

# Professional Stress and Work Motivation among Croatian Preschool Educators

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## Abstract

*The research analyzes professional stress and work motivation among educators in preschool institutions in the Republic of Croatia. An online survey study was conducted with a sample of 130 educators from 18 Croatian counties. The aim was to examine the relationship between the frequency of stress and work motivation, as well as to determine the correlation between years of work experience and motivation. The results indicate an exceptionally strong negative correlation between the frequency of stress and work motivation ( $r = -.94$ ), with stress accounting for 88.1 % of the variance in motivation. A linear increase in motivation was confirmed with years of work experience. Educators contemplating a career change exhibit significantly lower motivation (Cohen's  $d = -2.91$ ). Positive relationships with colleagues are associated with lower frequency of stress ( $r = -.86$ ). The research highlights the issue of burnout syndrome and the need for a systematic approach to safeguarding the mental health and job satisfaction of educators.*

**Keywords:** burnout syndrome; job satisfaction; organizational commitment; teacher attrition; work-life balance

## Introduction

### ***The conceptual approach to professional stress in the preschool teacher profession***

Professional stress represents a complex phenomenon that significantly impacts the functioning of educators in preschool institutions. According to Jamil et al. (2023), professional stress denotes a frequent occurrence that adversely affects both employees and the institution, and is manifested through emotional exhaustion and tension. In the specific context of educational work, stress is defined as an unpleasant,

negative emotional experience that can result in excessive physical and mental fatigue, frustration, anxiety, or psychological tension (Roeser et al., 2013).

It is important to distinguish professional stress from general stress, as it is a specific type of stress whose source lies within the work environment. The nature of the job itself, the organization of workspaces, and working conditions are considered sources of stressors. Cooper et al. (2020) explain that an individual's reaction to stress results from a complex interplay of individual sensitivity, stressors, and external circumstances, where individual sensitivity is determined by personality, age, and lifestyle. This complex nature of professional stress necessitates a detailed analysis of its causes.

Research indicates that workplace stress is most commonly caused by several key factors. Cabrera-Aguilar et al. (2021) identify excessive demands, lack of support, poor working conditions, and lack of control over tasks as the main sources of stress. Additionally, Ozkan et al. (2019) further note that employee conflicts and weak support increase tension in the work environment. Another big problem is work overload, which occurs when individuals face an excessive amount of work within a specific timeframe. Furthermore, job insecurity, which arises as a result of organizational changes, also represents a significant stressor as it leads to ambiguities regarding positions within the institution (Bakker & Vries, 2021). Finally, Vallasamy et al. (2023) emphasize that the presence of interpersonal conflicts in the workplace can significantly contribute to professional stress. Such exposure to stressors leaves deep marks on employees.

The consequences of professional stress become manifest at various levels and affect both the individual and the entire institution. Lu et al. (2017) state that stress negatively impacts job satisfaction and employee engagement, which directly impacts their work performance. The frequency of stress in the workplace can have substantial and significant consequences on the overall functioning of the institution. At a personal level, employees experiencing stress are more likely to develop physical and emotional health problems such as anxiety, depression, heart disease, and diabetes. Moreover, stress can lead to decreased job satisfaction, excessive absenteeism, and reduced productivity (Kumareswaran et al., 2022). Physical manifestations of stress include headaches, cardiac arrhythmias, insomnia, decreased appetite, and other somatic symptoms (Hudek-Knežević & Kardum, 2006). At the cognitive level, stress can significantly affect memory and learning as it directly impacts the areas of the brain that control working memory, thereby increasing the risk of cognitive overload (Bong et al., 2016).

Among all these negative effects, the burnout syndrome stands out. It can be described as a consequence of prolonged exposure to stress that causes exhaustion and psychological burden in employees (Hozo et al., 2015). This condition is characterized by anxiety, fatigue, and emotional distancing, indicating the simultaneous presence of multiple stressors in the workplace. It is important to note that the burnout syndrome does not occur suddenly; rather, it develops gradually as a prolonged response to chronic stress challenges at work (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). A theoretical approach to this phenomenon allows for a deeper insight into its structure.

Maslach and Jackson (1981) identified three fundamental dimensions of burnout that interrelate with one another. Emotional exhaustion manifests as a feeling of depletion due to psychological demands at work, signifying fatigue and lethargy. Cynicism or depersonalization pertains to the interpersonal component of burnout, defined as a response characterized by detachment and indifference towards one's job. Reduced personal accomplishment is reflected in negative professional self-evaluation and doubts regarding one's effectiveness in performing work tasks. A more recent approach proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2020) expands this model by incorporating four core dimensions: mental distance, emotional and cognitive impairment, and exhaustion, alongside secondary dimensions such as depressive mood and psychosomatic complaints. However, the manifestation of this syndrome is not uniform.

The burnout syndrome does not develop in an identical manner for all individuals; rather, there are different subtypes that depend on the employees' commitment to their activities. Montero-Marin (2016) identifies three main subtypes: the frenetic subtype, the under-challenged subtype, and the exhausted subtype. The frenetic subtype is, according to Edu-Valsania et al. (2022), typical for work contexts characterized by overload and for individuals who are exhausted due to their jobs. At the motivational level, workers exhibit high engagement and a need for validation, which is associated with a problem-solving coping style that necessitates a significant number of hours per week. The under-challenged subtype is characteristic of unstimulating and monotonous professions where tasks are repetitive and do not provide the necessary satisfaction for employees. Consequently, workers display boredom, indifference, and a lack of personal development, coupled with a desire for job change. The exhausted subtype is predominantly characterized by feelings of hopelessness and a lack of control over the outcomes of one's work, as well as a lack of recognition for the effort invested. This subtype is closely linked to the perception of inefficacy and a passive coping style in response to stress.

While the burnout syndrome in educational professions has been extensively studied internationally, empirical evidence specific to Croatian preschool educators remains scarce. This research fills this gap by examining the relationship between professional stress and work motivation among preschool educators across 18 Croatian counties. The study aims to provide insights into how stress-motivation dynamics operate within the specific context of the Croatian education system, including its unique regulatory frameworks, resource allocation, and institutional culture. It is expected that understanding these context-specific patterns will impact the development of evidence-based interventions tailored to the Croatian preschool education landscape and that it will help address the concerning attrition rates among early childhood educators.

### ***Professional identity of educators as a contextual factor***

Understanding professional stress in the teaching profession necessitates an examination of the specificities of the educator's role. According to the National Pedagogical Standard (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2008), an educator is

a qualified individual who independently creates the educational process and assesses and monitors the development of each child. In this regard, the National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education (2015) emphasizes that the professional development of educators aims to direct changes in the beliefs and actions of educators. Continuous learning can be considered a key competency that encompasses openness to new insights and challenges, the ability to explore and reflect, as well as a willingness for professional development (Brock, 2013). Hervie and Winful (2018) define professional development as a set of processes designed to enhance the knowledge, development of positive behaviors, and skills of educators. In this context, the importance of the capacity for learning is particularly emphasized as a crucial factor in professional development, highlighting active participation in the organization of institutions and the shaping of educational policies (Domović, 2011).

Prevention and treatment of stress require a proactive approach. Given that prolonged exposure to stress can have significant consequences on human health, it is extremely important to develop effective stress management strategies. Stress management interventions can assist individuals in adapting to stressful situations, developing stress tolerance skills, and alleviating emotional exhaustion (Tetrick & Winslow, 2015). Glazer and Liu (2017) highlight that stress management interventions are aimed at reducing issues within institutions. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of strengthening the aspects of work environment that create a sense of quality work context, enabling individuals to confront stressors that may arise. It is also crucial to provide individuals within the institution with tools for managing stressful events.

At the individual level, Panigrahi (2017) identifies several effective ways to combat everyday stress: longer sleep, physical activities, relaxation techniques, conversations with close individuals, time management, and avoidance of harmful habits such as alcohol and cigarette consumption. Additionally, Gabriel and Aguinis (2022) mention two main types of individual interventions: cognitive-behavioral training (changing thoughts and developing active coping skills) and mindfulness meditation groups (adjusting to stressful events through the development of awareness).

The educational context implies that educators bear significant responsibility for the future of society, and in their educational work they should be capable of coordinating activities and seeking examples of best practices to ensure the quality of their work. One of the key ways to achieve this goal is by developing emotional intelligence, which contributes to the effective implementation of professional practice (Broilo Bartelle, 2020). Individuals with low emotional intelligence face several difficulties in addressing stress-related problems. This fact is supported by various studies suggesting a strong correlation between stress and emotional intelligence (Sharma & Kumar, 2016).

The theoretical approach presented regarding professional stress in the teaching profession allows for a comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon. Through the analysis of various aspects of professional stress, from its causes and manifestations to its consequences and management strategies, a clear picture emerges

of the challenges faced by educators in the contemporary educational context. It is particularly important to recognize that professional stress in the teaching profession cannot be viewed in isolation but rather as a result of the complex interaction between the individual characteristics of educators, the specificities of their work, organizational factors, and the broader social context. The burnout syndrome, as the most severe consequence of prolonged exposure to stress, represents a significant challenge that requires systematic prevention and intervention. Understanding the different dimensions of professional stress, as well as the factors that can mitigate its negative effects, such as social support, transformational leadership, and the development of emotional competencies, provides a foundation for designing effective strategies to protect mental health and professional well-being of educators. Such an approach not only contributes to the quality of educators' work but also has far-reaching implications for the quality of the educational process and development of children in preschool institutions.

## Methodology

A quantitative survey study was conducted with the aim of examining the level of professional stress among educators in preschool institutions and identifying key predictors of work motivation among educators. In accordance with this objective, two hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Based on burnout theory, there is a strong negative relationship between stress frequency and work motivation, such that educators experiencing more frequent stress demonstrate markedly lower work motivation.

Hypothesis 2: Work motivation among educators increases linearly with years of work experience, with more experienced educators exhibiting higher levels of motivation than newcomers.

Exploratory aims: In addition to testing these primary hypotheses, the study explores the relationships between additional work-related variables (relationships with colleagues, working conditions, lack of energy, praise as motivation) and educators' stress and motivation to provide a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing professional well-being.

## Participants

The target population of the research consisted of educators employed in early childhood education institutions across the Republic of Croatia. The sample was a convenience sample comprising  $N = 130$  respondents from 18 Croatian counties. An *a priori* power analysis using G\*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that for detecting a large effect size ( $r = .50$ ) in correlation analysis with  $\alpha = .05$  and power of .95, a minimum sample size of 84 participants is required. The achieved sample size of  $N = 130$  provides statistical power  $> .99$  for detecting medium to large effect sizes.

The geographical distribution of the sample indicates the highest representation of respondents from Požega-Slavonia County (15.4 %,  $n = 20$ ), followed by Brod-

Posavina County (13.8 %,  $n = 18$ ), the City of Zagreb (11.5 %,  $n = 15$ ), Zagreb County (9.2 %,  $n = 12$ ), Osijek-Baranja County (8.5 %,  $n = 11$ ), Vukovar-Syrmia County (7.7 %,  $n = 10$ ), Zadar County (6.9 %,  $n = 9$ ), Istria County (4.6 %,  $n = 6$ ), Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (3.8 %,  $n = 5$ ), Krapina-Zagorje and Split-Dalmatia Counties (each 3.1 %,  $n = 4$ ), Varaždin, Karlovac, and Sisak-Moslavina Counties (each 2.3 %,  $n = 3$ ), as well as Međimurje, Šibenik-Knin, and Bjelovar-Bilogora Counties (each 1.5 %,  $n = 2$ ), and Lika-Senj County (0.8 %,  $n = 1$ ).

In terms of gender structure, the sample is characterized by a significant prevalence of female respondents (99.2 %,  $n = 129$ ) compared to male respondents (0.8 %,  $n = 1$ ), reflecting the gender composition of the teaching profession in the Republic of Croatia.

### **Operationalization of variables and measurement instruments**

The selection of variables for this study was guided by theoretical frameworks on burnout and work motivation (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2020), as well as by exploratory aims to comprehensively examine the phenomenon of professional stress among educators. While the primary hypotheses focus on the relationships between stress frequency, work motivation, and years of experience, additional variables were included to: (a) explore potential moderating or mediating factors (relationships with colleagues, working conditions), (b) assess dimensions of burnout syndrome (lack of energy, emotional exhaustion), and (c) investigate motivational mechanisms (praise as motivation). These additional measures enable a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors that influence educators' professional well-being.

For the purposes of this study, a survey questionnaire was constructed to operationalize the following key variables: frequency of professional stress, work motivation, relationships with colleagues, working conditions, lack of energy, and praise as a source of motivation. Additionally, demographic data were collected on gender, years of work experience, and county of employment.

**Instrument development.** Survey items were developed specifically for this study based on theoretical frameworks of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016) and work motivation (Schaufeli et al., 2020), and existing research on occupational stress among early childhood educators. Items were constructed to reflect key dimensions of professional stress and motivational factors relevant to the Croatian preschool education context. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using the study sample, demonstrating satisfactory values for the stress frequency scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and work motivation scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Frequency of professional stress.** The frequency of professional stress was measured using 8 items that respondents rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The items covered various aspects of stress experiences in the teaching profession. Sample items include: "I feel overwhelmed by work", "I find it difficult to balance all work obligations", and "I feel tense during the workday". The total score for stress frequency

was calculated as the arithmetic mean of all items, with higher scores indicating greater frequency of experienced professional stress. Reliability analysis demonstrated high internal consistency of the scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ).

**Work motivation.** Work motivation was measured using 6 items on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The items related to different sources and levels of educators' motivation for performing professional tasks. Sample items include: "I work because my job fulfills me", "I feel satisfied when I see children's progress", and "I am motivated by achieving professional goals". The total score for motivation was calculated as the arithmetic mean of all items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of work motivation. The scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Relationships with colleagues.** The quality of interpersonal relationships with colleagues was measured using one item on a Likert scale from 1 (*very poor*) to 5 (*very good*), with higher scores indicating more positive relationships.

**Working conditions.** Assessment of working conditions was conducted using one item on a scale from 1 (*very poor*) to 5 (*very good*).

**Lack of energy.** The feeling of lack of energy and exhaustion was measured using one item on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), with higher scores indicating a greater degree of exhaustion.

**Praise as motivation.** The importance of praise as a source of motivation was assessed on a scale from 1 (*not important at all*) to 4 (*very important*).

**Demographic variables.** Data were collected on gender, years of work experience (categorized as: less than 1 year, 1-5 years, 5-10 years, 10-15 years, more than 15 years), county of employment, and additional variables relevant to the study such as intention to change careers, experience of fear/tension, impact of stress on partner relationships, and time for parenting.

**Verification of assumptions for statistical analyses.** Before conducting parametric statistical procedures, basic assumptions for their application were verified. The normality of distribution of continuous variables was examined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and visual inspection of Q-Q plots. Results show that certain variables statistically significantly deviate from normal distribution ( $p < .05$ ); however, given the sample size ( $N = 130$ ) and the robustness of parametric tests to minor deviations from normality, it was decided to apply parametric procedures while interpreting results with caution. Homogeneity of variances was examined using Levene's test, which shows that the assumption of homogeneity is satisfied for most comparisons ( $p > .05$ ). Analysis of outliers was conducted using Z-scores. No extreme values ( $|Z| > 3.29$ ) were identified that would significantly affect the results of the analyses.

### ***Data collection procedure and ethical principles***

Data collection was conducted over the period from October to November 2024. An electronic method of data collection was employed using the Google Forms

platform. The distribution of the questionnaire was organized through social media, which facilitated broad accessibility of the instrument and increased flexibility for respondents regarding the time and place of completing the questionnaire. This approach was chosen for its practicality, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency in reaching the target population.

The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of scientific research. Prior to participating in the study, all respondents were informed about the purpose, objectives, and methods of the research through detailed instructions at the beginning of the questionnaire. Complete anonymity of respondents was ensured, participation was voluntary, and respondents had the option to discontinue completing the questionnaire at any time without consequences.

All collected data are treated as strictly confidential and are protected from unauthorized access. The analysis and interpretation of results are based solely on the aggregated data without the possibility of identifying individual respondents. The data are used exclusively for scientific purposes and are stored in accordance with personal data protection regulations.

### **Data analysis**

The statistical analysis of the data was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0. For all continuous variables, standard descriptive statistics were calculated, including the mean, standard deviation, median, and range. The Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships between continuous variables. The Student t-test for independent samples was applied to investigate differences between binary groups, while one-way analysis of variance was used to compare groups based on years of work experience. To identify the individual contribution of each potential predictor to work motivation, a series of simple linear regression analyses were conducted, with each predictor examined separately. The variables were entered simultaneously (enter method) into the regression model, including stress frequency, years of work experience, and relationships with colleagues as the independent variables, with work motivation as the dependent variable. The significance level was set at  $\alpha = .05$  for all statistical tests. The effect size was quantified using *Cohen's d* for t-tests. The level of statistical significance was set at  $\alpha = .05$ . To test for linear trends in motivation across the ordered categories of work experience, the polynomial trend analysis was conducted as part of the one-way ANOVA.

## **Results**

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all constructs that were measured in the survey.

The results indicate moderately high average values for most of the measured variables, with relationship with colleagues achieving the highest rating, suggesting positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Lack of energy also demonstrates a high

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics of the Key Continuous Variables (N = 130)

Variable	M	SD	Median	Range
Relationship with Colleagues	4.15*	0.76	4	2-5
Working Conditions	3.60	1.00	4	1-5
Frequency of Stress	3.66	1.00	4	1-5
Lack of Energy	4.02	1.01	4	1-5
Motivation for Work	3.52	1.02	3	1-5
Praise as Motivation	3.05	0.88	3	1-4

\*All variables measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = lowest value and 5 = highest value, except Praise as Motivation measured on a 4-point scale where 1 = not important and 4 = very important.

average value, signaling a significant issue with work-related exhaustion. Frequency of stress and working conditions exhibit moderate values, while motivation for work and praise as motivation attain the lowest average ratings, with moderate variability in participants' responses across all variables.

Table 2 presents the strongest correlations among the measured variables, specifically those with absolute values greater than .80.

Table 2  
Strongest correlations ( $|r| > .80$ )

Variable 1	Variable 2	r	Interpretation
Frequency of stress	Work motivation	-0.94	Very strong negative
Lack of energy	Praise as motivation	.92	Very strong positive
Working conditions	Work motivation	-.89	Strong negative
Frequency of stress	Lack of energy	.89	Strong positive
Relationship with colleagues	Frequency of stress	-.86	Strong negative
Relationship with colleagues	Work motivation	-.85	Strong negative

The correlation analysis reveals several critical connections among the variables. A higher frequency of stress is strongly associated with diminished employee motivation. More fatigued employees appear more reliant on external motivators, while poor working conditions are associated with undermined motivation. Stress is strongly related to exhaustion. Additionally, positive relationships with colleagues are associated with both reduced stress and higher motivation, underscoring the importance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Table 3 shows differences in work motivation between groups based on binary variables.

T-tests reveal dramatic differences in motivation between groups. The largest effect (Cohen's  $d = -2.91$ ) is observed among employees who are considering changing careers, as their motivation is significantly lower ( $M = 2.68$ ) compared to those who are not considering a change ( $M = 4.35$ ). Similarly, employees who experience fear/tension demonstrate drastically lower motivation ( $M = 2.66$ ) with a very large effect size ( $d = -2.62$ ). A lack of time for parenting, disrespect for State pedagogical standard

Table 3  
Differences in Motivation Regarding Binary Variables

Variable	Group YES (M, SD)	Group NO (M, SD)	t(128)	Cohen's d	Effect Size
Considers changing careers	2.68 (0.58)	4.35 (0.57)	-16.61	-2.91	Huge
Feels fear/tension	2.66(0.62)	4.28(0.61)	-14.93	-2.62	Very large
Sufficient time for parenting	2.94(0.64)	4.53(0.63)	-13.00	-2.50	Very large
Respects SPD	2.60(0.68)	4.13(0.67)	-12.47	-2.25	Very large
Stress affects partner	2.59(0.69)	4.11(0.68)	-12.27	-2.22	Very large

(SPD), and stress affecting a partner also significantly diminish motivation, all with very large effect sizes. All results are statistically significant at the  $p < .001$  level, indicating the robustness of the findings.

Table 4 presents analogous t-test results examining differences in stress frequency across the same binary groupings.

Table 4  
Differences in Stress According to Binary Variables

Variable	Group YES (M, SD)	Group NO (M, SD)	t(128)	Cohen's d
Feels Fear/Tension	2.75	4.46	-18.89	-3.31
Respects SPD	2.69	4.31	-14.89	-2.71
Sufficient Time	3.08	4.68	-13.73	-2.65

All t-tests are statistically significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

The analysis of differences in stress levels reveals a similar pattern to that observed in motivation. Employees who experience fear/tension exhibit significantly lower levels of stress ( $M = 2.75$ ) compared to those who do not experience it ( $M = 4.46$ ), with a substantial effect size ( $d = -3.31$ ). This may indicate that individuals who already experience high levels of fear/tension might employ coping strategies or adapt to stressful situations. Non-compliance with SPD and a lack of time are also associated with lower levels of stress in the affected groups, which may suggest resignation or emotional distancing as forms of coping.

Table 5 shows work motivation levels across different categories of years of employment.

Table 5  
Motivation by Years of Employment

Years of Employment	N	M	Trend
< 1 year	15	1.67 (0.52)	↗
1-5 years	44	2.98 (0.68)	↗
5-10 years	21	3.62 (0.71)	↗
10-15 years	22	4.00 (0.74)	↗
15+ years	28	4.89 (0.63)	–

One-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in motivation across the categories of work experience ( $F(4, 125) = 68.42, p < .001$ ). The polynomial trend analysis confirmed a significant linear trend, indicating a systematic increase in motivation with years of employment.

The results indicate a distinct upward trend in motivation as years of employment increase. Employees with less than one year of service exhibit the lowest motivation ( $M = 1.67$ ), while those with over 15 years of service demonstrate the highest motivation ( $M = 4.89$ ). This progressive increase across all categories of employment duration (1-5 years:  $M = 2.98$ ; 5-10 years:  $M = 3.62$ ; 10-15 years:  $M = 4.00$ ) suggests that long-term employees develop a greater commitment to their work and the organization. The statistically significant  $F$ -test ( $p < .001$ ) confirms the robustness of this trend, which may indicate successful organizational socialization and career development over time.

Table 6 presents the results of simple linear regression analyses examining key predictors of work motivation among educators. Each predictor was analyzed separately to determine its individual relationship with work motivation.

Table 6  
*Individual Predictors of Work Motivation*

Predictor	Regression Equation	$R^2$	% of Explained Variance
Frequency of Stress	$Y = 0.01 + 0.96X$	.88	88.1 %
Working Conditions	$Y = 6.76 - 0.90X$	.79	79.2 %
Lack of Energy	$Y = -.04 + 0.88X$	.77	77.2 %

Simple linear regression analyses reveal that each examined variable individually predicts work motivation when analyzed separately. The frequency of stress shows the strongest individual relationship, accounting for 88.1 % of the variance in motivation ( $R^2 = .88$ ). Working conditions explain 79.2 % of the variance ( $R^2 = .79$ ), while lack of energy accounts for 77.2 % of the variance ( $R^2 = .77$ ). It is important to note that these  $R^2$  values represent the variance explained by each predictor individually and are not additive, as the predictors are highly intercorrelated.

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to examine the level of professional stress among educators in preschool institutions and identify key predictors of work motivation among educators. For this purpose, an online survey was conducted with 130 educators from 18 Croatian counties. Two primary hypotheses were tested: (H1) that stress frequency would be negatively related to work motivation, and (H2) that motivation would increase linearly with years of work experience. Both hypotheses were fully supported by the data, with an exceptionally strong negative correlation between stress and motivation ( $r = -.94, R^2 = .88$ ) and a significant linear increase in motivation across experience categories ( $F(4, 125) = 68.42, p < .001$ ). Additionally, exploratory analyses revealed that relationships with colleagues are strongly negatively associated

with stress frequency ( $r = -.86$ ), and educators contemplating career change show substantially lower motivation (Cohen's  $d = -2.91$ ), highlighting critical factors in educator well-being and retention.

The obtained results provide significant insight into the complex relationships between professional stress, work motivation, and work experience among educators in the Republic of Croatia. The most prominent finding of this research pertains to the exceptionally strong negative correlation between the frequency of stress and work motivation ( $r = -.94$ ). A correlation of this magnitude is extraordinarily high and warrants careful interpretation. In psychometric terms, correlations approaching .90 or above typically indicate substantial overlap between constructs, suggesting that stress frequency and work motivation may represent two poles of a single underlying dimension rather than entirely distinct constructs. This finding aligns with theoretical conceptualizations of burnout, where increasing stress and diminishing motivation are viewed as interdependent facets of the same deteriorating psychological state (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The near-perfect inverse relationship suggests that in the context of early childhood education, professional stress and work motivation may be inseparable - as stress increases, motivation does not merely decrease, but is fundamentally eroded. This highlights the critical importance of stress prevention as a direct pathway to maintaining educator motivation. This finding is in complete agreement with research by Agyapong et al. (2022), which confirms that stress associated with the teaching profession can be linked to burnout, anxiety, and depression, all of which have profound effects on teacher health, well-being, and productivity. However, the extremely high correlation also raises questions about the discriminant validity of the two measures and suggests that future research should employ more refined instruments to distinguish between stress experiences and motivational decline, or alternatively, reconceptualize these constructs as unified indicators of professional well-being.

Particularly concerning is the analysis of t-tests, which reveals dramatic differences in motivation between groups, with employees contemplating a career change exhibiting significantly lower motivation compared to those who are not considering a change, with a substantial effect size. This result supports the longitudinal study by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2020), which demonstrates that teacher burnout can be the ultimate outcome of prolonged professional stress, and that stressful working conditions have been associated with measures of burnout. However, the quasi-experimental nature of this grouping variable precludes causal interpretation. Because career change contemplation was self-reported rather than experimentally manipulated, we cannot determine the direction of causality: low motivation may lead educators to consider leaving the profession, or the decision to leave may influence how they report their current motivation levels. This represents a case of potential circular reasoning that limits the interpretability of this finding.

Simple linear regression analyses identify the frequency of stress as having the strongest individual relationship with work motivation, explaining a substantial

proportion of the variance when examined independently. Such a result is consistent with the meta-analytic study by Madigan and Kim (2021), which shows that teacher burnout is associated with poorer academic achievement among students and lower quality of student motivation. Similarly, the research by Kumari and Kumar (2023) confirms that motivation significantly impacts educators' job performance.

Another key finding relates to the linear increase in motivation with years of work experience, which supports the second hypothesis of the research. Employees with less than one year of experience exhibit the lowest motivation, while those with more than 15 years of experience achieve the highest motivation. However, this result is partially inconsistent with international studies. Toropova et al. (2021) note that research on the impact of teaching experience on job satisfaction among teachers remains contradictory and likely depends on the characteristics of school systems specific to countries. Our research, however, does not align with the theory of organizational socialization supported by Wang et al. (2024), who emphasize that older educators may experience boredom leading to increased exhaustion, but this was not evident in our sample. Instead, our results support the theory that greater identification with the organization and profession develops over time.

However, an important alternative explanation for this finding should be considered: the observed increase in motivation with years of experience may reflect a selection bias rather than a developmental process. Specifically, educators who remained unmotivated likely left the profession earlier in their careers, while those who persisted are precisely those with higher intrinsic motivation and stronger professional commitment. This "survival effect" suggests that our sample of experienced educators represents a selected group of individuals who have successfully adapted to professional demands and maintained their motivation over time. This interpretation aligns with research on teacher attrition, which shows that a significant number of educators leave the profession within the first five years precisely due to low motivation and high stress levels. Therefore, the linear increase in motivation we have observed may not reflect a universal developmental trajectory, but rather the selective retention of more motivated individuals.

Analyzing the strongest correlations in the study, a particularly notable finding is the strong negative correlation between relationships with colleagues and the frequency of stress, highlighting the importance of positive interpersonal relationships in reducing stress. This result directly aligns with recent studies by Wang et al. (2024), which show that positive relationships correlate with increased job satisfaction, reduced stress levels, and a sense of fulfillment among educators. The very strong positive correlation between lack of energy and praise as motivation suggests that more fatigued employees are more dependent on external motivators. This result supports the motivation theories of Kumari and Kumar (2023), which emphasize that intrinsic motivation drives self-satisfaction, but when internal resources are depleted, reliance on external

incentives increases. Wang et al. (2024) confirm that emotional exhaustion represents a fundamental dimension of professional burnout in the educational landscape, characterized by deep depletion of emotional resources.

According to binary variables, differences in stress reveal concerning patterns. Employees who experience fear/tension report significantly lower levels of stress compared to those who do not feel it, with a substantial effect. This paradoxical result is partially consistent with the research by Agyapong et al. (2022), which indicates that more than three out of four educators have experienced health issues arising from an inability to manage stress, suggesting that those who already experience high levels of fear/tension may employ coping strategies or adapt to stressful situations through a form of emotional resignation.

The practical implications of these results are significant for the management of preschool institutions. Our findings align with calls from experts that stress and burnout drive too many individuals out of the profession (NEA, 2024). For practical application of the results, our findings support the research by Cabaron and Oco (2023), which demonstrates that motivation significantly impacts teachers' job performance, thereby confirming the need for a systematic approach to stress management. Schools That Lead (2024) warn that prolonged occupational stress causes talented educators to withdraw emotionally, perform poorly, or leave the profession completely.

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this study. Convenience sampling led to disproportionate representation of participants across counties, with some counties being significantly more represented than others (e.g., Požega-Slavonia County 15.4 %, Lika-Senj County 0.8 %). Given that counties differ in the number of job positions in preschool institutions, economic conditions, and specific regional circumstances, the disproportionate representation of participants could affect not only the generalization of the results to the entire population of educators in the Republic of Croatia, but also the research results themselves, if regional factors significantly influence stress and motivation levels. Additionally, important demographic data are missing, such as participants' precise age, work experience at their current workplace, and information about partner and parental status. The lack of these data limits the possibility of deeper analysis of variables such as the impact of stress on partner relationships or time for parenting, and also makes it impossible to verify whether all participants were able to adequately answer questions related to partner relationships and parenting. Future research should ensure that such questions are asked only of participants for whom they are relevant or verify whether there are differences in responses based on partner and parental status. Furthermore, the study was conducted at a single time point (*cross-sectional design*), which does not allow for the determination of causal relationships between the observed variables. Future longitudinal research would be necessary to better understand the dynamic nature of the relationships between professional stress, motivation, and work experience over time.

## Conclusion

The research conducted on a sample of 130 educators from 18 Croatian counties provides a significant insight into the complex relationships between professional stress, work motivation, and work experience in preschool institutions. The results unequivocally confirm both hypotheses and reveal concerning trends that require the attention of professionals and policymakers.

Particularly alarming are the dramatic differences in motivation between groups of educators. Those contemplating a career change exhibit drastically lower motivation with a substantial effect size, highlighting a serious issue regarding staff retention in the teaching profession. The research also uncovers the crucial role of positive interpersonal relationships through a strong negative correlation between relationships with colleagues and the frequency of stress. The very strong positive correlation between lack of energy and praise as motivation suggests that emotionally exhausted educators become increasingly reliant on external motivators, which may indicate symptoms of burnout.

This research represents a significant contribution to understanding professional stress in the teaching profession within the Croatian context. The results clearly indicate the necessity for a systematic approach to safeguarding the mental health and professional well-being of educators, which is crucial not only for the quality of educators' work but also for the optimal development of children in preschool institutions. Investing in the well-being of educators represents an investment in the future of society by ensuring a quality foundation for lifelong learning and development.

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# Profesionalni stres i motivacija za rad hrvatskih odgojitelja u predškolskim ustanovama

## Sažetak

Istraživanje analizira profesionalni stres i motivaciju za rad odgojitelja u predškolskim ustanovama Republike Hrvatske. Provedeno je online istraživanje na uzorku od 130 odgojitelja iz 18 hrvatskih županija. Cilj je bio ispitati povezanost između učestalosti stresa i motivacije za rad, kao i utvrditi korelaciju između godina radnoga iskustva i motivacije. Rezultati pokazuju iznimno jaku negativnu korelaciju između učestalosti stresa i motivacije za rad ( $r = -.94$ ), pri čemu stres objašnjava 88,1 % varijance u motivaciji. Potvrđen je linearan porast motivacije s godinama radnoga iskustva. Odgojitelji koji razmišljaju o promjeni karijere pokazuju značajno nižu motivaciju (Cohenov  $d = -2,91$ ). Pozitivni odnosi s kolegama povezani su s nižom učestalošću stresa ( $r = -.86$ ). Istraživanje naglašava problem sindroma sagorijevanja i potrebu za sustavnim pristupom zaštiti mentalnoga zdravlja i zadovoljstva poslom odgojitelja.

**Ključne riječi:** sindrom sagorijevanja; zadovoljstvo poslom; organizacijska predanost; napuštanje profesije; ravnoteža između posla i privatnoga života

## Uvod

### Konceptualni pristup profesionalnom stresu u odgojiteljskoj profesiji

Profesionalni stres predstavlja složen fenomen koji značajno utječe na funkcioniranje odgojitelja u predškolskim ustanovama. Prema Jamilu i sur. (2023), profesionalni stres označava učestalu pojavu koja štetno utječe kako na zaposlenike, tako i na ustanovu, manifestirajući se putem emocionalne iscrpljenosti i napetosti. U specifičnom kontekstu odgojiteljskoga posla, stres se definira kao neugodno, negativno emocionalno iskustvo koje može rezultirati pretjeranom fizičkom i mentalnom iscrpljenošću, frustracijom, tjeskobom ili psihičkom napetošću (Roeser i sur., 2013).

Važno je razlikovati profesionalni stres od općenitoga stresa jer se radi o specifičnoj vrsti stresa čiji je izvor u radnom okružju. Pritom priroda samoga posla, organizacija radnih mjesta te radni uvjeti mogu biti izvori stresora. Cooper i sur. (2020) objašnjavaju da reakcija osobe na stres rezultira iz složene povezanosti individualne osjetljivosti,

stresora i vanjskih okolnosti, pri čemu individualnu osjetljivost određuju osobnost, godine i stil života. Ovako složena priroda profesionalnoga stresa zahtijeva detaljnu analizu njegovih uzroka.

Istraživanja pokazuju da stres na radnome mjestu najčešće uzrokuju nekoliko ključnih čimbenika. Cabrera-Aguilar i sur. (2021) identificiraju prevelike zahtjeve, manjak podrške, loše radne uvjete i nedostatak kontrole nad poslovima kao glavne izvore stresa. Uz to, Ozkan i sur. (2019) dodatno navode da sukobi zaposlenika i slaba podrška povećavaju napetost u radnom okružju. Posebno problematična je preopterećenost poslom koja nastaje kada se osobe suočavaju s prevelikom količinom posla unutar određenoga vremenskog okvira. Nadalje, nesigurnost posla, koja se javlja kao posljedica organizacijskih promjena, također predstavlja značajan stresor jer dovodi do nejasnoća u vezi s pozicijama unutar ustanove (Bakker i de Vries, 2021). Konačno, Vallasamy i sur. (2023) ističu kako prisutnost međuljudskih sukoba na radnome mjestu može značajno doprinijeti profesionalnom stresu. Takva izloženost stresorima ostavlja duboke tragove na zaposlenicima.

Posljedice profesionalnoga stresa manifestiraju se na različitim razinama i utječu kako na pojedinca, tako i na cijelu ustanovu. Lu i sur. (2017) navode kako stres negativno utječe na zadovoljstvo poslom i angažman zaposlenika, što se direktno odražava na njihov radni učinak. Učestalost stresa na radnome mjestu može imati velike i značajne posljedice na sveukupno funkcioniranje ustanove. Na osobnoj razini, zaposlenici koji doživljavaju stres imaju veću vjerojatnost razvijanja fizičkih i emocionalnih zdravstvenih problema poput anksioznosti, depresije, bolesti srca i dijabetesa. Osim toga, stres može dovesti do smanjenoga zadovoljstva poslom, pretjeranog izostajanja s posla i smanjene produktivnosti (Kumareswaran i sur., 2022). Fizičke manifestacije stresa uključuju glavobolje, srčane aritmije, nesanicu, smanjen apetit i druge somatske simptome (Hudek-Knežević i Kardum, 2006). Na kognitivnoj razini, stres može značajno utjecati na pamćenje i učenje jer izravno utječe na područja mozga koja kontroliraju radnu memoriju, povećavajući tako rizik od kognitivnoga preopterećenja (Bong i sur., 2016).

Među svim ovim negativnim učincima, posebno se izdvaja sindrom sagorijevanja. Možemo ga opisati kao posljedicu dugotrajne izloženosti stresu koja kod zaposlenika izaziva iscrpljenost i psihološko opterećenje (Hozo i sur., 2015). Ovo stanje karakterizira tjeskobu, umor i emocionalno distanciranje koje upućuje na istovremenu prisutnost više stresora na radnome mjestu. Važno je napomenuti da se sindrom sagorijevanja ne javlja iznenada, već se razvija postupno kao produljeni odgovor na kronične stresne izazove na poslu (Maslach i Leiter, 2016). Teorijski pristup ovome fenomenu omogućuje dublji uvid u njegovu strukturu.

Maslach i Jackson (1981) identificirali su tri temeljne dimenzije sagorijevanja koje se međusobno prožimaju. Emocionalna iscrpljenost manifestira se kao osjećaj iscrpljenosti zbog psiholoških napora na poslu, označavajući umor i malaksalost. Cinizam ili depersonalizacija odnosi se na interpersonalnu komponentu izgaranja, definirajući se kao odgovor odvojenosti i ravnodušnosti prema poslu. Smanjena osobna postignuća

ogledaju se u negativnoj profesionalnoj samoevaluaciji i sumnjama u učinkovitost obavljanja posla. Noviji pristup koji predlažu Schaufeli, Desart i De Witte (2020) proširuje ovaj model uključujući četiri osnovne dimenzije: mentalnu udaljenost, emocionalno i kognitivno oštećenje te iscrpljenost, uz sekundarne dimenzije poput depresivnoga raspodjele i psihosomatskih tegoba. Međutim, manifestacija ovoga sindroma nije ujednačena.

Sindrom sagorijevanja se ne razvija uvijek na identičan način kod svih ljudi, već postoje različiti podtipovi koji ovise o predanosti zaposlenika svojim aktivnostima. Montero-Marin (2016) identificira tri glavna podtipa: frenetični podtip, podtip s nedovoljno izazova te podtip istrošenosti. Frenetični podtip je, prema Edu-Valsanii i sur. (2022), tipičan za radne kontekste s preopterećenošću i za osobe koje su iscrpljene zbog posla. Na motivacijskoj razini radnici pokazuju visoku uključenost i potrebu za dokazivanjem, što je povezano sa stilom suočavanja koji se temelji na pokušaju aktivnoga rješavanja problema, za što je potreban velik broj sati tjedno. Podtip s nedovoljno izazova karakterističan je za nestimulativne i monotone profesije u kojima se zadatci ponavljaju i ne pružaju potrebno zadovoljstvo zaposlenicima. Posljedično, radnici pokazuju dosadu, ravnodušnost te nedostatak osobnoga razvoja uz želju za promjenom posla. Podtip istrošenosti karakteriziraju pretežno osjećaji beznađa i nedostatka kontrole nad rezultatima svojega rada te nedostatka priznanja uložena truda. Ovaj je podtip čvrsto povezan s percepcijom neučinkovitosti te pasivnim stilom suočavanja sa stresom.

Iako je sindrom sagorijevanja u obrazovnim profesijama opsežno istraživano na međunarodnoj razini, empirijski dokazi specifični za hrvatske odgojitelje u predškolskim ustanovama ostaju oskudni. Ovo istraživanje popunjava taj jaz ispitivanjem odnosa između profesionalnoga stresa i radne motivacije odgojitelja iz 18 hrvatskih županija. Studija ima za cilj pružiti uvid u to kako dinamika stresa i motivacije funkcionira u specifičnom kontekstu hrvatskoga obrazovnog sustava, uključujući njegove jedinstvene regulatorne okvire, raspodjelu resursa i institucionalnu kulturu. Razumijevanje tih kontekstualno-specifičnih obrazaca očekuje se da će informirati razvoj intervencija utemeljenih na dokazima, prilagođenih okružju hrvatskoga predškolskog obrazovanja te će pridonijeti rješavanju zabrinjavajućih stopa napuštanja profesije među odgojiteljima djece rane i predškolske dobi.

### ***Profesionalni identitet odgojitelja kao kontekstualni čimbenik***

Razumijevanje profesionalnoga stresa u odgojiteljskoj profesiji zahtijeva i sagledavanje specifičnosti odgojiteljskoga posla. Prema Državnom pedagoškom standardu (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta, 2008), odgojitelj je stručna osoba koja samostalno stvara odgojno-obrazovni proces te procjenjuje i prati razvoj svakoga djeteta. U skladu s tim, Nacionalni kurikulum ranoga i predškolskoga odgoja i obrazovanja (2015) ističe da profesionalni razvoj odgojitelja nastoji usmjeriti na stvaranje promjena u vjerovanjima i akcijama odgojitelja. Kontinuirano učenje može

se smatrati ključnom kompetencijom koja uključuje otvorenost za nove uvide i izazove, sposobnost za istraživanje i promišljanje kao i spremnost za profesionalni razvoj (Brock, 2013). Hervie i Winful (2018) definiraju profesionalni razvoj kao skup procesa osmišljenih za poboljšanje znanja, razvoj pozitivnoga ponašanja i vještina odgojitelja. Pri tome se posebno naglašava važnost kapaciteta za učenje kao ključnoga čimbenika u profesionalnom razvoju, ističući aktivno sudjelovanje u organizaciji institucije i oblikovanju obrazovnih politika (Domović, 2011).

Prevenција i tretman stresa zahtijevaju proaktivan pristup. S obzirom da dugotrajna izloženost stresu može ostaviti velike posljedice na ljudsko zdravlje, iznimno je važno razviti učinkovite strategije upravljanja stresom. Intervencije za upravljanje stresom mogu pomoći pojedincima da se prilagode stresnim situacijama, razviju vještinu tolerancije na stres i ublaže emocionalnu iscrpljenost (Tetrick i Winslow, 2015). Glazer i Liu (2017) ističu da su intervencije za upravljanje stresom usmjerene na smanjenje problema unutar ustanova. Nadalje, naglašavaju važnost jačanja aspekata radnoga okružja koji stvaraju osjećaj kvalitetnoga radnog konteksta, omogućavajući pojedincima da se suočavaju sa stresorima koji mogu porasti. Također, vrlo je važno pružiti alate pojedincima unutar ustanove za upravljanje stresnim događajima.

Na individualnoj razini, Panigrahi (2017) identificira nekoliko učinkovitih načina borbe sa svakodnevnim stresom: duže spavanje, tjelesne aktivnosti, tehnike opuštanja, razgovor s bliskim osobama, upravljanje vremenom i izbjegavanje štetnih navika poput konzumacije alkohola i cigareta. Nadalje, Gabriel i Aguinis (2022) navode dvije glavne vrste individualnih intervencija: kognitivno-bihevioralni trening (mijenjanje misli i razvoj aktivnih vještina suočavanja) i grupe za meditaciju svjesnosti (prilagođavanje stresnim događajima kroz razvoj svjesnosti).

Obrazovni kontekst podrazumijeva da odgojitelji imaju značajnu odgovornost za budućnost društva te bi u odgojno-obrazovnom radu trebali biti sposobni koordinirati aktivnosti i tražiti primjere dobre prakse kako bi se osigurala kvaliteta rada. Jedan od ključnih načina za postizanje toga cilja jest razvoj emocionalne inteligencije koja pridonosi učinkovitoj provedbi profesionalne prakse (Broilo Bartelle, 2020). Osobe slabe emocionalne inteligencije suočavaju se s nekoliko poteškoća u rješavanju problema povezanih sa stresom. Ovu činjenicu potvrđuju različita istraživanja koja sugeriraju jaku povezanost između stresa i emocionalne inteligencije (Sharma i Kumar, 2016).

Prikazani teorijski pristup profesionalnom stresu u odgojiteljskoj profesiji omogućuje sveobuhvatno razumijevanje ovoga složenog fenomena. Analizom različitih aspekata profesionalnoga stresa, od njegovih uzroka i manifestacija do posljedica i strategija upravljanja, formira se jasna slika o izazovima s kojima se suočavaju odgojitelji u suvremenom obrazovnom kontekstu. Osobito je važno prepoznati da se profesionalni stres u odgojiteljskoj profesiji ne može promatrati izolirano, već kao rezultat složene interakcije između individualnih karakteristika odgojitelja, specifičnosti njihova posla, organizacijskih čimbenika i širega društvenog konteksta. Sindrom sagorijevanja, kao najteža posljedica dugotrajne izloženosti stresu, predstavlja ozbiljan izazov koji zahtijeva

sustavnu prevenciju i intervenciju. Razumijevanje različitih dimenzija profesionalnoga stresa, kao i čimbenika koji mogu ublažiti njegove negativne učinke, poput socijalne podrške, transformacijskoga vodstva i razvoja emocionalnih kompetencija, pruža temelj za osmišljavanje učinkovitih strategija zaštite mentalnoga zdravlja i profesionalne dobrobiti odgojitelja. Takav pristup ne samo da doprinosi kvaliteti rada odgojitelja, već ima dalekosežne posljedice na kvalitetu odgojno-obrazovnoga procesa i razvoj djece u predškolskim ustanovama.

## Metodologija

Provedeno je kvantitativno istraživanje s ciljem ispitivanja razine profesionalnoga stresa odgojitelja u predškolskim ustanovama i identificiranja ključnih prediktora njihove radne motivacije.

Sukladno ovom cilju, formirane su dvije hipoteze:

Hipoteza 1: Na temelju teorije sagorijevanja, postoji jaka negativna povezanost između učestalosti stresa i motivacije za rad, tako da odgojitelji koji doživljavaju češći stres pokazuju znatno nižu motivaciju za rad.

Hipoteza 2: Motivacija odgojitelja za rad linearno se povećava s godinama radnoga iskustva, pri čemu iskusniji odgojitelji pokazuju više razine motivacije od početnika.

Eksplorativni ciljevi: Osim testiranja primarnih hipoteza, istraživanje istražuje odnose između dodatnih varijabli vezanih uz rad (odnosi s kolegama, radni uvjeti, manjak energije, pohvala kao motivacija) te stresa i motivacije odgojitelja kako bi se steklo sveobuhvatno razumijevanje čimbenika koji utječu na profesionalnu dobrobit.

## Ispitanici

Ciljanu populaciju istraživanja činili su odgojitelji zaposleni u ustanovama ranoga i predškolskoga odgoja i obrazovanja na teritoriju Republike Hrvatske. Uzorak je bio prigodan uzorak koji je obuhvaćao  $N = 130$  ispitanika iz 18 hrvatskih županija. Analiza snage *a priori* koristeći G\*Power 3.1 (Faul i sur., 2007) pokazala je da za otkrivanje velikoga učinka ( $r = .50$ ) u korelacijskoj analizi s  $\alpha = .05$  i snagom od ,95, potrebna je minimalna veličina uzorka od 84 sudionika. Postignuta veličina uzorka od  $N = 130$  pruža statističku snagu  $> .99$  za otkrivanje srednjih do velikih veličina učinka.

Geografska distribucija uzorka pokazuje najveću zastupljenost ispitanika iz Požeško-slavonske županije (15,4 %,  $n = 20$ ), zatim Brodsko-posavske županije (13,8 %,  $n = 18$ ), Grada Zagreba (11,5 %,  $n = 15$ ), Zagrebačke županije (10,8 %,  $n = 14$ ), Osječko-baranjske županije (8,5 %,  $n = 11$ ), Varaždinske županije (6,2 %,  $n = 8$ ), Virovitičko-podravske županije (6,2 %,  $n = 8$ ), Primorsko-goranske županije (5,4 %,  $n = 7$ ), Koprivničko-križevačke županije (4,6 %,  $n = 6$ ), Međimurske županije (3,8 %,  $n = 5$ ), Karlovačke županije (3,1 %,  $n = 4$ ), Istarske županije (2,3 %,  $n = 3$ ), Sisačko-moslavačke županije (2,3 %,  $n = 3$ ), Splitsko-dalmatinske županije (2,3 %,  $n = 3$ ), Šibensko-kninske županije (1,5 %,  $n = 2$ ), Bjelovarsko-bilogorske županije (1,5 %,  $n = 2$ ), Dubrovačko-neretvanske županije (0,8 %,  $n = 1$ ) i Ličko-senjske županije (0,8 %,  $n = 1$ ).

Prema spolnoj strukturi, uzorak je karakteriziran značajnom prevalencijom ženskoga spola (99,2 %,  $n = 129$ ) u odnosu na muški spol (0,8 %,  $n = 1$ ), što odražava rodnu strukturu profesije odgojitelja u Republici Hrvatskoj.

### **Operacionalizacija varijabli i mjerni instrumenti**

Odabir varijabli za ovu studiju temelji se teorijskim okvirima o sagorijevanju i radnoj motivaciji (Maslach i Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli i sur., 2020), kao i istraživačkim ciljevima sveobuhvatnoga ispitivanja fenomena profesionalnoga stresa kod odgojitelja. Iako se primarne hipoteze usredotočuju na odnose između učestalosti stresa, radne motivacije i godina radnoga iskustva, dodatne varijable uključene su kako bi se: (a) istražili potencijalni moderatorski ili medijacijski čimbenici (odnosi s kolegama, uvjeti rada), (b) procijenile dimenzije sindroma sagorijevanja (nedostatak energije, emocionalna iscrpljenost) i (c) istražili motivacijski mehanizmi (pohvala kao motivacija). Ove dodatne mjere omogućuju sveobuhvatnije razumijevanje složene međugre individualnih, interpersonalnih i organizacijskih čimbenika koji utječu na profesionalnu dobrobit odgojitelja.

Za potrebe ovoga istraživanja konstruiran je anketni upitnik kako bi se operacionalizirale sljedeće ključne varijable: učestalost profesionalnoga stresa, radna motivacija, odnosi s kolegama, uvjeti rada, nedostatak energije i pohvala kao izvor motivacije. Dodatno su prikupljeni demografski podatci o spolu, godinama radnoga iskustva i županiji zaposlenja.

**Razvoj instrumenta.** Anketne čestice razvijene su specifično za ovu studiju na temelju teorijskih okvira sagorijevanja (Maslach i Leiter, 2016) i radne motivacije (Schaufeli i sur., 2020) te postojećih istraživanja o profesionalnom stresu odgojitelja djece rane dobi. Čestice su konstruirane kako bi odražavale ključne dimenzije profesionalnoga stresa i motivacijskih čimbenika relevantnih za hrvatski kontekst predškolskoga odgoja. Pouzdanost unutarne konzistentnosti procijenjena je korištenjem uzorka istraživanja, pokazujući zadovoljavajuće vrijednosti za ljestvicu učestalosti stresa ( $\alpha = 0,87$ ) i ljestvicu radne motivacije ( $\alpha = 0,82$ ).

**Učestalost profesionalnoga stresa.** Učestalost profesionalnoga stresa mjerena je pomoću 8 čestica koje su ispitanici ocjenjivali na Likertovoj ljestvici od 1 (nikada) do 5 (uvijek). Čestice su obuhvaćale različite aspekte doživljaja stresa u odgojiteljskoj profesiji. Primjeri čestica uključuju: *Osjećam se preopterećeno poslom*, *Teško mi je uravnotežiti sve radne obveze* i *Osjećam se napeto tijekom radnoga dana*. Ukupni rezultat za učestalost stresa izračunat je kao aritmetička sredina svih čestica, pri čemu viši rezultati ukazuju na veću učestalost doživljenoga profesionalnog stresa. Analiza pouzdanosti pokazala je visoku unutarnju konzistentnost ljestvice (Cronbachov  $\alpha = 0,87$ ).

**Radna motivacija.** Radna motivacija mjerena je pomoću 6 čestica na Likertovoj ljestvici od 1 (uopće se ne slažem) do 5 (u potpunosti se slažem). Čestice su se odnosile na različite izvore i razine motivacije odgojitelja za obavljanje profesionalnih zadataka. Primjeri čestica uključuju: *Radim jer me moj posao ispunjava*, *Osjećam zadovoljstvo*

*kada vidim napredak djece i Motivira me postizanje profesionalnih ciljeva.* Ukupni rezultat za motivaciju izračunat je kao aritmetička sredina svih čestica, pri čemu viši rezultati ukazuju na višu razinu radne motivacije. Ljestvica je pokazala zadovoljavajuću pouzdanost (Cronbachov  $\alpha = 0,82$ ).

**Odnosi s kolegama.** Kvaliteta interpersonalnih odnosa s kolegama mjerena je pomoću jedne čestice na Likertovoj ljestvici od 1 (vrlo loši) do 5 (vrlo dobri), pri čemu viši rezultati ukazuju na pozitivnije odnose.

**Uvjeti rada.** Procjena uvjeta rada provedena je pomoću jedne čestice na ljestvici od 1 (vrlo loši) do 5 (vrlo dobri).

**Nedostatak energije.** Osjećaj nedostatka energije i iscrpljenosti mjereno je pomoću jedne čestice na ljestvici od 1 (nikada) do 5 (uvijek), pri čemu viši rezultati ukazuju na veći stupanj iscrpljenosti.

**Pohvala kao motivacija.** Važnost pohvale kao izvora motivacije procijenjena je na ljestvici od 1 (uopće nije važno) do 4 (vrlo važno).

**Demografske varijable.** Prikupljeni su podaci o spolu, godinama radnoga iskustva (kategorizirano kao: manje od 1 godine, 1 - 5 godina, 5 - 10 godina, 10 - 15 godina, više od 15 godina), županiji zaposlenja i dodatnim varijablama relevantnim za istraživanje kao što su namjera promjene karijere, doživljaj straha/napetosti, utjecaj stresa na partnerske odnose i vrijeme za roditeljstvo.

**Provjera pretpostavki za statističke analize.** Prije provođenja parametrijskih statističkih postupaka verificirane su osnovne pretpostavke za njihovu primjenu. Normalnost distribucije kontinuiranih varijabli ispitana je korištenjem Kolmogorov-Smirnovljeva testa i vizualnom inspekcijom Q-Q dijagrama. Rezultati pokazuju da određene varijable statistički značajno odstupaju od normalne distribucije ( $p < 0,05$ ); međutim, s obzirom na veličinu uzorka ( $N = 130$ ) i robusnost parametrijskih testova na manja odstupanja od normalnosti, odlučeno je primijeniti parametrijske postupke uz opreznu interpretaciju rezultata. Homogenost varijanci ispitana je korištenjem Leveneova testa koji pokazuje da je pretpostavka homogenosti zadovoljena za većinu usporedbi ( $p > 0,05$ ). Analiza ekstremnih vrijednosti provedena je korištenjem Z-rezultata. Nisu identificirane ekstremne vrijednosti ( $|Z| > 3,29$ ) koje bi značajno utjecale na rezultate analiza.

### ***Procedura prikupljanja podataka i etička načela***

Prikupljanje podataka provedeno je u razdoblju od listopada do studenoga 2024. godine. Primijenjena je elektronička metoda prikupljanja podataka korištenjem platforme Google Forms. Distribucija upitnika organizirana je putem društvenih mreža, što je omogućilo široku dostupnost instrumenta i povećalo fleksibilnost za ispitanike u pogledu vremena i mjesta popunjavanja upitnika. Ovaj pristup odabran je zbog svoje praktičnosti, isplativosti i učinkovitosti u dosezanju ciljne populacije.

Istraživanje je provedeno u skladu s etičkim standardima znanstvenoga istraživanja. Prije sudjelovanja u istraživanju, svi ispitanici informirani su o svrsi, ciljevima i

metodama istraživanja putem detaljnih uputa na početku upitnika. Osigurana je potpuna anonimnost ispitanika, sudjelovanje je bilo dobrovoljno, a ispitanici su imali mogućnost prestanka popunjavanja upitnika u bilo kojem trenutku bez posljedica.

Svi prikupljeni podatci tretiraju se kao strogo povjerljivi i zaštićeni su od neovlaštenoga pristupa. Analiza i interpretacija rezultata temelje se isključivo na agregiranim podacima bez mogućnosti identifikacije pojedinih ispitanika. Podatci se koriste isključivo u znanstvene svrhe i pohranjuju se u skladu s propisima o zaštiti osobnih podataka.

### **Analiza podataka**

Statistička analiza podataka provedena je korištenjem IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0. Za sve kontinuirane varijable izračunata je standardna deskriptivna statistika, uključujući aritmetičku sredinu, standardnu devijaciju, medijan i raspon. Pearsonova korelacijska analiza korištena je za ispitivanje odnosa između kontinuiranih varijabli. Studentov t-test za nezavisne uzorke primijenjen je za ispitivanje razlika između binarnih skupina, dok je jednosmjerna analiza varijance korištena za usporedbu skupina prema godinama radnoga iskustva. Za identifikaciju individualnoga doprinosa svakoga potencijalnog prediktora radnoj motivaciji provedena je serija jednostavnih linearnih regresijskih analiza, pri čemu je svaki prediktor analiziran zasebno. Varijable su unesene simultano (enter metoda) u regresijski model, uključujući učestalost stresa, godine radnoga iskustva i odnose s kolegama kao nezavisne varijable, s radnom motivacijom kao zavisnom varijablom. Razina značajnosti postavljena je na  $\alpha = 0,05$  za sve statističke testove. Veličina učinka kvantificirana je korištenjem *Cohenova d* za t-testove. Razina statističke značajnosti postavljena je na  $\alpha = 0,05$ . Za testiranje linearnih trendova u motivaciji putem uređene kategorije radnoga iskustva provedena je polinomna analiza trenda kao dio jednosmjerne ANOVE.

## **Rezultati**

Tablica 1 prikazuje deskriptivnu statistiku za sve konstrukte koji su mjereni u istraživanju.

Tablica 1

Rezultati ukazuju na umjereno visoke prosječne vrijednosti za većinu mjenjenih varijabli, pri čemu odnos s kolegama postiže najvišu prosječnu ocjenu, što sugerira pozitivne interpersonalne odnose na radnom mjestu. Nedostatak energije također pokazuje visoku prosječnu vrijednost, signalizirajući značajan problem s iscrpljenošću vezanom uz posao. Učestalost stresa i uvjeti rada pokazuju umjerene vrijednosti, dok motivacija za rad i pohvala kao motivacija postižu najniže prosječne ocjene, s umjerenom varijabilnošću u odgovorima sudionika

Tablica 2 prikazuje najjače korelacije među mjenjenim varijablama, specifično one s apsolutnim vrijednostima većim od .80.

Tablica 2

Korelacijska analiza otkriva nekoliko ključnih povezanosti među varijablama. Viša učestalost stresa snažno je povezana sa smanjenom motivacijom zaposlenika. Iscrpljeniji zaposlenici pokazuju veću ovisnost o vanjskim motivatorima, dok loši uvjeti rada značajno narušavaju motivaciju. Stres je snažno povezan s iscrpljenošću. Pozitivni odnosi s kolegama povezani su s nižom učestalošću stresa i višom motivacijom, naglašavajući važnost interpersonalnih odnosa u smanjenju stresa i održavanju motivacije.

Tablica 3 prikazuje razlike u motivaciji za rad između skupina na temelju binarnih varijabli.

#### Tablica 3

T-testovi otkrivaju dramatične razlike u motivaciji između skupina. Najveći učinak (*Cohenov*  $d = -2,91$ ) uočen je kod zaposlenika koji razmišljaju o promjeni karijere jer je njihova motivacija značajno niža ( $M = 2,68$ ) u usporedbi s onima koji ne razmišljaju o promjeni ( $M = 4,35$ ). Slično, zaposlenici koji doživljavaju strah/napetost pokazuju drastično nižu motivaciju ( $M = 2,66$ ) s vrlo velikom veličinom učinka ( $d = -2,62$ ). Nedostatak vremena za roditeljstvo, nepoštivanje Državnoga pedagoškog standarda (DPS) i stres koji utječe na partnera također značajno smanjuju motivaciju, svi s vrlo velikim veličinama učinka. Svi su rezultati statistički značajni na razini  $p < ,001$ , što ukazuje na robusnost rezultata.

Tablica 4 prikazuje analogne rezultate t-testa koji ispituju razlike u učestalosti stresa među istim binarnim skupinama.

#### Tablica 4

Analiza razlika u stresu otkriva sličan obrazac onome uočenom u motivaciji. Zaposlenici koji doživljavaju strah/napetost pokazuju značajno niže razine stresa ( $M = 2,75$ ) u usporedbi s onima koji ga ne doživljavaju ( $M = 4,46$ ), sa znatnom veličinom učinka ( $d = -3,31$ ). To može ukazivati da pojedinci koji već doživljavaju visoke razine straha/napetosti možda primjenjuju strategije suočavanja ili se prilagođavaju stresnim situacijama. Neusklađenost s DPS-om i nedostatak vremena također su povezani s nižim razinama stresa u zahvaćenim skupinama, što može sugerirati rezignaciju ili emocionalno distanciranje kao oblike suočavanja.

Tablica 5 prikazuje razine radne motivacije s obzirom na različite kategorije godina radnoga staža.

#### Tablica 5

Jednosmjerna ANOVA otkrila je značajne razlike u motivaciji prema kategorijama radnoga iskustva ( $F(4, 125) = 68,42, p < ,001$ ). Polinomna analiza trenda potvrdila je značajan linearni trend, ukazujući na sustavno povećanje motivacije s godinama radnoga staža.

Rezultati ukazuju na izrazit uzlazni trend u motivaciji kako se povećavaju godine radnoga staža. Zaposlenici s manje od jedne godine radnoga staža pokazuju najnižu motivaciju ( $M = 1,67$ ), dok oni s više od 15 godina radnoga staža pokazuju najvišu

motivaciju ( $M = 4,89$ ). Ovo progresivno povećanje u svim kategorijama trajanja zaposlenja (1 - 5 godina:  $M = 2,98$ ; 5 - 10 godina:  $M = 3,62$ ; 10 - 15 godina:  $M = 4,00$ ) sugerira da dugoročni zaposlenici razvijaju veću privrženost svojem poslu i organizaciji. Statistički značajan F-test ( $p < ,001$ ) potvrđuje robusnost ovoga trenda, što može ukazivati na uspješnu organizacijsku socijalizaciju i profesionalni razvoj tijekom vremena.

Tablica 6 prikazuje rezultate jednostavnih linearnih regresijskih analiza koje ispituju ključne prediktore radne motivacije među odgojiteljima. Svaki prediktor analiziran je zasebno kako bi se utvrdio njegov individualni odnos s radnom motivacijom.

Tablica 6

Jednostavne linearne regresijske analize otkrivaju da svaka ispitivana varijabla individualno predviđa radnu motivaciju kada se analizira zasebno. Učestalost stresa pokazuje najjaču individualnu povezanost, objašnjavajući 88,1 % varijance u motivaciji ( $R^2 = ,88$ ). Uvjeti rada objašnjavaju 79,2 % varijance ( $R^2 = ,79$ ), dok nedostatak energije objašnjava 77,2 % varijance ( $R^2 = ,77$ ). Važno je napomenuti da ove  $R^2$  vrijednosti predstavljaju varijancu objašnjenu svakim prediktorom individualno i nisu aditivne jer su prediktori visoko međusobno korelirani.

## Diskusija

Cilj studije bio je ispitati razinu profesionalnoga stresa među odgojiteljima u predškolskim ustanovama i identificirati ključne prediktore radne motivacije među odgojiteljima. U tu svrhu provedena je *online* anketa sa 130 odgojitelja iz 18 hrvatskih županija. Testirane su dvije primarne hipoteze: (Hipoteza 1) da će učestalost stresa biti negativno povezana s radnom motivacijom i (Hipoteza 2) da će se motivacija linearno povećavati s godinama radnog iskustva. Obje hipoteze bile su u potpunosti podržane podacima, s iznimno jakom negativnom korelacijom između stresa i motivacije ( $r = -,94$ ,  $R^2 = ,88$ ) i značajnim linearnim porastom motivacije u kategorijama iskustva ( $F(4, 125) = 68,42$ ,  $p < ,001$ ). Dodatno, eksplorativne analize otkrile su da su odnosi s kolegama snažno negativno povezani s učestalošću stresa ( $r = -,86$ ), a odgojitelji koji razmišljaju o promjeni karijere pokazuju znatno nižu motivaciju (*Cohenov*  $d = -2,91$ ), što ističe ključne čimbenike u dobrobiti i zadržavanju odgojitelja.

Dobiveni rezultati pružaju značajan uvid u složene odnose između profesionalnoga stresa, radne motivacije i radnoga iskustva među odgojiteljima u Republici Hrvatskoj. Najistaknutiji rezultat ovoga istraživanja odnosi se na iznimno jaku negativnu korelaciju između učestalosti stresa i radne motivacije ( $r = -,94$ ). Korelacija ove veličine izvanredno je visoka i zahtijeva pažljivu interpretaciju. U psihometrijskim terminima, korelacije koje se približavaju ,90 ili više obično ukazuju na značajno preklapanje između konstrukata, sugerirajući da učestalost stresa i radna motivacija mogu predstavljati dva pola jedne temeljne dimenzije, a ne potpuno različite konstrukte. Ovaj rezultat usklađen je s teorijskim konceptualizacijama sagorijevanja na poslu, pri čemu se povećani stres i smanjivanje motivacije promatraju kao međuovisni aspekti istoga psihološkog stanja

koje se pogoršava (Maslach i Leiter, 2016). Gotovo savršen inverzni odnos sugerira da u kontekstu ranoga i predškolskoga odgoja i obrazovanja, profesionalni stres i radna motivacija mogu biti neodvojivi. Kako se stres povećava, motivacija se ne samo smanjuje, već je temeljno narušena. Ovo ističe kritičnu važnost prevencije stresa kao izravnoga puta do održavanja motivacije odgojitelja. Ovaj rezultat u potpunosti se slaže s istraživanjem Agyaponga i sur. (2022), koje potvrđuje da stres povezan s nastavničkom profesijom može biti povezan sa sagorijevanjem, anksioznošću i depresijom, što sve ima duboke učinke na zdravlje, dobrobit i produktivnost učitelja. Međutim, izuzetno visoka korelacija također postavlja pitanja o diskriminantnoj valjanosti dviju mjera i sugerira da bi buduća istraživanja trebala koristiti precizniji instrumentarij za razlikovanje između iskustava stresa i pada motivacije, ili alternativno, ponovno konceptualizirati ove konstrukte kao unificirane pokazatelje profesionalne dobrobiti.

Posebno zabrinjavajuća je analiza t-testova koja otkriva dramatične razlike u motivaciji između skupina, pri čemu zaposlenici koji razmišljaju o promjeni karijere pokazuju značajno nižu motivaciju u usporedbi s onima koji ne razmatraju promjenu, s velikim učinkom veličine. Ovaj rezultat podržava longitudinalnu studiju Skaalvika i Skaalvik (2020), koja pokazuje da sagorijevanje učitelja može biti konačni ishod dugotrajnoga profesionalnog stresa te da su stresni radni uvjeti povezani s mjerama sagorijevanja. Međutim, kvaziekperimentalna priroda ove grupne varijable onemogućava kauzalnu interpretaciju. Budući da je razmišljanje o promjeni karijere bilo samo-izvješteno, a ne eksperimentalno manipulirano, ne možemo utvrditi smjer kauzalnosti: niska motivacija može dovesti odgojitelje do razmatranja napuštanja profesije ili odluka o odlasku može utjecati na to kako izvještavaju o svojim trenutačnim razinama motivacije. Ovo predstavlja slučaj potencijalnoga kružnog zaključivanja koje ograničava interpretabilnost ovoga rezultata.

Jednostavne linearne regresijske analize identificiraju učestalost stresa kao varijablu s najjačom pojedinačnom povezanošću s motivacijom za rad, objašnjavajući značajan udio varijance pri samostalnom ispitivanju. Takav rezultat konzistentan je s metaanalitičkom studijom Madigana i Kima (2021), koja pokazuje da je sagorijevanje učitelja povezano s lošijim akademskim postignućima među učenicima i nižom kvalitetom motivacije učenika. Slično tome, istraživanje Kumarija i Kumara (2023) potvrđuje da motivacija značajno utječe na radnu uspješnost odgojitelja.

Drugi ključni rezultat odnosi se na linearni porast motivacije s godinama radnoga iskustva, što podupire drugu hipotezu istraživanja. Zaposlenici s manje od godinu dana iskustva pokazuju najnižu motivaciju, dok oni s više od 15 godina iskustva postižu najvišu motivaciju. Međutim, ovaj je rezultat djelomično nesukladan s međunarodnim studijama. Toropova i sur. (2021) navode da istraživanja o utjecaju nastavničkoga iskustva na zadovoljstvo poslom među učiteljima ostaju kontradiktorna i vjerojatno ovise o karakteristikama školskih sustava specifičnih za pojedine zemlje. Naše se istraživanje, međutim, ne slaže s teorijom organizacijske socijalizacije koju podupiru Wang i sur. (2024), koji naglašavaju da stariji odgojitelji mogu doživljavati dosadu koja vodi do pojačane iscrpljenosti, no to takav nalaz nije utvrđen među našim

ispitanicima. Umjesto toga, naši rezultati podupiru teoriju da se s vremenom razvija veća identifikacija s organizacijom i profesijom.

Međutim, važno alternativno objašnjenje za ovaj rezultat treba razmotriti: uočeno povećanje motivacije s godinama iskustva može odražavati pristranost odabira, a ne razvojni proces. Konkretno, odgojitelji koji su ostali nemotivirani vjerojatno su napustili profesiju ranije u svojoj karijeri, dok su oni koji su ustrajali upravo oni s višom intrinzičnom motivacijom i jačom profesionalnom predanošću. Ovaj „efekt preživljavanja” sugerira da naš uzorak iskusnih odgojitelja predstavlja selektiranu skupinu pojedinaca koji su se uspješno prilagodili profesionalnim zahtjevima i održali svoju motivaciju tijekom vremena. Ova interpretacija usklađena je s istraživanjima o napuštanju učiteljske profesije, koja pokazuju da značajan udio odgojitelja napušta profesiju unutar prvih pet godina upravo zbog niske motivacije i visokih razina stresa. Stoga linearno povećanje motivacije koje smo uočili možda ne odražava univerzalnu razvojnu putanju, već selektivno zadržavanje motiviranih pojedinaca.

Analizirajući najjače korelacije u studiji, osobito zapažen rezultat jest snažna negativna korelacija između odnosa s kolegama i učestalosti stresa, što naglašava važnost pozitivnih međuljudskih odnosa u smanjenju stresa. Ovaj rezultat izravno se slaže s nedavnim studijama Wang i sur. (2024), koje pokazuju da pozitivni odnosi koreliraju s povećanim zadovoljstvom poslom, smanjenim razinama stresa i osjećajem ispunjenosti među odgojiteljima. Vrlo snažna pozitivna korelacija između nedostatka energije i pohvale kao motivacije sugerira da su umorniji zaposlenici ovisniji o vanjskim motivatorima. Ovaj rezultat podupire teorije motivacije Kumari i Kumara (2023), koje naglašavaju da intrinzična motivacija pokreće samozadovoljstvo, ali kada su unutarnji resursi iscrpljeni, oslanjanje na vanjske poticaje se povećava. Wang i sur. (2024) potvrđuju da emocionalna iscrpljenost predstavlja temeljnu dimenziju profesionalnoga sagorijevanja u obrazovnom okruženju, obilježenu dubokim iscrpljivanjem emocionalnih resursa.

Razlike u stresu prema binarnim varijablama otkrivaju zabrinjavajuće obrasce. Zaposlenici koji doživljavaju strah/napetost izvještavaju o značajno nižim razinama stresa u usporedbi s onima koji to ne osjećaju, uz znatan učinak. Ovaj paradoksalni rezultat djelomično je sukladan istraživanju Agyapong i sur. (2022), koje ukazuje da je više od tri četvrtine odgojitelja doživjelo zdravstvene probleme koji proizlaze iz nemogućnosti upravljanja stresom, što sugerira da oni koji već doživljavaju visoke razine straha/napetosti mogu primjenjivati strategije suočavanja ili se prilagođavaju stresnim situacijama u obliku emocionalne rezignacije. Praktične implikacije ovih rezultata značajne su za upravljanje predškolskim ustanovama. Naši rezultati usklađeni su s pozivima stručnjaka da stres i sagorijevanje tjeraju previše pojedinaca iz profesije (NEA, 2024). Za praktičnu primjenu rezultata, naši rezultati podržavaju istraživanje Cabarona i Oca (2023), koje pokazuje da motivacija značajno utječe na radnu uspješnost učitelja, čime se potvrđuje potreba za sustavnim pristupom upravljanju stresom. Schools That Lead (2024) upozoravaju da dugotrajni profesionalni stres uzrokuje da se talentirani odgojitelji emocionalno povlače, slabo obavljaju posao ili potpuno napuštaju profesiju.

Važno je priznati određena ograničenja ove studije. Prigodni uzorak doveo je do neproporcionalne zastupljenosti sudionika u županijama, pri čemu su neke županije bile značajno više zastupljene od drugih (npr. Požeško-slavonska županija 15,4 %, Ličko-senjska županija 0,8 %). S obzirom da se županije razlikuju po broju radnih mjesta u predškolskim ustanovama, ekonomskim uvjetima i specifičnim regionalnim okolnostima, neproporcionalna zastupljenost sudionika mogla bi utjecati ne samo na generalizaciju rezultata na cijelu populaciju odgojitelja u Republici Hrvatskoj, već i na same rezultate istraživanja, ako regionalni čimbenici značajno utječu na razine stresa i motivacije. Dodatno, nedostaju važni demografski podatci, kao što su točna dob sudionika, radno iskustvo na trenutačnom radnom mjestu i informacije o partnerskom i roditeljskom statusu. Nedostatak ovih podataka ograničava mogućnost dublje analize varijabli poput utjecaja stresa na partnerske odnose ili vrijeme za roditeljstvo, a također onemogućava provjeru jesu li svi sudionici bili u mogućnosti adekvatno odgovoriti na pitanja vezana uz partnerske odnose i roditeljstvo. Buduća istraživanja trebala bi osigurati da se takva pitanja postavljaju samo sudionicima za koje su relevantna ili provjeriti postoje li razlike u odgovorima na temelju partnerskoga i roditeljskoga statusa. Nadalje, studija je provedena u jednoj vremenskoj točki (presjek istraživanje), što ne dopušta utvrđivanje kauzalnih odnosa između promatranih varijabli. Buduća longitudinalna istraživanja bila bi potrebna za bolje razumijevanje dinamične prirode odnosa između profesionalnoga stresa, motivacije i radnoga iskustva tijekom vremena.

## **Zaključak**

Istraživanje provedeno na uzorku od 130 odgojitelja iz 18 hrvatskih županija pruža značajan uvid u složene odnose između profesionalnoga stresa, radne motivacije i radnoga iskustva u predškolskim ustanovama. Rezultati nedvosmisleno potvrđuju obje hipoteze i otkrivaju zabrinjavajuće trendove koji zahtijevaju pažnju stručnjaka i nositelja politika.

Posebno alarmantne su dramatične razlike u motivaciji između skupina odgojitelja. Oni koji razmišljaju o promjeni karijere pokazuju drastično nižu motivaciju s velikim učinkom veličine, ističući ozbiljan problem u pogledu zadržavanja osoblja u nastavničkoj profesiji. Istraživanje također otkriva ključnu ulogu pozitivnih interpersonalnih odnosa u jakoj negativnoj korelaciji između odnosa s kolegama i učestalosti stresa. Vrlo jaka pozitivna korelacija između nedostatka energije i pohvale kao motivacije sugerira da emocionalno iscrpljeni odgojitelji postaju sve ovisniji o vanjskim motivatorima, što može ukazivati na simptome sagorijevanja.

Ovo istraživanje predstavlja značajan doprinos razumijevanju profesionalnoga stresa u nastavničkoj profesiji unutar hrvatskoga konteksta. Rezultati jasno ukazuju na nužnost sustavnoga pristupa zaštiti mentalnoga zdravlja i profesionalne dobrobiti odgojitelja, što je ključno ne samo za kvalitetu rada odgojitelja već i za optimalni razvoj djece u predškolskim ustanovama. Ulaganje u dobrobit odgojitelja predstavlja ulaganje u budućnost društva osiguravanjem kvalitetne osnove za cjeloživotno učenje i razvoj.