

## ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN TEACHERS' ANXIETY AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AND SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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### Abstract

Recent global crises have intensified attention to mental health within school communities, including educators. Teachers' psychological well-being is closely linked to students' academic and emotional outcomes, underscoring the importance of supportive school environments. This study examined associations between teachers' symptoms of anxiety and depression and selected aspects of the school environment, including school connectedness, perceived teaching efficacy, staff collaboration, student behaviour, and parent–teacher communication competence. The sample comprised 638 primary and lower secondary school teachers from Slovakia. Data were collected using standardized instruments (DASS-10, Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire, School Level Environment Questionnaire, and Parent–Teacher Conversation Competence Questionnaire) and analysed using correlational and linear regression analyses. Results revealed significant negative associations between anxiety and depressive symptoms and perceptions of school connectedness ( $r = -.474$ ), teaching efficacy ( $r = -.316$ ), staff collaboration ( $r = -.295$ ), student relationships ( $r = -.289$ ), and communication with parents ( $r = -.315$ ). Higher psychological distress was consistently related to lower perceived support, efficacy, and positive interpersonal relationships within the school context. These findings highlight the importance of fostering supportive and collaborative school climates to promote teachers' mental health.

**Keywords:** *Teachers' mental health, anxiety and depression, school environment, parent–teacher communication.*

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### 1. Introduction

Recent global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have intensified concerns about mental health across occupational groups. Teachers represent a particularly vulnerable population due to sustained emotional demands, increasing workload, and accountability pressures. Research indicates elevated levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, and emotional exhaustion among teachers (Agyapong et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2024), with implications for classroom climate and student outcomes (Collie et al., 2012).

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) provides a useful framework for understanding these associations. Job demands are linked to psychological distress, whereas job resources—such as collegial support, autonomy, and positive school climate—promote engagement and well-being.

School connectedness, defined as a sense of belonging and supportive relationships, has been associated with lower stress and higher job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012). Similarly, perceived teaching efficacy reflects teachers' belief in their capacity to manage classroom demands effectively (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and is linked to resilience and well-being (Gu & Day, 2007).

Staff collaboration contributes to a positive organizational climate, while student behaviour and parent–teacher communication represent important relational dimensions influencing teachers' daily experiences and stress levels (Aloe et al., 2014; Oplatka, 2007).

Despite growing research, fewer studies have examined multiple school-related factors simultaneously in relation to both anxiety and depressive symptoms, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. This study addresses this gap.

## 2. Objectives

The aim of this study was to examine associations between teachers' symptoms of anxiety and depression and selected aspects of the school environment, including school connectedness, perceived teaching efficacy, staff collaboration, student relationships, and parent–teacher communication competence.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Research sample

The sample consisted of 638 primary and lower secondary school teachers from Slovakia. Of these, 40.3% taught at the primary level and 59.7% at the lower secondary level. The mean age was 46.85 years (range 21–69), with an average teaching experience of 20.5 years. Most participants were women (92%).

**3.1.1. Measures.** *DASS-10 – Depression Anxiety Stress Scale* (Halford & Frost, 2021) consists of 10 items rated on a four-point scale (1 = never, 4 = almost always). Higher scores indicate higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms.

*Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire* (Renshaw et al., 2015) consists of 8 items rated on a four-point scale (1 = almost never, 4 = almost always). Higher scores indicate higher perceived school connectedness and teaching efficacy.

*School Level Environment Questionnaire* (Johnson et al., 2007). Two of the four original subscales were used: Collaboration (6 items, 5-point scale) and Student Relations (4 items, 5-point scale).

*Parent–Teacher Conversation Competence Questionnaire* (Gartmeier et al., 2016). The Interpersonal Relationships subscale (3 items) was used, rated on a four-point scale. Higher scores indicate better perceived quality of parent–teacher relationships.

**3.1.2 Statistical analysis.** Data were analysed using correlational analysis and linear regression.

## 4. Results

Significant negative correlations were found between anxiety and depressive symptoms and school connectedness ( $r = -.474$ ), teaching efficacy ( $r = -.316$ ), staff collaboration ( $r = -.295$ ), student relationships ( $r = -.289$ ), and parent–teacher relationships ( $r = -.315$ ). The regression model explained 26.8% of the variance in psychological distress. Significant predictors included school connectedness, relationships with students, and interpersonal relationships with parents (Table 1).

Table 1. Linear regression model of symptoms of depression and anxiety symptoms among teachers.

Predictor	Estimate	t	p	Stand. Estimate	Lower	Upper
<i>Intercept</i>	37.734	22.228	<.001			
<i>SCS</i>	-.702	-7.304	<.001	-.361	-.458	-.264
<i>TEFF</i>	.0313	.267	.789	0.012	-.079	.103
<i>COLL</i>	-.0504	-.723	.470	-.032	-.120	.056
<i>REL</i>	-.175	-2.356	.019	-.102	-.186	-.017
<i>IR</i>	-.681	-5.243	<.001	-.216	-.296	-.135

*SCS* - school connectedness; *TEFF* - teaching efficacy; *COLL* - collaboration with colleagues; *REL* - relationships with students; *IR* - interpersonal relationship with parent.

## 5. Discussion

The findings indicate that higher psychological distress among teachers is associated with lower perceived school connectedness, weaker relationships with students and parents, reduced teaching efficacy, and lower collaboration. These results support the view that teachers' mental health is embedded in the relational and organizational context of schools.

School connectedness emerged as the strongest predictor, consistent with previous research highlighting the protective role of belongingness and collegial support (Collie et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2024). Within the JD-R framework, it may function as a key resource buffering occupational demands.

Relationships with students and parents also contributed significantly, emphasizing the importance of relational aspects of teaching. Emotionally demanding interactions may increase vulnerability to psychological distress (Aloe et al., 2014; Oplatka, 2007).

## 6. Conclusion

This study highlights significant associations between teachers' anxiety and depressive symptoms and key relational aspects of the school environment. School connectedness, positive student relationships, and constructive communication with parents appear particularly important for teachers' well-being.

The findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive school climates and strengthening communication competencies. Organizational support for teachers is essential for both their well-being and the effective functioning of school communities.

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