

# ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ НАУКИ

УДК 159.99  
ГРНТИ 15.81.21

---

## OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND PERFECTIONISM AMONG PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN RUSSIAN SCHOOLS

---

*Anna-Aleksandra Vlasova*  
*Immanuel Kant BFU,*

*FGOU (Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University)*  
*Address: Ulitsa Aleksandra Nevskogo, 14,*  
*Kaliningrad, Kaliningrad Oblast, 236041*

### (ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНЫЙ СТРЕСС И ПЕРФЕКЦИОНИЗМ СРЕДИ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ НАЧАЛЬНЫХ И СРЕДНИХ КЛАССОВ РОССИЙСКИХ ШКОЛ)

*Анна-Александра Власова*

*Балтийский Федеральный Университет Имени И. Канта*  
*Адрес: ул. Невского 14, Калининград, Россия 236041*

#### ABSTRACT

Globally, to date, there is a massive shortage of school teachers. There are many factors that contribute to the reduction of workers in this area. One of such factors is occupational stress. This study was created to identify whether certain personality traits are related to the stress level of teachers. The purpose of this research is to explore how perfectionism and its dimensions are linked with the occupational stress among teachers in the Russian population.

The study looked at the sample of 66 Russian teachers. The results indicated a positive correlation between socially prescribed perfectionism, however, no significant correlation was revealed between self-oriented perfectionism and occupational stress. This means that high standards and striving for excellence of an individual in relation to himself are not associated with an increased level of occupational stress. At the same time, those individuals who believe that other people have high standards in relation to them tend to experience increased occupational stress.

#### АННОТАЦИЯ

На сегодняшний день во всем мире ощущается нехватка школьных учителей. Есть много факторов, которые способствуют сокращению работников в этой области. Одним из таких факторов является профессиональный стресс. Это исследование было создано, чтобы определить, связаны ли определенные черты личности с уровнем стресса учителей. Целью данного исследования является изучение того, как перфекционизм и его аспекты связаны с профессиональным стрессом среди учителей России.

В исследовании рассматривались выборки из 66 российских (калининградских) учителей. Результаты показали положительную корреляцию между социальным предписанным перфекционизмом, однако, не было обнаружено значительной корреляции между самоориентированным перфекционизмом и профессиональным стрессом. Это означает, что высокие стандарты и стремление к совершенству индивида по отношению к себе не связаны с повышенным уровнем профессионального стресса. В то же время те люди, которые считают, что другие люди имеют высокие стандарты по отношению к ним, как правило, испытывают повышенный профессиональный стресс.

**Key terms:** perfectionism, occupational stress

**Ключевые слова:** перфекционизм, профессиональный стресс

**Introduction:** Teachers take a leading position in terms of job stress level in comparison to other professions [4]. Such tendency might be a major characteristic that makes the profession less attractive for new employees and causes the early retirement of many professionals in this field [4]. Additionally, burnout is another negative consequence of stress that leads to significant loss of trained staff [10]. These factors contribute to the global problem of massive shortage of teachers. Across different countries, the teaching profession is becoming exceedingly less popular and appealing [2]. Unesco's Institute of Statistics (2016) calculated that in order to achieve the

Global Goal of 2030 to make quality education accessible to every child, countries must recruit 68.8 million teachers. Obviously, there are a variety of reasons that contribute to the problem of shortage, however, it is important to take into account all of the possible factors and high occupational stress is evidently one of them. One out of a variety of factors that lead to the increased stress level is perfectionism. In several studies, it was revealed that this personality characteristic is associated with work-related stress [3, 8]. In addition, it was also identified that there are several dimensions of perfectionism, therefore it is crucial to understand how the manifestation of different

dimensions of perfectionism is linked to stress levels in teachers in order to eliminate its negative effect in the work of the professionals [13].

Perfectionism was defined as personality trait represented by the strong desire for impeccability and high personal standards [5]. However, this trait is multidimensional. Hewitt and Flett introduced three dimensions of perfectionism instead of two: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism [5]. Individuals with a self-oriented dimension of perfectionism are highly motivated to achieve their goals and the work that is required for that achievement is enjoyable for them; they do everything they can in order to avoid failure and to complete their tasks perfectly [5]. Other-oriented perfectionism is associated with setting high standards for significant others. Individuals with this dimension tend to have high expectations for parents, friends, co-workers, etc., and strictly evaluate their performance; however, it does not mean that such individuals would apply similar standards for themselves. Lastly, socially prescribed perfectionists tend to experience pressure as a result of an unrealistic belief that people around them have high standards that he or she has to line up to [5]. In fact, this model emphasizes the existence of two major dimensions of perfectionism: adaptive (self-oriented perfectionism) and maladaptive (other-oriented and socially-prescribed perfectionism).

In most recent studies of perfectionism, psychologists designed a model which includes only two dimensions of perfectionism. It was appealed to the classification that highlights two dimensions of perfectionism: perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns [12]. Perfectionistic striving refers to adaptive features of normal, self-oriented perfectionism with positive outcomes and processes [12]. People in this category have less psychological issues such as depression and anxiety, have high self-esteem, and score highly in agreeableness; they are more academically successful and have more social interactions [12]. In contrast, perfectionistic concerns include those characteristics that are unhealthy, maladaptive and neurotic, such as strong worries about making mistakes, socially prescribed perfectionism and lack of satisfaction no matter what the result is. Consequently, such people frequently struggle with numerous psychological issues [12]. In fact, although there is the more recent classification, their classification basically sums up and supplements the types of perfectionism that previously had been already presented by Hewitt & Flett. Therefore, in this study, the first presented classification by Hewitt & Flett will be used.

**Assigned task:** The major problems associated with occupational stress in teachers is shortage of staff as a result of negative impact on the psychological well-being. In such conditions, there is an urgent need for promoting stress-reducing practices and creating a favourable working environment. In order to achieve this, all of the possible factors that cause increased stress have to be taken into account and investigated. One of the factors that is often overlooked is

perfectionism. The aim of this study is to explore the links between occupational stress and three dimensions of perfectionism in teachers with the goal to contribute to the previous research in this area by providing findings on the Russian population. The following hypotheses were formulated:

*H1: Socially prescribed perfectionism will be positively correlated with higher occupational stress level in Russian primary and secondary school teachers.*

*H2: Self-oriented perfectionism will not be correlated with higher occupational stress level in Russian primary and secondary school teachers.*

**Methods:** In the present study participated 66 primary and secondary school teachers from three different Russian schools. All of the participants were Russian citizens. A convenience sampling method was used. Participants were asked to complete two self-administered questionnaires, informed consent forms, and debriefing form. There was no time-limit for completing the questionnaires. Two scales were used for collecting data: Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale is a scale developed to measure the level of perfectionism and determine the nature of its components in individuals [5]. The scale contains 45 statements. Participants expressed the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statements using a 7-point Likert scale. The scale consists of three subscales. Each subscale measures the degree of expression of one of the dimensions of perfectionism. The sum of scores on all three subscales reflects the overall level of perfectionism. The scale is valid and reliable, however, Cronbach alpha is not mentioned [5]. The scale was adapted and translated for Russian population by Vodopyanova [14].

Perceived Stress Scale was developed for measuring "the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful". [1] Only 10 items from the scale are included in the modern version. Participants needed to indicate the level of agreement with each statement using 5-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the higher the level of perceived stress. Although, this scale was primarily designed for measuring general stress, in this research participants were asked to answer questions referring to their experiences at work, where possible. The scale was translated according to the requirements of the procedure, including back translation.

**Results:** in the present study, it was analyzed whether Stress level and two types of perfectionism (Self Oriented and Socially Prescribed) are interconnected. All the analyses were completed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Spearman's correlation was used to investigate the nature of relationships between the variables.

Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) level was calculated in order to estimate the reliability of the instruments, including each scale and subscale. Perceived Stress Scale yielded  $\alpha = .86$ , Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (total score) had  $\alpha = .82$ , Self Oriented Perfectionism subscale had  $\alpha = .72$ , Other Oriented Perfectionism

subscale had  $\alpha = .67$ , Socially Prescribed Perfectionism had  $\alpha = .61$ .

In the present study, there was a total of 66 participants, 58 (87.9 %) out of them were females and 8 (12.1 %) were males. The average age of participants was 49.97 (SD = 9.94), and the average working experience was 23.32 (SD = 11.75; min = 0.5, max = 46). In addition, there were 32 (48.4 %) primary school teachers, 24 (36.4 %) secondary school teachers, and 10 (15.2 %) teachers who indicated that they work both as primary and as secondary school teachers. On average, participants reported that they have been working in their current institution for 11.44 years (SD = 9.84; min = 0.5, max = 33). Furthermore, the mean score for Stress scale was 10.67 (SD = 5.83; range of scores from 1 to 26), for Self-Oriented Perfectionism the mean score was 65.48 (SD = 10.44; range of scores from 35 to 90), for Other Oriented Perfectionism the mean score was 51.83 (SD = 9.704; range of scores from 29 to 76), and for Socially Prescribed Perfectionism the mean

score was 53.64 (SD = 8.76; range of scores from 38 to 82).

*Hypothesis 1: Socially prescribed perfectionism will be positively correlated with higher occupational stress level in Russian primary and secondary school teachers.* According to the scatter plot (see figure 1), the relationship between Stress and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism was linear. Before performing correlational analysis, assumption for normality was checked. Using the Shapiro–Wilk test of normality, it was indicated that Stress scale data was not normally distributed ( $p = 0.28$ ), while data for all of the three Perfectionism subscales was normally distributed. As data for one of the variables was not normal ( $p = 0.28$ ), nonparametric test was used.

Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation was used in investigating the relationships between Stress level and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism. Results showed that there is a significant positive correlation between variables ( $r_s(64) = .34$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the first hypothesis was supported.

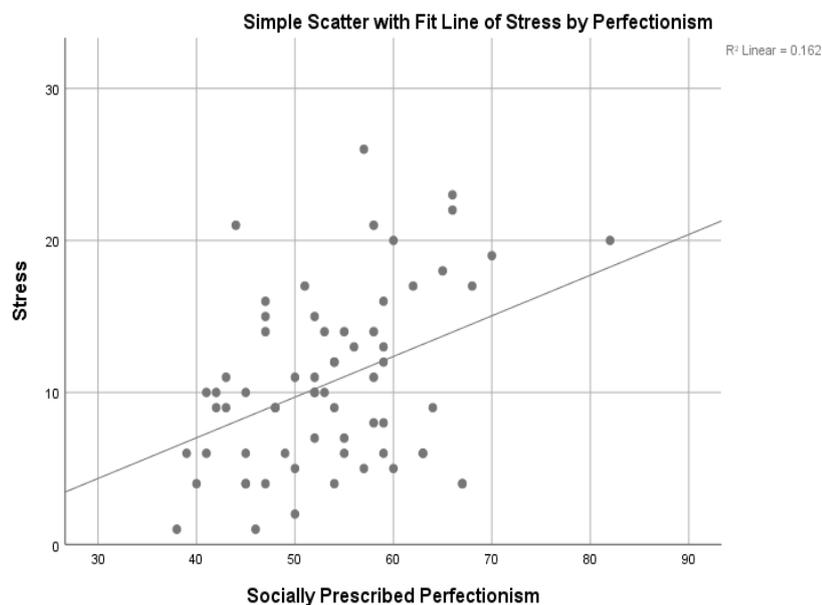


Figure 1. The scatter plot of the correlation between Stress and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism

*Hypothesis 2: Self-oriented perfectionism will not be correlated with higher occupational stress level in Russian primary and secondary school teachers*

According to the scatter plot (see figure 2), the relationship between Stress and Self-Oriented Perfectionism was linear. Spearman's Rank-Order

Correlation was used in investigating the relationship between Stress level and Self Oriented Perfectionism. Data showed that there was no significant correlation between the variables ( $r_s(64) = -.13$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Therefore, the second hypothesis was supported.

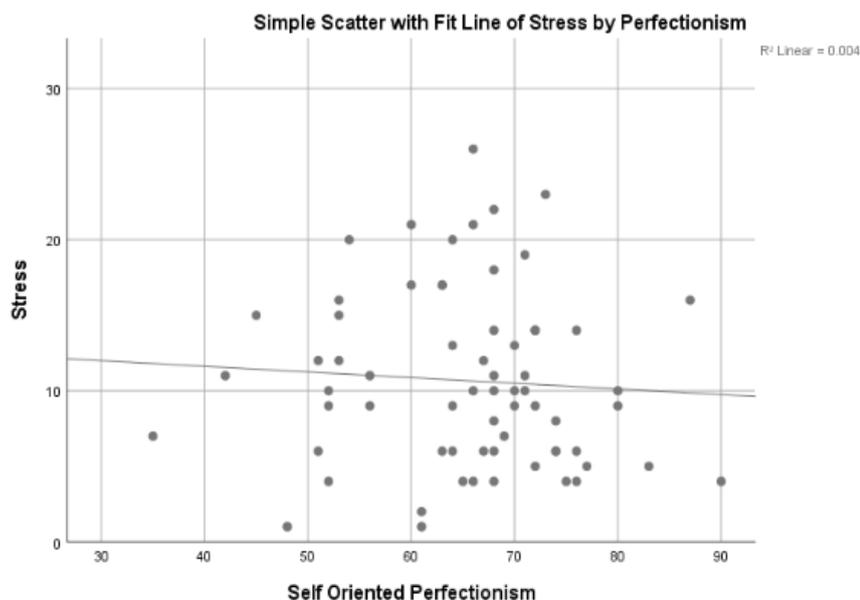


Figure 2. The scatter plot of the correlation between Stress and Self-Oriented Perfectionism

**Discussion:** The study examined the links between the three dimensions of perfectionism and occupational stress and showed that perfectionism is an important factor that contributes to the occupational stress in Russian teachers. Furthermore, as in previous studies, perfectionism appeared to have the opposite effect depending on its dimension in terms of occupational stress. In relation to the first hypothesis, the analysis of the results showed that there is a positive correlation between occupational stress and socially prescribed perfectionism. This finding corresponds with similar research in this area that had been done before [5, 13]. In their studies with teachers, it was also revealed that socially prescribed perfectionism was positively correlated with the occupational stress level. This means that professionals in this area who score high on socially prescribed perfectionism and have a tendency to experience perceived pressure for excellence from others may have an increased occupational stress level.

In relation to the second hypothesis, the relationship between self-oriented perfectionism and occupational stress were not significantly correlated in the present sample. Hewitt, Flett & Hallett and Stoeber & Rennert arrived at similar results, stating that self-oriented perfectionism was not significantly correlated with the measures of teachers' stress [6, 13]. Therefore, teachers who score high on self-oriented perfectionism and have high internal standards and strive for excellence do not necessarily have an increased occupational stress level.

The nature of the present findings can be partially explained by the tendencies among perfectionists in terms of coping with stress. Maladaptive perfectionists typically choose less advantageous coping strategies (e.g., emotion-based) than adaptive perfectionists (e.g., would choose problem-focused) [10]. In turn, socially prescribed perfectionism has a stronger association with the maladaptive characteristics of perfectionism rather than self-oriented [7]. Moreover, it was revealed that self-oriented perfectionism can become entirely

adaptive with the absence of socially prescribed perfectionism. Therefore, the absence of significant correlation between self-oriented perfectionism and occupational stress can be explained by the general ability of the individuals with this characteristic to cope with stress more effectively compared with individuals with the socially prescribed perfectionism dimension.

Vice versa, since socially prescribed perfectionists tend to use less effective coping strategies, they have a greater chance to be exposed to the increased stress level. A possible explanation of why self-oriented perfectionists tend to use more effective strategies in comparison to the socially prescribed perfectionists is their propensity to view a potential problem as a challenge [13]. In a situation when they face a problem, self-oriented perfectionists tend to do their best in order to eliminate it, instead of stressing out [13]. Thus, possibly, the main problem associated with perfectionism in terms of stress is that it prevents the professionals from viewing problems in a healthy way and from appealing to the more effective coping strategies.

These findings can also be explained by the fact that some teachers experience an increased pressure from the parents of their students. Out of ten major stressors in teachers, being evaluated by others is one of the main problems related to teaching [9]. In addition, "perceived pressure from students' parents was positively related to burnout" [13]. Based on these two explanations, it is possible to make an assumption that socially prescribed perfectionism predicts higher level of occupational stress in the field of teaching due to the fact that professionals experience a great pressure from the parents of their students. In turn, those individuals who are oriented to their own high standards only (self-oriented perfectionists) are less affected by the external criticism and consequently experience less stress. It is also logical to presuppose that people who have developed a desire for perfection and high standards before getting into the field can fall into the maladaptive socially prescribed form of

perfectionism later during their career due to frequent criticism that is typical for this occupation.

### Implications

The present study provides additional support for the findings that were revealed in the previous research on this topic. In fact, up to this point, there are only two studies that have looked at the relationships between different types of perfectionism and stress level in teachers. One study was conducted with a sample of Canadian school teachers, and another took place in Germany [6, 13]. Both studies had similar results in terms of the effects that perfectionism has on stress in teachers. However, in the latest literature, there is no investigation that looks at the relationships between these variables in the teaching occupation outside of Europe or North America. Thus, the main contribution of this study is that it demonstrated that the same phenomenon also exists among the Russian population. The finding of this study can be applied in recruitment. Candidates with the potentially harmful personality trait of perfectionism can be additionally assessed in terms of their stress resistance and their psychological fitness to work with children. In addition, making this information available, those professionals who are already involved in the field of teaching and experience difficulties with perfectionism would be able to recognize the existing problem and reduce its effect by seeking professional help. Finally, this knowledge is valuable in school-based prevention programmes against occupational stress.

### Conclusion

The aim of this study is to explore the links between occupational stress and three types of perfectionism in school teachers with the goal to contribute to the previous research in this area by providing findings on the Russian population. In particular, the study investigated whether there is a positive correlation between self-oriented, other-oriented, socially prescribed perfectionism and occupational stress in this particular occupation. The results showed that only one dimension of perfectionism (socially prescribed) is positively correlated with occupational stress level.

### References

1. Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. A global measure of perceived stress // *Journal of health and social behavior*. — 1983. — C.385-396.
2. Dupriez, V., Delvaux, B., & Lothaire, S. Teacher shortage and attrition: Why do they leave? // *British Educational Research Journal*. — 2016. — № 42(1). — C.21-39.
3. Guglielmi, R. S., & Tatrow, K. Occupational stress, burnout, and health in teachers: A

methodological and theoretical analysis // *Review of educational research*. — 1998. — № 68(1). — C.61-99.

4. Hakanen, J. J., Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. Burnout and work engagement among teachers // *Journal of school psychology*. — 2006. — № 43(6). — C.495-513.
  5. Hewitt, P. L., & Flett, G. L. Perfectionism in the Self and Social Contexts: Conceptualization, Assessment, and Association With Psychopathology // *Journal Of Personality & Social Psychology*. — 1991. — №60(3). — C. 456-470.
  6. Hewitt, P. L., Flett, G. L., & Hallett, C. J. Perfectionism and job stress in teachers // *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*. — 1995. — №11(1). — C.32-42.
  7. Klibert, J. J., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., & Saito, M. Adaptive and maladaptive aspects of self-oriented versus socially prescribed perfectionism // *Journal of College Student Development*. — 2005. — №46(2). — C.141-156.
  8. Kokkinos, C. M. Job stressors, personality and burnout in primary school teachers // *British Journal of Educational Psychology*. — 2007. — №77(1). — C.229-243.
  9. Kyriacou, C. Teacher stress: Directions for future research // *Educational review*. — 2001. — №53(1). — C.27-35.
  10. Mearns, J., & Cain, J. E. Relationships between teachers' occupational stress and their burnout and distress: Roles of coping and negative mood regulation expectancies // *Anxiety, Stress & Coping*. — 2003. — №16(1). — C.71-82.
  11. Rice, K. G., & Lapsley, D. K. Perfectionism, coping, and emotional adjustment // *Journal of College Student Development*. — 2001 — №42(2). — C.157-168.
  12. Stoeber, J., & Otto, K. Positive conceptions of perfectionism: Approaches, evidence, challenges // *Personality and social psychology review*. 2006. — №10(4). — C.295-319.
  13. Stoeber, J., & Rennert, D. Perfectionism in school teachers: Relations with stress appraisals, coping styles, and burnout // *Anxiety, stress, and coping*. — 2008. — №21(1). — C.37-53.
  14. Vodopyanova, N. E., & Starchenkova, E. S. Burnout syndrome: diagnostics and prevention // *SPb.: Piter*. — 2005. — C.336.
- Internet resources
15. The World Needs Almost 69 Million New Teachers To Reach The 2030 Education Goals. (2016, October 5) // URL: <http://uis.unesco.org/> (Retrieved November 17, 2017)