

## COPING WITH SCHOOL FAILURE, STRESS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT IN THE CONTEXT OF SELF-CARE

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**Abstract:** The article deals with school failure coping and searching for the relations to stress, social support and selected areas of self-care. It is based on the assumption, that self-care, which is absent in the complex perception in the preparation for the profession of a social worker, as well as for practitioners, can be related to the selected phenomena. The sample of 217 social science students confirmed the existence of the relations between the stress experienced and the selection of strategy for coping with school failure. Stress positively correlated with the social support as well, in particular with the areas as family and friends. Differences in the selection of strategies of school failure coping depending of the faith, alcohol abuse frequency and place of residence.

**Keywords:** Coping with school failure, stress, social support, self-care.

### 1 Introduction

Social work is a very demanding assisting profession. Its domain is providing assistance and care to the others. The social workers definitely need good intentional long life self-care to be able to perform their profession well. There are many studies proving the fact, that the workers in the most demanding positions neglect self-care (Figley 2002, Burton, Pakenham, Brown 2010, Hricová, Vargová 2014), which can show by occurrence of various negative phenomena at work (Figley 2002).

### 2 Self-care

Self-care is an extensive term involving several parts and it is presented in the form of several concepts. The literature defines self-care as a system of individual activities serving to help the assisting workers to cope with different external and internal challenges they face. Its definitions and contents are different regarding their professions. However, their essence is aware/intentional performing activities for regulation of human functioning and development (Denyes, Orem, Bekel 2001).

Godfrey, Harrison, Lysaght, Lamb, Graham a Oakley (2011) defined according to contentual analysis 139 definitions of self-care, seven factors which were contained in the definitions and in which they differed. The factors were assorted from the aspects of: health, illness and disability, general consequences: self-care performer, professional health care workers and the aspect of health care system.

Many of the definitions are based on the medical aspect and they involve above all the self-care part. According to Lovas (2014) it is important to clarify the relationship between the terms self-care and health care. The term of self-care involves from the psychological aspect above all the aspect "self". In such perception it is possible to understand health care as one of the parts of self-care. Self-care then according to Lovas (2014) presents a summary of intentionally, self-regulation based performed activities related to health, physical and psychological well-being and personal development.

The issue of self-care is within social work practice often discussed in the context of ethical issues. A part of keeping the competencies of social workers within providing professional services it is important for the assisting worker to be in the state of physical, mental and spiritual well-being (Profitt 2009). An ideal concept of self-care is its widest perception. Abroad it has been considered an inevitable part of performing assisting professions for decades.

In performing the assisting professions, it is appropriate to view self-care as a part of the professional life and it should be involved in the preparation for occupation.

### 3 Coping with school failure

Stress and coping with it are at present a part of everyday life. For the young people school and coping with school failure can present some of the stress sources and burden in it-self. Success or failure at school can prove to which extent the student has fluffed his studying objectives. We can talk about success, if the student has managed higher standards with small problems. Failure is characterized by difficulties and incapability to achieve requested objectives and often it involves other problems (Chitty 2009). The consequences of school failure can have far reaching impact on the individual, educational problems are for young people often related to undesired reactions.

There are several theories, which explain school failure from different aspects (Chitty 2009). The theory of intelligence is based on finding IQ score. Supporters of this theory express opinion, that intelligence can be hereditary. However, this theory is severely criticized by sociologists, who claim, that there is correlation between genetics and environmental impacts, that IQ tests are culturally prejudiced – non-objective, as they are based on the average values. The theory of cultural deprivation relates school success to the communication skills. According to its supporters, there is a relation between socio-economic factors and language skills of the individual. This has according to them an impact on education of an individual and his school success (Giavrimis, Papanis 2008).

The theory of material deprivation relates school failure to poverty. This theory is based on the idea, that poor environment brings about vulnerability to diseases, accidents and lacking educational opportunities. The theory of interaction assumed, that the evaluation criteria of teachers are based on their cultural background. This is related to certain stereotypes, which can put some students to disadvantage, some authors even claim that there are the so called attributes if an ideal student, which can be considered by the teacher to be a more important criterion than learning (Wiggan 2007).

According to Carey (2003), regarding school failure, it is necessary to consider factors from several areas: the student's personality, which involves factors as IQ score, faith in own skills, motivation, in relation to school mates or absences. Another area is represented by school factors involving general climate and culture of the school, educational plans, evaluation, size of class rooms, qualities of teachers and quantity of homework. The family represents the factors as interest of parents in their child's education, education of parents, discipline in the family, relations in the family. The last area is the aspect of gender, race and cultural and socio economic indicators.

The issue of success and failure at school is often related also to specialisation, or target orientation and motivation of students. Target orientation is also related to coping with school failure. According to Brdar, Rijavec and Loncaric (2006) there is a relation between target orientation, coping with failure and school success. In their opinion it is important to distinguish learning orientation, where the emphasis is placed on understanding, acquiring knowledge, improving competencies and skills. The main idea is that performance of the rest is irrelevant, if I try, I will achieve success, it is irrelevant if the success is achieved by the rest. Performance orientation is characterized by the effort to prove high skills and evaluation in comparison to the others, with efforts or endeavor of no value.

### 4 Social support

Social support has been analyzed in more details in the last 40 years. The first authors dealing with it are Cassel, Caplan a Cobb (Mareš 2004). This theory involves different specific approaches which research it in different lines. Some experts (House 1981, Stewart 1993) point out, that in the quantity of definitions it is

impossible to find conformity in definition or method of measuring social support. After summing up definitions it is possible to state at least the fact, that social support means existence of close people who are able and willing to provide assistance to an individual when needed. For the purposes of this research the author worked with the perceived social support provided in three lines: family, friends and other close people.

Social support was one of the first identified factors impacting, along with unfavourable life situations, mental well-being and health of a human, which has been confirmed by many research studies (Šolcová 1999). According to Šolcová and Kebza (1999) it is possible to distinguish two types of social support: a bumper model related to coping with stress and the model of main impact, which assumes protective character of the social support from the aspect of health, regardless of the stress experienced. In this research the author deals with the bumper model researching the relation between social support, stress and coping with school failure.

Another factor specifying social support is its direction, when it is distinguished, if support is given or taken. Kebza and Šolcová (1999) talk about anticipated and gained support and objectives – really provided and expected support. Majority of measuring tools finds perceived social support, which is rather discussed theme. Social support and social network is utilised above all in cases of coming across challenging situations.

## 5 Research method

The research verified the relations between school failure coping, social support perceived, the extent of stress experienced and the selected characteristics of respondents.

217 respondents – social work students participated in the research, out of those 18 men and 194 women. 129 respondents were full time students, 83 part time students. Their age ranged from 18 to 53 years, the average 25,228 (St. dev. 5,928).

Methodology applied in the research:

- A questionnaire PSS (Cohen), a questionnaire of ten items, total score was used,
- The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet), of twelve items which finds the extent of the social support perceived in three parts: family, other people, friends,
- Items finding the selected characteristics of respondents: faith, size of the town of origin, form of study, and alcohol abuse,
- A questionnaire The School Failure Coping Scale (Brdar, Rijavec 1997), finding seven strategies of coping with school failure: anger (Cronbach's alpha 0,746), taking responsibilities (Cronbach's alpha 0,739), forgetting (Cronbach's alpha 0,717), social support (Cronbach's alpha 0,751), inadequate reactions (Cronbach's alpha 0,829), parents (Cronbach's alpha 0,498), relaxation. This questionnaire, which is not officially translated in Slovak, verified the variability of the individual sub – scales (strategies) via Cronbach alpha. As the alpha value of the strategy regarding the parents (involves 4 items: I will not tell it to my parents, I will tell them when I get a better mark, I will complain to them, I look for assistance of the parents) reached the value 4,98, according to the contentual analysis of the items, there was a decision to divide this strategy into two strategies: reporting to parents and social support of parents. These strategies then reached alpha value 0,629 for the items marked: I will not tell it to my parents, or when I get a better mark, which was marked as the strategy of reporting it to the parents and the value of 0,710 for the items I will complain to parents, I look assistance from my parents, which were marked as the strategy of social support of the parents.

Research results were divided into three parts according to the set assumptions. The first part research searched relations

between stress and social support. The second part searched relations between stress and coping with school failure. The third part was represented by a series of calculations of t-tests, testing the differences in experiencing stress, perceived social support and coping with school failure according to the elected personal characteristics.

Table 1 presents the result of calculating correlation finding the relation between the stress experienced and perceived social support.

Table 1 Relation between stress experienced and social support perceived

	Social support	Family	Relatives	Friends
stress	Pearson corr.	-0,177	-0,113	-0,246
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,012*	0,111	0,000**

Negative relation was confirmed between the stress perceived and social support perceived, provided by the family and friends. So, those respondents who perceive support perceived, indicate less stress perceived and vice versa, those who experience more stress, feel less social support provided from the family and friends.

Table 2 presents the result of correlation between the stress experienced and coping with school failure.

Table 2 Relation between the stress experienced and coping with school failure

Strategies of coping with school failure	The extent of stress experienced	
	Pearson corr.	Sig. (2-tailed)
Anger	0,368	0,000**
Responsibility	0,359	0,000**
Forgetting	0,140	0,051
Social support	0,190	0,008*
Inadequate reactions	0,418	0,000**
Remaining uninvolved	0,021	0,771
Reporting o parents	0,183	0,010*
Support from parents	0,114	0,112

According to the results we can state, that confirming positive relations between the measure of stress experienced and selection of strategies of coping with stress failure. The strongest relation was demonstrated between stress and inadequate reactions. That means the stronger stress, the more frequent selection of inappropriate reaction to the particular situation. The stronger stress is, the more the individual tries to search social support in his environment (not from parents), the more he postpones reporting the failure to parents (I will not tell them, I will tell when I get a better mark). However it was found that the more stress is experienced, the more the individuals resolve the situation responsibly, although they experience more anger with this stress.

Table 3 Differences from the aspect of the form of study

Coping strategies	ft study	pt study	p	t
Anger	2,318	2,063	2,428	0,016*
Responsibility	3,206	3,419	-2,154	0,032*
Social support	2,780	2,513	2,213	0,028*
Remaining uninvolved	3,396	3,071	2,617	0,010**
Reporting to parents	2,232	1,642	4,102	0,000***

The third part of the research was finding differences in stress experiencing, perception of social support and selection of strategies for coping with school failure according to the form of study, faith, size of the town of origin and frequency of alcohol - use. For the purpose of transparency only those results are stated, which found statistically significant differences.

It has been found out, that from the aspect of the form of study, where respondents were compared, there were full time and part time students, there were differences in utilising the strategy of

anger, applied more frequently by the full time students. The strategy of responsibility was more frequently utilised by the part time students, social support was searched more by full time students, they also remain uninvolved. Telling, resp. not telling the bad situation at school to the parents is more often presented by full time students, however, it is necessary to consider, that majority of part time students are of older age, they often live with their own family, where reporting study results to parents is irrelevant.

Table 4 Differences from the aspect of faith

Coping strategies	Believers	Non - believers	p	t
Anger	2,279	2,021	2,122	0,035*
Inadequate reactions	2,031	1,731	2,129	0,034*

It was found out, that in comparison of utilising strategies of the respondents from the aspect of faith, the believers more often utilise strategy of anger and inadequate reactions. Utilising these two strategies is not surprising in combination, because a relation between them was proven in correlation (Pearson corr. 0,538\*\*). Surprise is the preference of these emotions orientated strategies by the believing part of the respondents.

Table 5 Differences from the aspect of the size of place of residence (cut point 50.000 inhabitants)

Coping strategies	Up to 50 thou	Over 50 thou	p	t
Anger	2,310	2,066	2,231	0,027*
Inadequate reactions	2,053	1,764	2,458	0,015*

According to the differences found, we can state again the composed occurrence of two strategies: anger and inadequate reactions. Both reactions were more frequently used by the respondents from smaller towns of residence.

Table 6 Differences from the aspect of alcohol use

Coping strategies	Less alcohol	More alcohol	p	t
Remaining uninvolved	3,199	3,486	-2,034	0,043*
Forgetting	3,074	3,317	-2,023	0,044*

In case of respondents who report more frequents alcohol use (3-4 times a month and more), utilisation of strategies as forgetting and reaming uninvolved was confirmed. Their total occurrence again confirms the level of mutual correlation (Pearson corr. 0,468\*\*).

## 6 Conclusion and discussion

The principal idea or research objectives consisted in the fact, that social support as a part of self-care can function as a method of coping with stress and it can be related to coping with school failure. The analyzed sample of 217, of that female students (194) and male students (18) of social studies confirmed relations between experienced extent of stress and perceived social support. It was a positive relation between stress and perceived support from the part of the parents and from the part of friends.

In searching for relations between stress and coping with school failure it was found out that strategies of anger, inadequate reactions and responsibility correlate most with stress. Along with anger and inappropriate behavior (inadequate reactions), which are the strategies related to each other, so it is possible to assume that they will occur jointly, it is interesting that another strategy most frequently used in stress is taking responsibility.

In analyzing differences from the aspect of faith it was found out that the respondents believers more frequently uses as a strategy of coping with school failure anger and selecting inadequate reactions. The same is preferred by the respondents living in the cities of over 50 thousand inhabitants, in comparison to

respondents living in bigger cities. From the aspect of the form of study it was found out that full time students more frequently select anger, looking for social support and remaining uninvolved as the strategies in comparison with part time students. Those select taking responsibility more frequently that full time students. The respondents who drink alcohol more frequently select mostly strategies as remaining uninvolved and forgetting.

The study performed in 2012 in Ankara with the sample of 371 university students (Cam, Deniz, Kurnaz 2014) also confirmed relation between stress and social support by Pearson correlation coefficient with the value of 0,160, it is a similar result as in this research where the author found out positive correlation on the level of the coefficient value of 0,190.

Coffman a Gilligan (2003) found from the sample of 94 students of the first year of Southeastern University in the USA relation between stress, social support and life satisfaction. They have found out that the high level of stress is negatively connected to the level of life satisfaction, the extent of stress negatively correlated with the extent of social support. Their final finding was that a higher level of social support and lower stress level was not related to a higher level of life satisfaction.

Friedlander, Reid, Shupak and Cribbie (2007) were dealing with finding relations between stress, social support and success at school in the research sample of 128 freshmen – university students. They have found out that the higher level of social support and lower stress predicts higher level of school success.

So we can state that in the elementary features similar results were confirmed, as in other research studies. Differences found in the strategies applied give a chance of further research and a question arises, if performing aware self-care could bring a positive change in coping with school failure. As the students involved were social studies students, it is necessary for them to learn during their studies to cope with demanding situations by an appropriate method and during performing their profession to avoid inappropriate coping strategies and protected themselves that way and also to be able to lead their clients to appropriate selection of coping strategies. As under conditions of SR the concept of self-care in its complexness das not been accepted so far, new possibilities are being open for the experts in this area, regarding practical performance and research objectives as well.

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