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Emotional distress and quality of life in teachers during the pandemic

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Abstract: The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated an unparalleled public health exigency globally. The enforced cessation of operations within educational edifices necessitated an expeditious shift from traditional pedagogy to a virtual educational paradigm. The initial and most palpable repercussion of the Coronavirus pandemic was observed in the alteration of human lifestyles. It drastically redefined interpersonal dynamics. Concurrently, there was a discernible transformation in individual attitudes towards self and others. Nevertheless, the exigencies of social isolation were found to be particularly arduous for individuals in solitude. Solitary inhabitants became acutely aware of their isolation, bereft of familial, social, and professional interactions. The imminent peril of the contagion engendered heightened vigilance towards personal health, compelling adherence to stringent regulations, notwithstanding the inherent sociability of humans. The intrinsic human yearning for social interaction, a component of self-actualization, was temporarily obviated. Concomitantly, the deleterious ramifications of social isolation and solitude began to surface. The eradication of customary leisure activities precipitated a void, punctuated by a collective inability to utilize time constructively. The impetus for selecting this subject matter was its contemporaneity and the desire to delve deeper into the tribulations engendered by the pandemic. Experiencing these tribulations from a student's perspective fostered a curiosity about their impact on educators. This discourse aims to elucidate the perturbations in quality of life and emotional distress, as well as the organizational stress effects during the pandemic epoch. Given the abrupt migration to online pedagogy necessitated by the pandemic, the study centers on pre-university educators, employing two digital questionnaires for data collection. The primary goal of this inquiry is to ascertain the correlation between emotional distress and various facets of life quality among pre-university pedagogues.

Keywords: emotional distress, quality of life, teachers, pandemic

1. Quality of life

The concept of quality of life refers to the well-being of people in society and indicates the degree to which a lifestyle is beneficial to them. The concept is multidimensional and includes many areas: conditions, living materials, health, housing, work, family life, work-life balance, subjective well-being. Although this concept focuses mostly on the individual and the

environment in which he lives, the quality of life approach captures the relationship of the individual with the society in which he lives and aspects of social quality.

The paramount characteristic of this methodology is that it furnishes individuals with a „voice” empowering them to appraise the multifaceted aspects of their existence within a methodologically institutionalized context. Consequently, quality of life metrics are transmuted into indicators of precise socio-economic and societal efficacies. Subjective quality of life measures are intrinsically interwoven with the objective milieu, encompassing the personal and social spheres in which individuals subsist. Macro-level determinants such as economic assets, political frameworks, employment nature, educational structures, and healthcare exert significant influence on life quality, shaping the unique conditions of an individual's existence. Nations with advanced economies are distinguished by elevated life quality standards, where citizens experience a sense of well-being and report high satisfaction rates across various life domains. The fundamental role of material resources in securing an adequate quality of life underscores a robust correlation between fiscal earnings and macro-level life quality. Nevertheless, there exists a threshold beyond which income level cedes precedence to other domains, intimating that material assets hold primacy primarily when they fulfill basic human necessities and enable the pursuit of loftier aspirations.

Perceptions and evaluations of the areas of life, however, also include values, personal expectations, but not only the dependence on the structural conditions offered by society. When people assess their own quality of life, they compare their own living conditions with those of others, consider their own and others' living conditions, and compare their personal circumstances with those of a reference group (friends, neighbors, acquaintances).

The concept of quality of life is inherently unclear due to its divided implications. On one hand, it may relate to an individual's personal life experiences, and on the other, to the individual's current living conditions. This duality renders the framework of quality of life inherently subjective and capable of significant variations among individuals. The quality of life paradigm is fundamentally anthropocentric, focused on the necessities and aspirations for life of individuals, as well as their interaction with societal elements necessary for self-affirmation, as articulated by Mărginean (2010). This paradigm gives precedence to the individual's introspection regarding their own life, including evaluations, perceptions, and states of satisfaction. Therefore, from the standpoint of quality of life, any interventions aimed at improving living conditions should stem from what individuals consider essential for an optimal or satisfactory standard of living.

The fundamental issue we face is the absence of a universally accepted definition of quality of life. This construct is profoundly influenced by a multitude of factors, such as an individual's physical and mental health, level of autonomy, and the nature of their interactions with their environment, among others (Ruževičius, 2012; Shin, 1979). Quality of life can be conceptualized as an individual's satisfaction with various aspects of life in relation to the ideal existence they envision. The evaluation of quality of life depends on the individual's value system and the cultural context in which they are situated (Gilgeous, 1998). However, it is essential to recognize that this concept extends beyond the domain of individual health issues.

According to Haas (1999, as cited by Merkys et al., 2008), the concept of quality of life is delineated by five distinct criteria: Firstly, it is an appraisal of an individual's present life circumstances. Secondly, the essence of quality of life is multifarious. Thirdly, it is contingent upon individual values and exhibits variability. Fourthly, it encompasses both objective indicators and subjective evaluations. Fifthly, the most precise assessments of quality of life are those conducted through introspective self-evaluation. The construct of quality of life is

recognized as a multi-tiered entity that reflects various levels of social well-being attainment: the macro layer, denoting the overall social conditions; the community layer, which includes specific opportunities, infrastructure, and service quality; and the individual layer, which pertains to the utilization of social resources and the subjective evaluation of opportunities and satisfaction based on personal experience (Merkys et al., 2008).

It is imperative to acknowledge the interdependence of these layers; a high-quality societal or community life cannot be construed as such if the individual experiences are negative. Conversely, the superior quality of municipal life cannot merely be equated to the aggregation of individual experiences (The Economist, 2005). Therefore, a holistic assessment of quality of life necessitates the consideration of all three strata of social well-being. The constructs of quality of life and happiness are not synonymous, as they are perceived distinctively by individuals in terms of their content, characteristics, and metrics (Susnienė & Jurkauskas, 2009).

Reflecting on the dilemma of happiness, French poet and philosopher Nicolas Chamfort remarked that “happiness is not readily attainable. It is profoundly challenging to find within oneself and impossible to find elsewhere”. In discussions on sustainable development, the conceptual framework developed by Price et al. (1997) must be mentioned; it posits that health and ecological equilibrium are quintessential indicators of quality of life, understood as the culmination of interactions among economic, environmental, and social values (Dooris, 1999). Fundamentally, this framework posits that a discourse on quality of life must not disregard the subjective nor the objective facets, as both are integral to a comprehensive understanding of the concept.

Aligned with this framework, Veenhoven (2000) identifies four requisite dimensions for the attainment of a high quality of life:

- Environmental deliverability, encompassing the opportunities provided by one's surroundings and the capacity to foster social connections.
- Self-assessment, involving the consciousness and perception of one's intrinsic personal attributes, alongside strengths and challenges.
- External benefit, denoting the extent to which an individual possesses life goals or higher aspirations, and the pursuit thereof.
- Inner assessment of quality of life, wherein an individual subjectively evaluates their life quality by juxtaposing lived experiences with their life expectations.

2. Stress and emotional distress

Emotional distress is a prevalent mental health issue in contemporary society, manifesting as a state of emotional suffering predominantly characterized by symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Often, these symptoms co-occur with common somatic complaints and a wide spectrum of chronic conditions, as well as with medically unexplained syndromes. Risk factors encompass stress-related and sociodemographic variables, along with inadequate internal and external coping mechanisms. Stress, in particular, has been corroborated to be associated with depression, anxiety, and burnout. Occupational factors, including high demands, insufficient support, and lack of autonomy, contribute to psychological morbidity. Although extensive research has delved into the symptomatology and epidemiology of psychological disorders, there has been a scarcity of studies delineating the lived experiences of patients afflicted with this medical condition. A review of the scholarly literature concerning emotional distress elucidates five cardinal attributes of patients enduring psychological disorders: perceived inability to cope, alterations in emotional state, discomfort, communication

of discomfort, and distress. Analyses of interviews with 179 Quebec residents revealed that the experiences of living with psychological disorders can be encapsulated into six overarching themes: demoralization and pessimism about the future, anguish and stress, self-deprecation, social withdrawal and isolation, somatization, and introspective retreat.

Hans Selye was a Canadian biochemist known as the „father of stress”. It defines mental stress as a general non-specific reaction of the body to the external action of factors called stressors.

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) define stress as a „cognitive and behavioral effort to reduce, master, or tolerate external or internal demands that exceed personal resources”.

In other words, all definitions of psychological stress so far, including those mentioned above, emphasize the aspect of personal awareness of the harmful potential of stressors.

Emotional and social distress has been highlighted as a major threat to self-regulation. A negative mood increases the likelihood of self-regulatory failure, such that alcoholics report a greater craving for alcohol and smokers have a greater desire to smoke. People in emotional distress are generally more likely to engage in unprotected sex or problem gambling, spend too much money, and behave aggressively.

In addition, the effects of emotional distress mainly act on individuals with a certain mental constitution, predisposed (hereditarily or through previous mental traumas) to the appearance of disorders with maladaptive behavioral implications (objectives of interest for both the doctor and the psychologist).

Within the domain of psychophysiology, the dichotomy between negative stress (distress) and positive stress (eustres) has been articulated, notably by Hans Selye in 1973. The construct of stress has ancient antecedents, with Hippocrates being among the notable precursors to the stress theory. Substantial contributions to the elucidation of the stress concept were also made by figures such as Sigmund Freud, Ivan Pavlov, and Walter Cannon. However, it was Hans Selye who, in 1936, definitively introduced stress into the medical lexicon, formulating the theory of the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). The inception of the term „coping” and the conceptualization of the transactional model of stress emerged in the early 1960s. Historically, the study of stress has evolved through three paradigmatic frameworks.

1. The paradigm of stress as a reaction - (M. Zlate, 2007, p. 570) defined stress as „the physiological or psychological response of the individual/organism to a stressor in the environment”. Biological stress was first addressed and described under the name general adaptation syndrome (SGA) by Selye. It is defined in 1971 by Selye as „the sum of non-specific responses to any request of the organism. It presents a staged evolution, going through three stages, each characterized by a series of changes: the alarm reaction, the resistance stage, the exhaustion stage”. Interest in understanding the negative effects of stress on health and the relationship between stress and disease has led to the development of variants of the physiological model of stress, among which we refer to the pathophysiological model of stress. Many studies and research on the effects of chronic stress have led to the emergence of the concept of burnout. The concept of burnout has changed many times over time, but the most important contribution was made by C. Maslach. After many studies carried out by experts, the following definition was obtained: „Burnout is an affective reaction to permanent stress whose central point is the gradual decrease, over time, of individual energy resources, including the expression of emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue and boredom , cognitive discouragement” (Shirom, 2003, p. 248).

2. Stress as stimulus paradigm – Stress is seen as an environmental condition. Stressors are agents, sources or situations, life events – stimuli that act on an individual. The amount of

stress produced by these stressors depends not only on individual perceptions, but also on factors such as the type of stress and its intensity and duration. The central theme of this paradigm is to identify stressors and classify them according to various criteria, but in the context of unstable stressors and unstable working and living conditions of people, no conclusions can be drawn about stressors.

The stress reaction paradigm, as postulated by M. Zlate (2007, p. 570), conceptualizes stress as „the physiological or psychological response of the individual/organism to an environmental stressor”. The notion of biological stress was initially delineated as the general adaptation syndrome (SGA) by Selye, who in 1971 described it as „the aggregate of non-specific systemic responses to any demand imposed upon the organism”. This process is characterized by a triphasic evolution comprising the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance, and the stage of exhaustion, each marked by a distinctive set of physiological changes. The burgeoning interest in discerning the deleterious impacts of stress on health and its correlation with pathogenesis has fostered the development of various physiological stress models, notably the pathophysiological stress model. The proliferation of research into the ramifications of chronic stress has given rise to the construct of burnout. This concept has undergone numerous revisions, with a seminal contribution from C. Maslach. Through extensive scholarly investigation, burnout has been defined as "an affective response to persistent stress characterized by the progressive diminution of an individual's energetic reserves, manifesting as emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, ennui, and cognitive disenchantment" (Shirom, 2003, p. 248).

2.1. Occupational stress

„Stress is the non-specific response to any demand” (Selye, 1956). Stress is an external force operating on a system, be it an organization or an individual. Strain is the change in the state of the internal system that results from this external stress and stress, they are not synonymous” (Hall & Mansfield, 1971). Organizational stress has also been defined in terms of a mismatch between a person's skills and abilities and the demands of the job as well as a mismatch in terms of a person's needs provided by the work environment (French et al., 1974). (Caplan et al. 1975) define it as „any feature of the work environment that poses a threat to the individual”. (Margarolis et al., 1974) utilizes (Cannon, 1929)'s concept of physiological homeostatis by defining stress as „a job condition that interacts with the characteristics of the waker to disrupt psychological or physiological homeostasis”. Beehr & Newman, 1978, after an extensive review of selected research on stress, define "workplace stress as a condition in which work-related factors interact with the worker to change (disrupt or enhance) his psychological or physiological state , so that the person (mind / body) is forced to deviate from normal functioning”. Beehr and Newman suggest that stress arises from conditions that can be considered either positive (enhancement) or negative (disruption).

McGrath (1976) prefers to define stress in terms of a set of conditions as having stress in it. Stress involves an interaction between the person and the environment. Something „outside” happens that presents a person with a demand, or constraint, or opportunity for behavior. McGrath suggests that situations have the potential for stress when they have demands that are perceived to threaten to exceed a person's ability to meet them and where there are substantial differences in the rewards and costs of meeting versus not meeting the demands. He adds, however, that the uncertainty of rewards and costs also influences a person's arousal (an indicator of stress).

Cooper & Marshall (1976) indicate „occupational stress refers to negative environmental factors or stressors (eg work overload, role conflict/ambiguity, poor working conditions) associated with a particular job”.

From these common definitions of stress it appears that in most studies of stress in organizational behavior and industrial psychology, organizational qualities and individual qualities have been used to define stress (French, 1974; Cooper & Marshall, 1976; McGrath, 1976; Beehr & Newman, 1978).

McGrath (1976) suggested and demonstrated the importance of uncertainty in stress. The essence of the relationship between uncertainty and stress is that although an individual may be under dynamic conditions or opportunity, constraint and/or demand vis-à-vis his desires, it is only when there is doubt or uncertainty as to whether he will be seized opportunity, purple constraint, or conquered demand (avoided loss) that there is stress. McGrath (1976) reported that stress was highest for those individuals who perceived that they were uncertain whether they would win or lose and lowest for those individuals who believed that winning or losing was a certainty.

The assumption here is that if winning or losing were an unimportant outcome, there would be no stress. The reference to important outcomes refers to the situation in which an individual can gain something important, be prevented from something important, or have something important removed. What is an important outcome is determined by an individual's needs and values, their relative importance, and the correspondence between the outcome and needs and values. What is an important outcome to one individual may therefore not be important to another. Because an individual may have multiple needs and values of varying importance, and because situations of opportunity, constraint, and/or demand will vary and therefore produce outcomes of varying importance. And the more uncertainty is attached to multiple outcomes related to solving a single condition, the more stress and individual experiences from that condition.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Objection

(O1) The Examination of Emotional Distress and Its Influence on Life Quality Amidst the Pandemic Era.

(O2) An Analysis of Salient Determinants Affecting Life Quality and Their Correlation with Emotional Distress.

3.2. Hypotheses

1. It is hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between self-esteem and emotional distress.

2. There is a negative correlation between global quality of life and emotional distress.

3. There is a negative correlation between the importance of creativity during the pandemic period and emotional distress.

4. There is a negative correlation between game importance and emotional distress.

3.3. Study participants

The chosen group of participants was composed of 60 pre-university teachers, 52 of whom were women and 8 men, aged between 18 and 65 from the Dobrogea area. The

participants are also differentiated by their marital status, 48 people being married while 12 are not, and by whether the people have children or not.

3.4. Research tools

In the execution of this research, the Emotional Distress Profile (EDP) alongside the Quality of Life Inventory were employed to gauge emotional distress. These instruments measure the degree of contentment with specific life domains as well as the significance attributed to these domains by the respondents.

4. Analysis and processing of the results

Hypothesis 1 – It is hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between self-esteem and emotional distress.

Tabelul 1. Correlations

			emotional distress profile	self-esteem
Spearman's rho	emotional distress profile	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,333**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,009
	self-esteem	Correlation Coefficient	-,333**	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,009	.
		N	60	60

From this table we can see that the value of Sig. (2-tailed) < 0.05, indicating that this correlation is statistically significant between the two measured parameters. At the same time, the value of -0.333 of the Spearman coefficient shows the existence of a weak negative correlation between self-esteem and emotional distress. We can say that the hypothesis has been confirmed, which is also demonstrated by the cloud of points below.

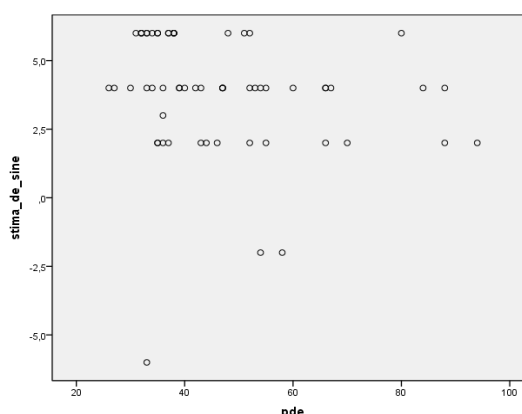


Figure 1. Point cloud of the correlation between self-esteem and emotional distress

Hypothesis 2 - There is a negative correlation between global quality of life and emotional distress.

Tabelul 2. Correlations

			pde	global_quality
Spearman's rho	pde	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,358**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,005
		N	60	60
	global_quality	Correlation Coefficient	-,358**	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,005	.
		N	60	60

The obtained significance value, Sig. (2-tailed), is less than 0.05, denoting a statistically significant relationship between the two evaluated variables. Concurrently, a Spearman's rho value of -0.358 suggests the presence of an inverse correlation of weak magnitude between overall quality of life and emotional distress. This evidence substantiates the proposed hypothesis. The dispersion plot provided further corroborates the aforementioned correlational link.

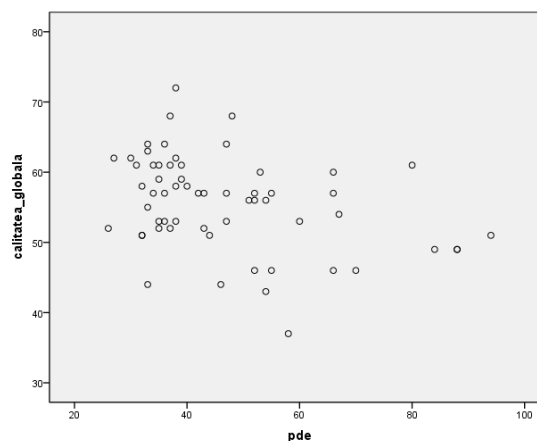


Figure 2. Point cloud of the correlation between global quality of life and emotional distress

With respect to the second hypothesis, the observed correlation coefficient of -0.358 is indicative of a weak negative relationship. Despite the modest strength of this correlation, the impact of emotional distress on quality of life is evident and cannot be dismissed, particularly within the context of the current pandemic. The advent of the virus and the consequent pandemic has undeniably been a source of significant stress universally. Scholarly evidence indicates a precipitous decline in the quality of life of many during the pandemic epoch. Beyond the pervasive apprehension for personal and communal health, a notable stressor during this period has been the radical transformation in professional workflows. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2019 has precipitated considerable disruption across educational landscapes globally, engendering elevated stress levels and mental health challenges among students and educators (Jones, 2020). Amidst these uncertain times, educators have been compelled to adapt their pedagogy and curricula to remote teaching modalities and virtual student engagement. Teachers

have encountered substantial alterations in their customary professional practices, transitioning to an exclusively online teaching environment, necessitating swift adaptation to surmount these emergent challenges. This has entailed new responsibilities and a rapid acclimation to technological platforms, as well as a spontaneous acquisition of knowledge. Consequently, the most pronounced emotional states reflected in responses to the emotional distress questionnaire have been worry, preoccupation, anxiety, and panic.

The extant literature on the psychosocial impacts of the pandemic is scant with regards to the measurement of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms amongst educators; however, the available studies underscore the manifestation of psychological symptoms in this cohort, thereby highlighting the criticality of reinstating normal operations within educational institutions. A recent investigation within the Arab region elucidated that educators have been experiencing psychological disturbances commonly associated with pandemic conditions, including anxiety, depression, domestic strife, and dissolution of marriages, all of which impinge upon their pedagogical efficacy (al Lily et al., 2020). Research conducted within three Chinese cities during the pandemic period identified an anxiety prevalence rate of 13.67% among teachers, with higher anxiety levels observed in women compared to men and a greater symptomatology in older individuals. Another Chinese study from March indicated a 9.1% prevalence of stress symptoms in teachers, emphasizing the necessity for psychological support (Zhou and Yao, 2020). Similarly, a Spanish study from the onset of the pandemic recorded increased workloads, psychosomatic issues, and burnout among teachers (Prado-Gascó et al., 2020).

Longitudinal research has consistently demonstrated an inverse relationship between quality of life and stress. Elevated stress levels are associated with diminished professional performance, increased healthcare expenditures, and a lower quality of life. Numerous studies have identified a significant correlation between psychological stressors and adverse physical and mental health outcomes. Moreover, life stressors are negatively correlated with quality of life and overall well-being, where such events are characterized by significant disruptions to regular activities, regardless of whether these events are perceived as positive or negative.

Stressors have been empirically identified as contributory factors to a spectrum of health pathologies, encompassing cardiovascular pathology, oncological conditions, metabolic disturbances, and affective disorders. Such stressors have been implicated in the genesis of workplace behavioral modifications, manifesting as attenuated work engagement, compromised job performance, and reduced occupational satisfaction. These alterations may culminate in increased rates of work absence, punctuality issues, and heightened staff attrition. Elucidating the nexus between life quality and stressors, inclusive of occupational stress, is pivotal for devising strategic interventions aimed at mitigating the deleterious effects of stressors, thereby enhancing the life quality within the labor force.

An investigation encompassing 16,000 personnel at the Esfahan Steel Company was conducted to scrutinize the correlation between life stress events and quality of life. The study revealed that both social and personal stress profiles bear an inverse association with life quality, resonating with extant literature that examines the accumulative impact of life stress events on life quality and well-being.

In a population-based analysis of individuals diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in Singapore, elevated life stress event scores were inversely related to physical and mental health indices. Staniute et al.'s inquiry into 560 coronary heart disease patients in Lithuania disclosed a negative correlation between life stress events and quality of life

Further, a research endeavor focusing on adults aged 60 and above in Bhutan found a negative association between quality of life and stressful events encountered during both childhood and adulthood.

Within the domain of industrial-organizational psychology, work-induced stress is characterized as a response to workplace stimuli that elicit adverse reactions in the affected individuals (Muchinsky, 2007). A prevalence of psychosomatic disorders, tension, fatigue, cephalalgia, and burnout has been documented among educators (Scheuch et al., 2015).

Hypothesis 3 – There is a negative relationship between the importance of creativity during the pandemic period and emotional distress.

Tabelul 3. Correlations

		pde	creativity
Spearman's rho	pde	Correlation Coefficient	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,356**
		N	60
	creativity	Correlation Coefficient	-,356**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,005
		N	60

It can be seen that the value of Sig. (2-tailed) < 0.05, indicating a significant correlation between the two measured factors. Since the Spearman coefficient value is -0.356, the correlation between creativity and emotional distress is a weak negative one. We can say that the hypothesis has been confirmed.

This cloud of points demonstrates the linearity between the two concepts.

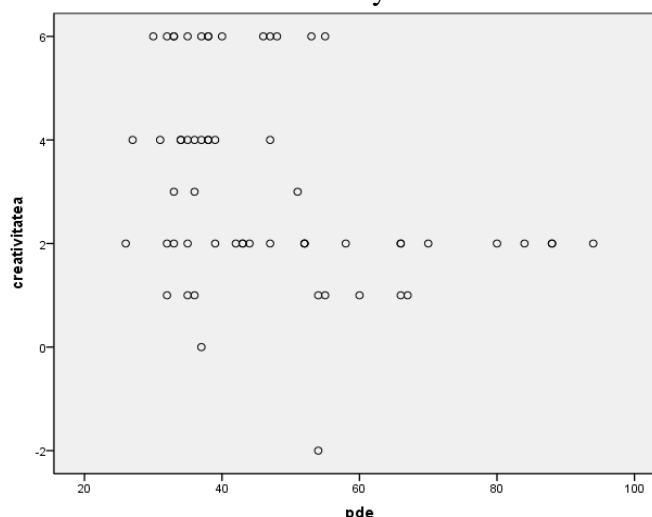


Figure 3. Point cloud of the correlation between creativity and emotional distress.

Within the scope of the third hypothesis, the investigation scrutinized the association between the perceived importance of creativity during the pandemic and its influence on emotional distress. The statistical verification of this hypothesis is present, yet the correlation's

modest magnitude suggests complex psychological interpretations. One perspective posits that heightened creativity may serve as a coping mechanism for those impacted by the pandemic, facilitating the alleviation of anxiety and emotional distress through imaginative engagement in activities such as painting or photography. Conversely, the pandemic may have impinged on the creative individuals' potential, constraining their ability to express creativity, potentially escalating stress and anxiety levels.

In the educational context, the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated profound uncertainty for educators and students alike. During this period, the creative convictions of teachers and students have played a salutary role in the adaptive management of stress, the discovery of joy, and the resilient recovery from setbacks. The cultivation of an adaptive creative mindset is paramount in aiding educators to navigate the exigencies and stress associated with remote teaching, particularly for those students who are most disadvantaged.

There has been a paucity of longitudinal research exploring the nexus between educators' creative beliefs, their perceptions of creative support within their work environments, and their overall job-related well-being, especially under the duress of the ongoing pandemic. International studies underscore the significance of teachers' beliefs in creativity on their pedagogical practices (Bereczki and Kárpáti, 2018). Moreover, the pedagogical atmosphere that educators curate and foster is instrumental in the creative development of students (Davies et al., 2013). The educators' convictions influence their propensity to integrate creative methodologies in the classroom, which in turn has implications for the students' creative evolution.

The various facets of an individual's creative endowment have been associated with overall well-being throughout one's life (Cohen, 1989) and the resilience to recover from challenges amidst adversity (Sweetman et al., 2011). For instance, Maslow (1962) suggested that the creative faculties of individuals are conducive to self-actualization and the holistic integration of the self. Pertaining to occupational well-being, research analyzing over 12,000 daily entries indicates that positive affective states and motivational drives are catalysts for creative output, that meaningful work underpins daily well-being, and that creativity in the workplace engenders the most enriching emotional experiences (Amabile, 2017). Consequently, the literature emphasizes the critical role of the work environment in fostering educators' creative growth and well-being.

Teacher well-being, during periods of heightened uncertainty and stress, may be influenced by their creative belief systems. Creative behaviors of individuals often emerge from sustaining a mindset conducive to creative growth, perceiving setbacks as opportunities for development (Amabile et al., 1996; HASS et al., 2016), and harboring a sense of self-efficacy and autonomy regarding one's creative capabilities (Karwowski and Beghetto, 2018). A creative growth mindset, which embraces errors as avenues for improvement, likely characterizes educators' dispositions when confronted with ambiguous situations. Creative advancement is feasible only when individuals are receptive to vulnerability and inclined towards risk-taking, particularly under uncertain conditions – a fundamental aspect of the creative process (Amabile, 2017). Indeed, the propensity for intellectual risk-taking can moderate the relationship between creative confidence and tangible creative endeavors and outcomes – absent a willingness to undertake intellectual risks, the nexus between creative self-assurance and action may dissolve (Beghetou et al., 2020). Moreover, the meaningfulness and personal gratification derived from educators' work facilitate growth, whereas heightened stress and insufficient support can stifle creative risk-taking (Beghetou, 2019). Navigating substantial challenges, such as distance learning, necessitates self-assuredness. Teacher self-efficacy in creativity is posited to foster

greater tenacity and continuity when encountering adversities (Ventura et al., 2015), and is associated with augmented resilience and buoyancy amidst challenges.

Creative endeavors often demand perseverance through ambiguous and uncertain challenges. Inventing novel concepts requires a tolerance for ambiguity; a deficiency in this tolerance may result in a premature dismissal of novel ideas or potentialities (Lubart et al., 2013). Creative anxiety, conceptually linked, may ensue from the encounter with uncertainty in pedagogical contexts, potentially escalating negative affect and stress levels. Creative anxiety embodies the unease, concern, and apprehension stemming from the necessity to think inventively, with a focus on novelty or devising unique methodologies (Daker et al., 2019). To mitigate creative anxiety and bolster teachers' creative convictions during stressful periods, emphasis can be placed on environmental support and the provision of pertinent professional development opportunities. Such developmental experiences can concentrate on nurturing creative growth, buoyancy, well-being, and enduring joy through capitalizing on fleeting creative opportunities within routine classroom activities that shape interpersonal dynamics and the educational milieu (Gajda et al., 2017).

These episodes can fortify educators' beliefs, influence, and attitudes towards creativity, while also fostering resilience and well-being, thereby alleviating stress, anxiety, and the negative impacts on their professional duties. It is crucial to note that positive emotions are integral to creative growth; however, maintaining positive beliefs and attitudes about creativity does not necessarily preclude negative affective experiences, particularly amid a pandemic. For instance, educators who engaged in professional development to incorporate drama-based pedagogies reported a broad emotional range, from fear and vulnerability to jubilation and enthusiasm (Anderson and Beard, 2018). Yet, the perception of a safe space was fundamental to their readiness and capacity to engage playfully in teaching and learning, bolstering confidence through risk-taking, even in the presence of fear. A typical human reaction to uncertainty includes fear and anxiety, which can, in fact, augment vigilance within the creative process (de DREU et al., 2008). Should educators confront heightened anxiety when facing novel, creativity-demanding challenges during school disruptions, they might also be susceptible to increased secondary traumatic stress due to the complexities of navigating such uncertainties for themselves and their students. Hence, their personal creative anxiety and the trauma experienced by their students could accumulate, compounding stress. Conversely, mastering the management of creative anxiety may also attenuate the intensity of secondary traumatic stress. This investigation preliminarily examines this dynamic.

Hypothesis 4 – There is a negative correlation between game importance and emotional distress.

Tabelul 4 Correlations

			pde	the game
Spearman's rho	pde	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,364**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,004
		N	60	60
	the game	Correlation Coefficient	-,364**	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,004	.
		N	60	60

It can be seen that the value of Sig. (2-tailed) < 0.05, indicating a significant correlation between the two measured factors. Since the Spearman coefficient value is -0.364, the correlation between game importance and emotional distress is a weak negative one. We can say that the hypothesis has been confirmed.

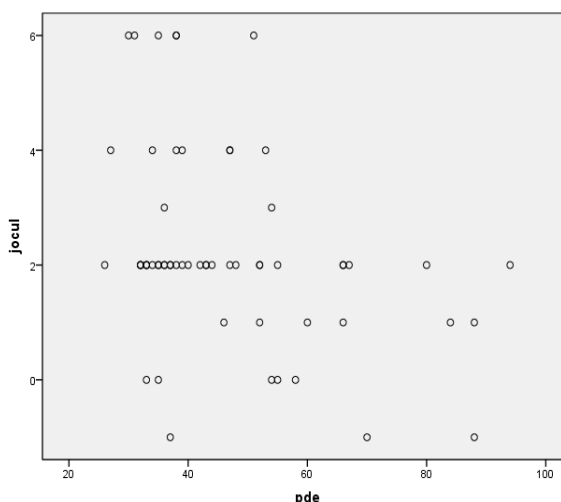


Figure 4. Point cloud of the correlation between gaming and emotional distress.

Regarding hypothesis 4, we obtained a negative correlation of -0.364, which means that this hypothesis is significant but at a weak level.

Play refers to the quality of life activity that people do in their free time to relax, have fun, or improve themselves. These activities can mean either watching a movie or reading a book or activities such as sports and visiting friends, these last two activities being limited during the pandemic period. The role of the game is to increase positive emotions in people's lives and to increase psychological well-being. The game, in people's lives, has the role of a defense mechanism (coping) in the face of stress. However, to understand the role of play in the process of coping with stress, it is important to note the research done towards this endeavour. Much research has been devoted to testing various models that might explain the stress process, including Iwasaki's meditation model and the coping process model of stress. The meditation model indicates that the effect of stress on psychological outcomes is mediated through coping resources, whereas the process model of coping with stress treats stress as more dynamic and accommodating multiple outcomes, which can be positive and negative, immediate and long-term. long term.

Studies have associated play with various positive psychological outcomes, such as positive emotions and psychological well-being. In general, play has been conceptualized as an individual disposition that manifests itself through the qualities or attributes that individuals bring to their environment. Research has also shown that people with higher levels of play are more flexible when faced with problems, indicating the possible contribution of play to combating stress.

Play in adults has been empirically shown to relate to a number of psychological attributes, including creativity, humor, the ability to have fun, motivation, and influence and expressiveness. Play serves a protective function even in the most difficult circumstances, unmasking psychosocial difficulties (eg, anxiety, depression, emotional distress) that individuals may encounter and highlighting the adaptive qualities they use to cope with adversity. Play allows people to express their emotional connection, a perspective that aligns well with the claim that play is the key to emotional survival.

At different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers examined how children used playful activities to cope with social isolation and school closures and to understand the virus itself.

A study conducted by Tegano revealed significant relationships between adult creativity, play, and what she called "ambiguity tolerance," referring to how prone a person is to deal with ambiguous situations. She found that both play and tolerance of ambiguity were significantly related to the creativity of elementary school teachers and staff. The author noted that these findings occurred when creativity was viewed as a personality trait as opposed to a cognitive trait.

Conclusiones

The quality of life of people in general has been affected by this pandemic through the many restrictions that have been applied, with them increasingly experiencing feelings of anxiety and emotional distress. The teachers in question were subjected to unprecedented difficulties in this pandemic situation, having to adapt to the new requirements.

Through this research, we looked at what impact emotional distress had on the quality of life during this pandemic period and what effects certain factors such as self-esteem, creativity and play have on emotional distress. Thus, through this work we observed negative correlations between these quality of life factors and emotional distress in pre-university teachers during the pandemic period.

This research makes clear the importance of this topic and the need for more thorough research in this direction, quality of life being one of the most important aspects of everyone's life. We can conclude that the objectives of our study were achieved through the 4 hypotheses that proved valid.

Although the results confirmed our hypotheses, we can say that considering the exceptional conditions we are in and what we are experiencing is new and not so easy to accept there are also certain limitations such as the online application of the questionnaires and the limited number of participants.

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