the respondents' opinions. The study allowed a margin of error of no more than 5 percent in statistical decisions. The survey data is illustrated with tables and figures, presented in absolute numbers and percentages. The findings of the study have been based on the data collected during the survey.

Outcomes of the study: The person's wellbeing is inseparable from his/her physical, psychological and social health. When evaluating the emotional wellbeing of teachers, this study focused more on their psychological health, which, according to Žydžiūnaitė and et al. (2009) is influenced by wellbeing, perception, thinking and communication.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to evaluate their wellbeing at school during the current and the previous school year. As is known, psychological health can be defined as positive and negative, but to improve accuracy, teachers were asked to evaluate their emotional wellbeing on the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is bad and 5 is very good. The study revealed that almost half of the educators who took part in the survey rated their emotional wellbeing at school as good, while 17% said they were feeling very good. About a quarter of the survey participants reported feeling satisfied, one in ten educators described their wellbeing as bad and five respondents as very bad (see Figure 1).

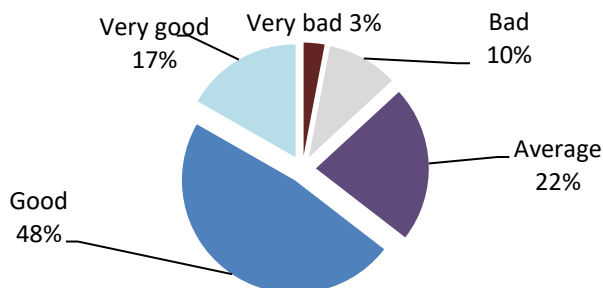


Figure 1. Self-esteem of the teacher's wellbeing at school

In an effort to provide wellbeing evaluation more specificity, teachers were asked to answer the control question: *Have you experienced emotional stress or a feeling of insecurity during this and the previous school year?* It turned out that a quarter of the respondents answered positively to this question and the same proportion of the respondents strongly stated that they had not experienced emotional stress or felt unsafe at school in the last school year. Most of the respondents had a partial answer, and several were unable to answer the question (see Figure 2).

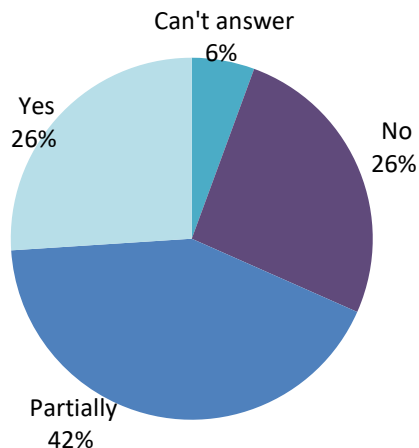


Figure 2. **Proportion of teachers who have experienced emotional stress or a sense of insecurity at school**

Responses to the question about the frequency of stress experienced demonstrated that just over one third of teachers experience emotional tension and feelings of insecurity at work infrequently, just under one in three often, while 15 survey participants said they were feeling stress all the time. Some teachers said they had only encountered tensions once or twice, while others could not answer that question. However, it is worrying that around 40% of teachers experience emotional stress and a feeling of insecurity at work quite common (see Figure 3).

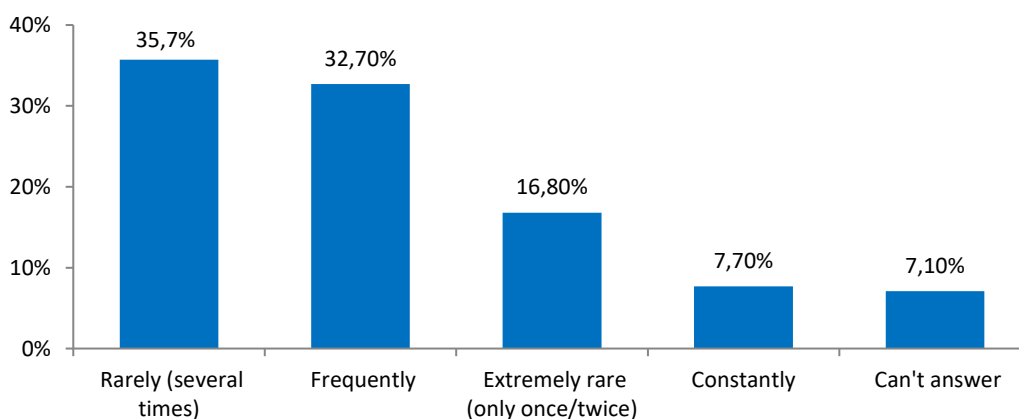


Figure 3. **Frequency of stress experienced by teachers**

Therefore, having summarized the answers to the first issues of the questionnaire, it can be said that a higher proportion of educators are quite positive about their wellbeing at school, and about one third – value that more negatively. Since the person's wellbeing, according to Carr (2004), depends on personal psychological potential, the subjectivity of the teachers' responses must be taken into account in drawing conclusions.

To find out the causes of emotional tension, the teachers were presented with a list of statements and they were offered the select of one or more of the most appropriate ones. Having summarized all the answers, it can be said that the teachers' feelings of insecurity or emotional stress at work are usually caused by distance learning introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic (62.4%). It should be noted that the majority of the respondents reported 2-3 reasons. More than one third of the respondents identified their emotional wellbeing as negatively affected by heavy workload (37.6%) or lack of time (33 %). One in four teachers is stressed by interactions with pupils (26.4%) or exaggerated expectations of their parents (25.9%).

Around one fifth of the educators admitted to having problems communicating with principles (21.3%) or feeling unwell due to unmeasured administrative requirements (20.8 %). After selecting the answer "Other", several teachers wrote that they had not experienced tension, while others stated the following reasons: *Constant change, lack of stability and excessive information; Anxiety about the situation (COVID 19) in Lithuania, as it might create additional concerns for the entire school community; Communicating with pupils' parents; Due to the uneven arrangement of classes in time, etc.* or again emphasized issues with distance learning and lack of time (see Figure 4).

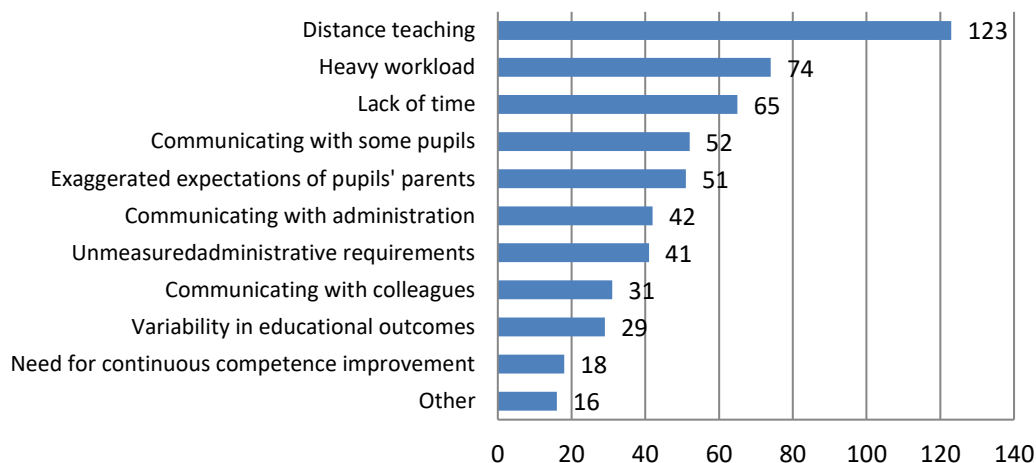


Figure 4. **Reasons for emotional stress at work identified by teachers**

Having analysed the causes of the stress experienced at work, it could be suggested that some teachers, as their comments have also demonstrated, do not feel safe due to the general situation in the country caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of distance learning in schools. This partly confirms the findings of the study carried out by Bobrova et al. (2013) that educators are under stress from unusual, unknown situations.

After experiencing emotional stress, most educators tend to discuss problems with colleagues, with principles, pupils' parents or/and pupils themselves, with a school psychologist. Others said they engaged in self-education, communicating only with their relatives, family or with friends outside school, or tended to hide within themselves: *I would look for reasons in my personal qualities; I am able to cope perfectly with my emotions myself, I have my own ways; I don't know yet, I've been going through that alone so far.* Several educators said they found calm in nature, music, painting, and one respondent had had to contact clergy and doctors.

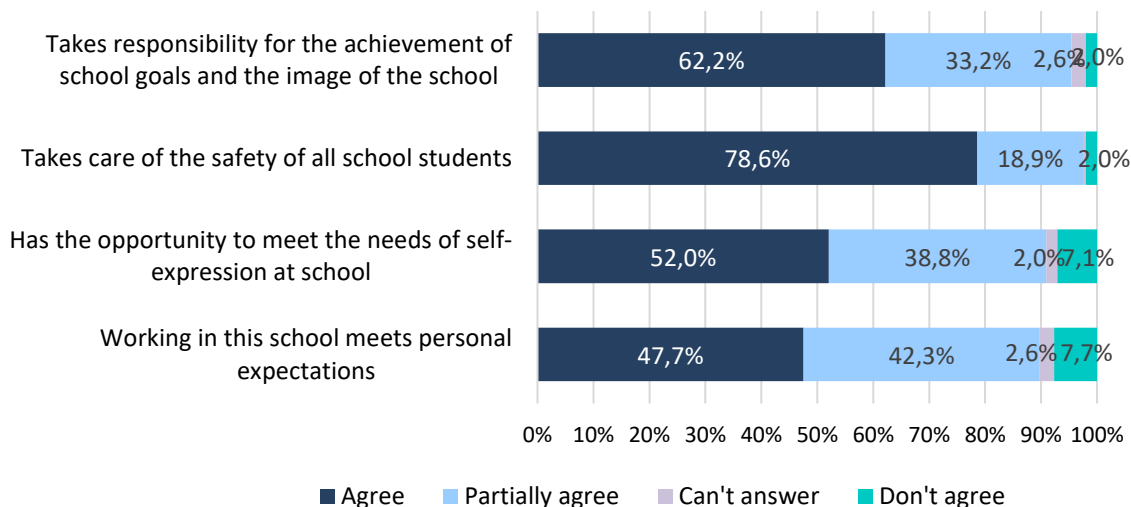


Figure 5. **Positive factors for teachers' emotional wellbeing at school**

In order to better reflect the factors influencing the teacher's emotional wellbeing, the statements covering the main dimensions of social and psychological health have been formulated: such as social

integration at school (relations with other members of the community, involvement in school life, feeling of identity), job satisfaction, finding opportunities for self-expression, etc. The need for schools to provide clear guidelines on emotional security has also been taken into account in formulating the statements, as well as the need to define what behaviour can be tolerated in order to make members of the community feel well and safe. All those statements were evaluated by the respondents, expressing their views and noting accordingly: *I agree, I partially agree, I disagree, I can't answer*. The evaluation of the statements reveal that almost all teachers care about the safety of pupils, most of whom take responsibility for the achievement of the school's goals and its image, and find opportunities for self-expression at school. While almost half of the respondents agree that working at the school meets their expectations, another similar proportion of teachers questioned it somewhat, choosing an answer in part. Therefore, it can be said that all these listed factors have a rather positive effect on the teacher's emotional health (see Figure 5).

Figure 6 illustrates the teacher's views on statements related to negative evaluation of their emotional wellbeing. This statement has received the highest level of support in this group of the statements: *There are pupils at school who treat teachers with disrespect*. It has also emerged that almost one fifth of the respondents suffer from tensions with some colleagues, one in ten suffers from conflicts with pupils, and around one in seven at school sometimes feel misunderstood.

Although teachers know where to turn in case of emotional stress, one eighth of the survey participants do not expect to receive help due to stressful relationships and emotional experiences at school (see Figure 6).

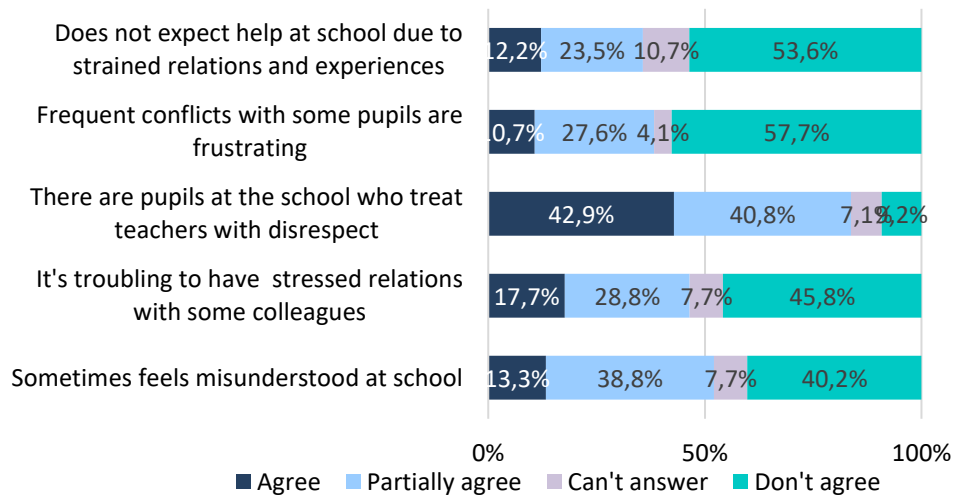


Figure 6. **Negative factors for the teacher's emotional wellbeing at school**

Organizational culture has a significant impact on the teacher's emotional wellbeing at work. Zohar and Marshall (2006) identify the eight key aspects of culture that bring the community together and lead to changes in the organization: communication, honesty, relations, trust, government, the truth, flexibility and empowerment. Most of them cover the main dimensions of social and psychological health mentioned above. That is exactly what has been taken into account in the selection of the statements for the evaluation the emotional environment of the school.

The outcomes of the survey reveal that the evaluation of the emotional microclimate of schools is not unambiguous. According to the majority of teachers, there is no shortage of community-uniting events in their school, the school activities are based on partnership, working as teams and members of the community are aware of their responsibilities, comply with the rules and agreements. However, the statements about the safety of community members, respect for each other and positive emotional climate that allow everyone to experience joy and success received a lot less support (see Figure 7).

The microclimate of the school is particularly negatively affected by the displays of bullying. According to Povilaitis and Valiukevičiūtė (2006), constant disagreements and bullying, as well as other ways of abuse, are the outcome of the low emotional literacy of society and, at the same time, the failure of youth socialization.

Unfortunately, what happens behind closed classroom doors is known only to teachers and pupils, and much is left to interpretation, which is often based on controversial personal experience. "Preventive programmes implemented in schools help to maintain mature interpersonal relationships and avoid or counter negative environmental impacts ": (*Lithuania: Education Status Review 2018, p. 66*), however the

aforementioned publication states that in the 2017-2018 school year only 66 % of the country's schools implemented at least one programme to prevent bullying and violence or other selected one. It should be noted, however, that the focus on bullying prevention is increasing: in the 2018-2019 school year, at least one prevention programme was implemented by 85% of general education schools (*Education Status Review, 2019*).

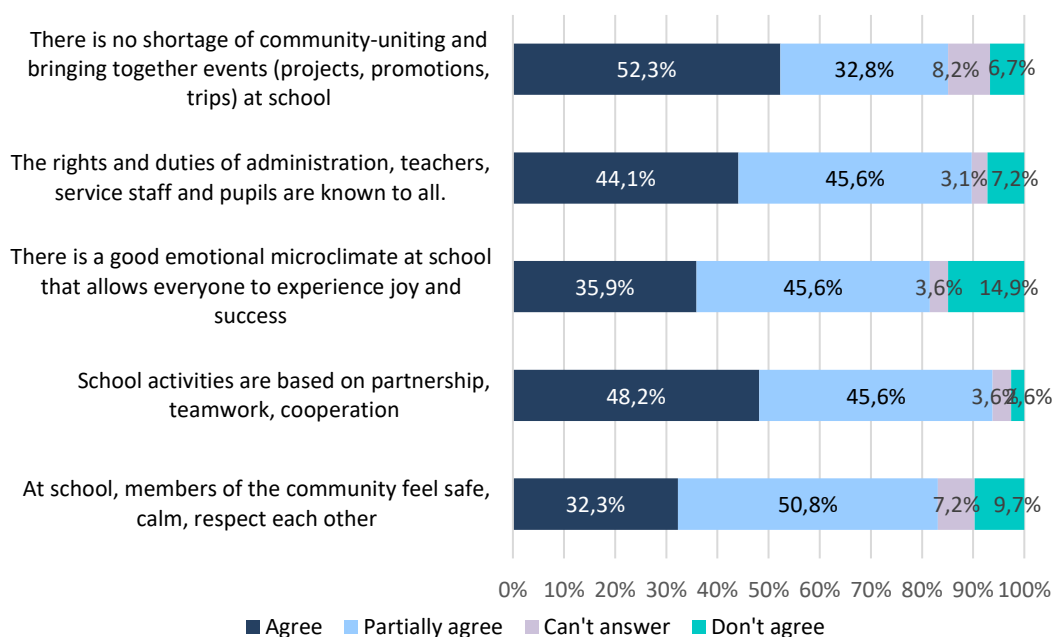


Figure 7. **Evaluation of the emotional microclimate of the school**

In expressing their views on bullying prevention at schools (see Figure 8), teachers confirmed that there was sometimes a lack of tolerance. Tandzegolskienė and Vančugovaitė (2019) in an article on the prevention of bullying among younger teenagers state the need to prevent this negative phenomenon at all levels: school, classroom and individual. Emphasis has been placed on creating a safe social environment, organizing preventive events, working with pupils and their parents, and responding to ongoing bullying at school level by the entire school community.

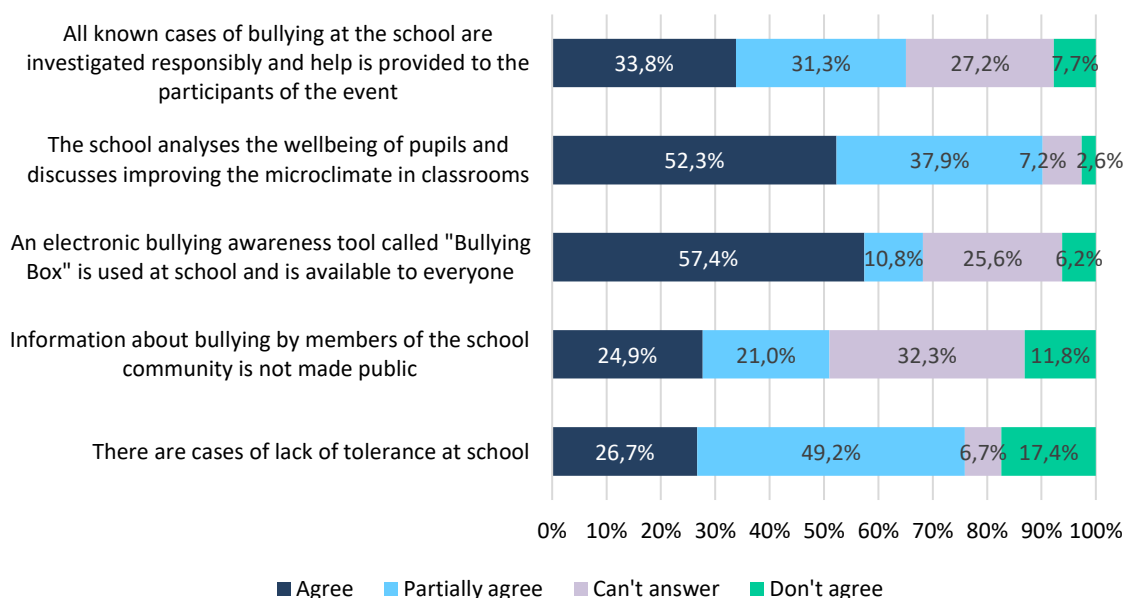


Figure 8. **Prevention of bullying at schools**

However, it has to be acknowledged that more than half of the survey participants said that information about bullying experienced by members of the community was not always made public in their schools, and one third of the respondents were unable to answer the question. One in three respondents questioned whether all known cases of bullying at school were investigated responsibly and that participants

were provided with help. Having asked in the questionnaire about the use of the electronic bullying tool “Bullying box” recommended to schools, it became clear that one third of the teachers in the survey had never heard of it. Therefore, there are doubts as to whether all schools have and use this tool. Or is it just teachers who are not informed about this bullying prevention measure, (see Figure 8).

In summary, most schools have no shortage of community-uniting events, school activities are based on partnership, working as teams and community members follow the rules and agreements. However, it has to be recognised that not all schools ensure the safety of all members of the community and good emotional climate, there are cases of intolerance and bullying prevention at school level is not effective enough either.

The outcomes of studies carried out in Lithuania reveal that school leaders impose high requirements on the quality of the teacher’s work and pupils’ achievements, however the management of educational institutions lacks attention to the processes taking place there, and teachers are rarely involved in discussions about improving these processes (*Lithuania: Education Status Review 2018*). It is the ideas and behaviours of teachers that are a particularly significant factor influencing the development of the educational process and the activities of the individual organisation. As this study has demonstrated, it is clear that teachers are willing and able to play an active role in studying school-relevant issues and finding solutions to problems. When asked in the questionnaire how to improve the emotional environment at school, comments and suggestions were received from almost all survey participants. Having analysed the teachers’ statements, insights into the school’s emotional climate and suggestions for its improvement, several topics relevant to the study participants emerged: *Search for professional identity; Identification of problem areas of the professional environment; Vision of an emotionally safe environment*. Teachers also emphasize the prevention of professional burnout, improvement of working conditions, creation of respectful interpersonal relations, cooperation, openness of management and publicity. According to teachers, creating a safe emotional environment in school should start with an individual level, i.e. self-cognition. Another important step is the identification of problematic areas of the professional environment at the school level.

Therefore, it can be stated that the psychological wellbeing of members of the school community is directly related to the ability of each member to know and manage the emotional processes taking place in the community. Interpersonal relations are probably the most important area on which the culture of the organization and the emotional microclimate of the school depend, leading to the emotional wellbeing and security of all members of the community. The outcomes of the external evaluation of schools in the country demonstrate that it is worth paying more attention to “the development of positive attitudes in schools: the promotion of values, the creation of relations should be taken care of by every member of the community” (Martišauskienė and Vaičekauskienė, 2016, p. 97). This has also been emphasized in the comments by the survey participants, arguing that it is important to abandon outdated, completely inflexible forms of communication and educational principles, which prevent tolerant relations, positive and open communication.

In the opinion of teachers, significant training in supervision, emotional literacy, emotional health, help from professional psychologists are important in improving the emotional environment of the school. Unfortunately, it has turned out that there is currently no psychologist in several schools. Teachers miss the prevention of occupational burnout, talk about improving working conditions and reducing additional workload. Teachers’ thoughts today inevitably turn to the evaluation of the influence of external factors. Internal anxiety, fear and emotional stress for teachers are caused by uncertainty related to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of distance learning at schools. Identifying their needs and expectations, teachers suggest managing basically the entire education system and expect the support of politicians, city leaders and the education department.

Therefore, the study confirmed the hypothesis that not all teachers feel emotionally safe in the workplace and expect more help and support in improving the emotional microclimate in general education schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing the analysed sources of information, it can be said that researchers from both Lithuania and foreign countries recognize that the psycho-emotional wellbeing of teachers depends on personal psychological potential, the requirements imposed on the profession and organizational system. Teachers often experience emotional exhaustion or professional “burnout.” The risk factors for the teacher’s emotional wellbeing are the following: persistent professional tension, stress, heavy workload, high

professional requirements, working conditions, etc.. The researchers recognize the importance of the school microclimate for the teacher's wellbeing, the need for psychological support and the need for research to reveal different aspects of psycho-emotional wellbeing.

Having analysed the data of the survey of the opinion of educators suggests that the higher proportion of teachers who participated in the survey view their emotional wellbeing positively in the city's general education schools, however about one third of teachers are quite often under emotional stress at work. There are several main causes of emotional insecurity: the introduction of distance learning due to COVID-19, increased workload, lack of time and relations between members of the community.

It has been found that the microclimate of the school is affected by the emotional well-being and safety of teachers. The evaluation of the microclimate of schools is mixed: most schools have no shortage of community-uniting events, school activities are based on partnership, teamwork, community members are aware of their responsibilities, rules and agreements are respected. However, not all schools provide rather good emotional climate, there are cases of intolerance, and bullying prevention at school level is not effective enough. However, not all schools provide sufficient emotional climate, there are cases of intolerance, and bullying prevention at the school level is not effective enough. Therefore, respectful interpersonal relations, cooperation and publicity of management, good working conditions, prevention of professional "burnout" of teachers, providing school communities with the help of a professional psychologist are rather important for creating an emotionally secure microclimate at schools.

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