

ACADEMIC TEACHERS UNDER STRESS IN THE PUBLISH OR PERISH ERA



Anna Wieczorek, Maciej Mitreęa

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INTRODUCTION

People working in contemporary academia face a variety of challenges nowadays. According to Bell et.al. (2012), over the last fifteen years, pressure at work has been continually rising within global academia. Challenges that scholars now face concern their scientific progress in view of the wind of change in today's universities, issues connected with publishing in recognizable, international journals and working in multi-cultural teams (Hicks, 2009). At the same time, those scholars have to share their knowledge with students and many of them may find it all together tiring, boring and frustrating. All such challenges may result in occupational stress, therefore the focus of this monograph is on the issues concerning occupational stress of academic teachers who are said to be experiencing a higher level of strain than other occupational groups (Kinman and Jones, 2004). When scholars suffer stress, they become less effective educators and scientists, and since they have impact on the lives of many people (e.g. students, other faculty members), they should be regularly monitored and their emotional well being should be managed at university (Lease, 1999). There are numerous studies concerning general teacher stress, but much fewer studies on job stress experiences at the university level, so it is a gap worth filling (Leung, 2000). What is more, Leung (2000) concludes that such research carried out so far has been West-oriented only, so it would be worthwhile to investigate how occupational stress affects the life and career of other scholars, e.g. from post-communist countries.

Academic teachers fall into a broader category of teachers in general and, so far, much has been said in relation to pedagogical and cognitive concerns connected with teaching (Freeman and Richards, 1996), rather than the relationships that teachers have with others in the workplace (Hargreaves, 2000). Such relationships may affect teacher development and even have an influence on whether a given teacher stays within the profession or leaves it. Academic teachers do not only come into contact with their students, but also with other scholars while taking part in various research projects and conferences. Often these research partners do not speak the same language and have different cultural backgrounds which many scholars may find stressful. Collaboration is, though, necessary in order to do and disseminate

good research, especially in view of the new regulations unifying scientific promotion rules in nearly all European countries and many other countries around the world. All scholars are forced to work in English since English language is academic lingua franca and science is international in nature. Scholars need to speak English fluently in order to communicate with foreign colleagues and to write in English in order to publish in respectable (i.e. impact factor) journals. This all brings a lot of emotional tensions to academic teachers.

This book is devoted to academic teacher stress and academic collaboration as a stressor, and at the same time, a leverage to scholars' career. It comprises four chapters. Chapter one is an endeavour to give a theoretical perspective on the stress of academic teachers. As there are only a few studies on job stress experiences at the university level (Leung, 2000), general teacher stress is elaborated on and its potential relations to the stress experienced by scholars. Chapter two comprises a description of empirical study design and study results, which in this case are, with regard to factors evoking stress among academic teachers. Third chapter presents the main research results. This research was qualitative in nature and it was based on interviews conducted with academic teachers employed mainly in post-communist countries. The study results suggests that many stressors faced by scholars originate from their necessity to collaborate with other scholars, often on the international level. To acquire an in-depth picture of this collaboration-related mechanism, we also conducted a focus group interview. A group interview enabled determining to what extent and in what way a collaboration impacts the well-being of teachers working in contemporary academia and whether it exerts only negative influence, or maybe it can also be treated as a leverage to one's career. The fourth and final chapter describes the role that collaboration plays in the life of scholars, including research results devoted to this issue. Research conclusions and suggestions for further research are presented at the end of the book.

This book is dedicated to all university teachers from all over the world that choose a very difficult profession and struggle nowadays within the "publish and perish" academic culture. Authors are grateful for the support they received from scholars that participated in the research project. Our informants openness allowed us to look through their own private angles at modern academia. Our informants open their hearts with regard to difficult situations they needed to face in work and provided very informative stories that build empirical fundamentals for this book.

We believe that this book can contribute to the ongoing debate on the development and institutional changes that occur within academia in post-communist countries and all other countries that aim at leveraging their productivity at university level. As many countries experience nowadays radical changes in their academic systems (e.g. with regard to the academic promotion criteria), this book may work as a reference for authorities at the university and ministry level that prepare institutional changes in academia and manage human resources at universities. Last but not least, all scholars interested in occupation stress, academic networking and their impact on academic productivity may use this book in their work. According to authors' knowledge this book combined with other books that were published recently (Mitreğa, et al. 2014, Mitreğa et al., forthcoming in 2016) are the sole academic works devoted explicitly to attitudes and behaviour of scholars from post-communist countries.

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