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# CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS IN NOVICE TEACHERS

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## **Abstract:**

*This article focuses on the study of stress experienced by novice teachers at the beginning of their professional career. The study included two groups of participants - directors of educational institutions and novice teachers. The purpose of this study is to clarify the underlying causes and consequences of stress and to understand how mentoring in educational institutions influences stress management in novice teachers. The first part of the study focused on novice teachers and their perspectives on the causes through a projective "Finish the Sentence" methodology and the consequences of stress through focus group work. The second part of the study analyses the opinions and views of principals on the mentoring support provided to novice teachers. The results show that mentoring plays a key role in the adjustment of novice teachers and helps them cope more effectively with the challenges of their new professional role. Principals recognize the importance of support and encourage the active participation of beginning teachers in supportive programs.*

**Keywords:** stress, novice teachers, mentors, causes of stress, effects of stress

## **INTRODUCTION**

The teaching profession is one of the most exciting and responsible professions that requires dynamism, flexibility and continuous adaptation to changing educational requirements. According to M. Mihova „The teaching profession, which is the basis of all other professions, is an „eternal“ profession.“ The role of teachers in society is invaluable and incomparable. They not only impart knowledge but also act as a bridge between different generations, carrying the experience and wisdom of past times to future generations.

In their qualitative role as educational leaders, they are responsible for shaping the character and values of young people, as well as their learning and personal development. They not only convey facts, but also help students develop social skills, critical thinking and the ability to learn independently, thus influencing society as a whole (M. Mihova, 2018).

Beginning teachers have high expectations for their professional success, including establishing good relationships with students, with members of the parent community, providing quality education, and developing habits of learning.

K. Kostov stresses that „In a school environment, not only is the value system of children developed, but also the potential for the development of the overall culture of society is created. This is directly related to the professional realization of those of them who in the future manifest themselves as subjects changing the common cultural identity, refracting it through their own developed self“ (K. Kostov, 2021).

They need support and guidance to adapt to the complexity of the teaching profession and to develop the necessary skills to manage stress effectively, helping them to achieve success and job satisfaction.

For many beginning teachers, this career path can be exhausting and challenging. Stress in beginning teachers is widespread and can have serious consequences for their professional growth as well

as their personal lives and well-being. In his extensive research Y. Yanakiev informs the public about „the need to derive and implement algorithms for coping with chronic stress in at-risk groups“ (Y. Yanakiev, 2019).

This article focuses on the study of stress in novice teachers (1-5 years of professional experience), analyzing the causes that contribute to this stress, the effects it can have on them, and strategies that can help them cope more effectively with this challenging aspect of the profession. The aim is to explore current theories and research in the field that contribute to a better understanding of the causes and consequences of novice teacher stress, and to propose concrete strategies and solutions that can be implemented in educational institutions.

The topic regarding stress in beginning teachers is extremely important and relevant to research today for several reasons:

**Retaining beginning teachers in the profession.** Statistics show that beginning teachers face high levels of stress and experience difficulties, leading to high rates of leaving the profession. With global statistics showing up to 50% teacher attrition in the first five years, there is a need for more detailed information on retention methods. Although in some contexts the percentage of teachers remaining in the profession may be higher, the question is why?

This can depend on many factors - both professional and personal. It is important to clarify whether the departure is the result of dissatisfaction with working conditions, insufficient support from educational institutions or lack of professional development. In addition, personal factors such as work-life balance can also play a significant role.

The analysis should also explore the possibility of a combination of these factors. Perhaps the interplay between professional and personal aspects is what ultimately influences teachers' decision to stay or leave the profession.

Understanding the reasons behind teacher attrition statistics is key to developing effective teacher retention and support strategies that will, ultimately, positively impact the educational environment and student success. (Thelma M. Gunn, Philip A. McRae, 2021)

**Quality of education.** The stress faced by novice teaching professionals can have a negative impact on the quality of education provided. If teachers are dissatisfied, feel burnt out in the profession and ineffective in managing their stress, this affects their interactions with other teachers, with students and their learning. A team of specialists has implemented a study and added to the evidence base by examining the links between teachers' years of experience and teaching quality. The results show no evidence of lower teaching quality for novice teachers (0-3 years of experience), but they do find evidence of a decline in teaching quality for teachers with 4-5 years of experience (Linda J. Graham, Sonia L.J. White, Kathy Cologon, Robert C. Pianta, 2020).

**Beginning teachers' health and well-being.** Stress in novice teachers has serious negative consequences for their physical and mental health, as well as their general well-being. „The measured increase in stress among teachers in a study of Icelandic professionals is of great significance as the results showed that poorer mental and physical health, as well as mental and physical symptoms, were significantly associated with perceived stress, after controlling for other factors in the models.“ This shows the importance of doing everything possible to improve work-related well-being among teachers. (Hjordis Sigursteinsdottir, Gudbjorg Linda Rafnsdottir, 2022)

**Professional development and growth.** Researching novice teachers' stress and developing coping strategies also contributed to their professional development and growth. They improve their skills

through continuous training in a variety of qualifications and through independent professional learning. When they embrace continuous professional development as a key part of their careers, teaching professionals not only acquire new competencies, but also incorporate the latest and most interesting methods into the learning process, stimulating students to achieve maximum results, taking into account their potential.

Through continuous professional development, teachers become more effective in the learning process, create more relevant and quality educational design, and inspire their students to achieve (Tsokov, G., D. Levterova, L. Africanov, 2022).

In conclusion, examining novice teacher stress and developing coping strategies are essential for improving the quality of education, retaining novice teachers in the profession, improving their health and well-being, and supporting their professional growth and development.

This topic has widespread application and relevance in today's education system and requires ongoing research and discussion to find optimal solutions and approaches to address the challenges of novice teacher stress.

It is critical to recognize that novice teacher stress is not only a problem for the individual teacher, but also a challenge facing educational institutions and the system as a whole. It is therefore necessary to pay special attention to the support and training of novice teachers and to the creation of a stimulating and supportive working environment.

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

*The theory of the teaching profession and stress*, developed by Christine Kyriacou (Kyriacou), is one of the leading theories addressing the relationship between teaching and stress. This theory is based on research and observations that highlight the influence of the professional environment in schools and the factors that contribute to stress in teachers, especially novice teachers.

According to Kyriacou, novice teachers are exposed to more stress for a number of reasons:

**Insufficient preparation** – novice teachers often face the challenges of the profession without having been sufficiently prepared in their education. Many of those starting out in teaching experience insecurity and a lack of confidence in their ability to cope with the duties, the curriculum and the students.

**Adverse working conditions** – teachers face many challenges in the school environment, such as workloads, limited budgets, discipline problems and complex relationships with students and parents. These conditions contribute to the accumulation of stress.

**Interpersonal challenges** – working with students with different needs and abilities, as well as interacting with colleagues and management, can be sources of stress for novice teachers. Insufficient support from colleagues and a lack of clear guidance increase feelings of stress.

Kyriacou's theory of the teaching profession and stress provides valuable guidelines for understanding the problem of stress in beginning teachers. It highlights the importance of professional learning, support and the development of self-esteem as means of improving the well-being and success of beginning teachers (Chris Kyriacou, 2001).

*The theory of mentoring*, developed by Richard Ingersoll and Karen Kralik, is concerned with the importance of mentoring in the context of the teaching profession. This theory focuses on the role of experienced teachers as mentors and the support they can provide to novice teachers.

The main idea of the theory is that mentoring occupies a significant place in the development and retention of novice teachers in the profession, providing them with support, guidance and opportunities

for development. According to this theory, mentoring helps novice teachers to adapt more easily to the professional environment and to cope with the challenges of teaching.

In the context of mentoring theory, some of the key aspects are:

**Development of professional skills** – mentors are tasked with helping novice teachers develop and improve their skills and competencies. They can provide guidance and feedback, share their professional experiences and help beginners develop in their profession.

**Psychological support** - mentors should engage with novice teachers and provide emotional and psychological support. They can help beginners cope with stress, build self-confidence and successfully adapt to the teaching profession.

**Providing information and resources** - mentors should provide novice teachers with the information, materials and resources they need to help them prepare and deliver lessons. By sharing good practice with them, beginners will find it easier to navigate the curriculum and choose the most appropriate teaching methods and strategies.

**Establishing trust and support in the professional community** - mentoring also has a social component, encouraging novice teachers to get involved in the professional community and connect with other teachers. Mentors assist in building networks of support and collaboration, which is essential for the successful functioning and retention of beginning teachers in the profession.

Mentoring helps to reduce stress and improve the well-being of novice teachers, facilitating successful adaptation to the teaching profession and the development of their professional skills and competencies (Ingersoll, R., J. Kralik, 2004).

**The theory of self-efficacy**, developed by Albert Bandura in 1997, is a theoretical model that focuses on the role of a person's beliefs and confidence in influencing their own ability to achieve success in a particular domain. In the context of the teaching profession, this theory has significant application to the study of novice teachers' self-efficacy and their ability to cope with stress and challenges.

According to self-efficacy theory, beliefs and confidence in one's own abilities have a direct impact on one's motivation, persistence, and achievement. Novice teachers who have a high degree of self-efficacy believe that they are able to cope with the challenges of the teaching profession and achieve success. They have positive expectations about their skills and believe they can control and influence the situations they encounter.

Novice teachers with high self-efficacy tend to actively engage in the learning and development process, seek out new resources and strategies, and are more likely to engage in interaction with colleagues and seek support. They cope better with stressful situations, have greater perseverance and resilience, and are more likely to stay in the profession and succeed in it.

Self-efficacy theory has significant application in educational contexts and provides valuable guidance for understanding the interplay between novice teachers' beliefs, confidence, and achievement. The development of self-efficacy has positive effects on novice teachers' stress, professional development, and retention in the teaching profession (Bandura, A., 1997)

**The theory of stress and coping**, developed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman in 1984, is one of the leading theories for understanding stress and coping mechanisms. This theory focuses on the interaction between the individual and the environment and how this influences stress responses and experiences.

The basic idea of the theory is that stress is not directly related to events in the environment, but to the meaning and evaluation that the person attaches to them. According to Lazarus and Folkman, stress



arises when one perceives an event or situation as a challenge or threat to his or her well-being and does not have sufficient resources to cope.

According to the theory, effective coping with stress involves adaptive cognitive processes, such as reframing, reappraising situations, and focusing attention on the positive aspects. The importance of social support and the use of effective coping strategies are also highlighted. Novice teachers can benefit from the support of mentors, colleagues and other professionals who have experience in the field of education.

Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory provides a framework to help beginning teachers understand and manage their stress reactions. It supports the development of practical coping skills and encourages a more positive and adaptive approach to stressful situations in the teaching profession. (*Lazarus, R. S., S. Folkman, 1984*)

### **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

The development of a methodology for the purpose of research on the perceived and experienced stress of novice teachers at the beginning of their professional career is necessarily done in the context of the theoretical concepts presented.

Object of the study is stress in novice teachers, and the subject of the study explores the causes and consequences of stress as well as mentor support as a factor in reducing stress levels, increasing personal resilience and effective adaptation to a new professional role.

**Excerpted from** – 49 teachers with 1 to 5 years of teaching experience and 25 principals participated in the study. The working environment of all respondents was schools in a district town and rural schools in the South-East. About 50% of them work with students and parents from multicultural backgrounds. Inclusion of the respondents in the study was random and by expressing informed consent to participate.

**Procedure** – the study was planned, organized and conducted between October 2022 and May 2023.

**Toolkit** – for the purpose of this study, a combined methodology including two methods was used - projective methodology „Finish the sentence“ and work in focus groups.

The first method is aimed at getting closer to the inner world of novice teachers, giving them the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings and views on the causes and consequences of the stress associated with starting their teaching career.

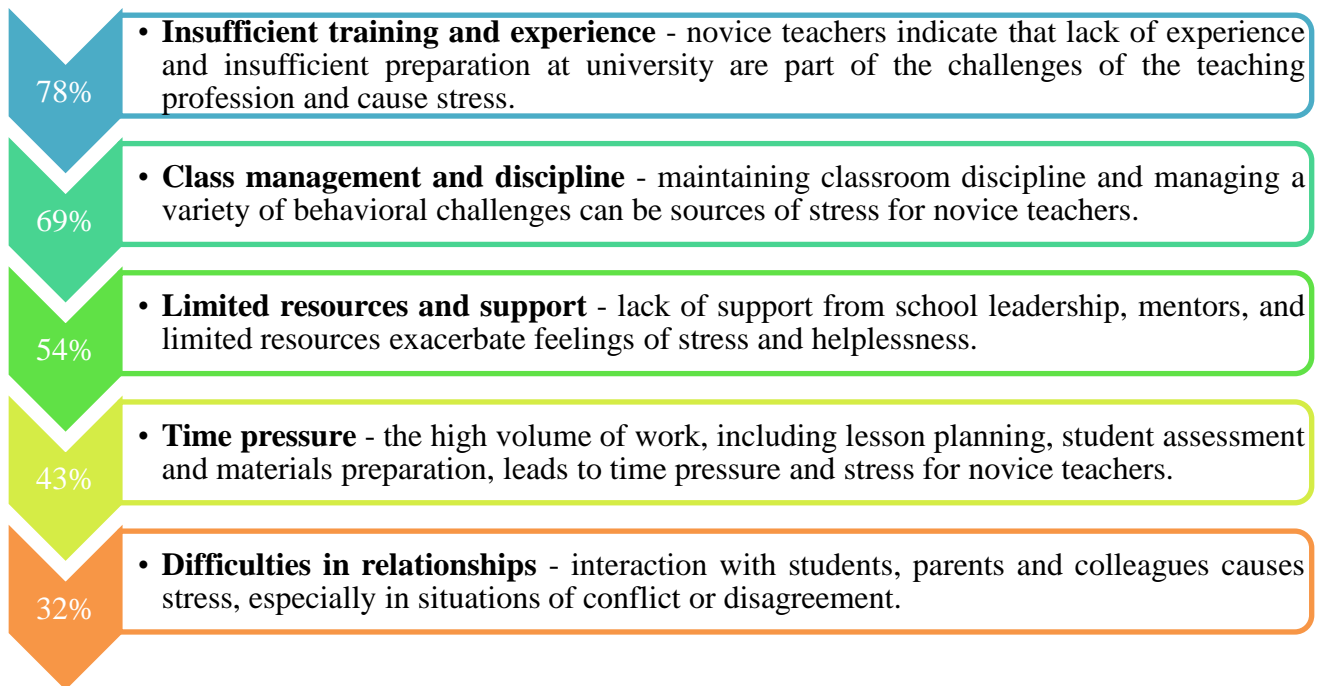
The second part of the methodology is carried out by working in focus groups and analysing the views and shared practices of headteachers on supporting new teachers in the schools they lead. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and views of key figures in educational institutions who provide beginning teachers with support early in their careers. Through this aspect of the research, a complex understanding of the role of mentoring and the ways in which it influences novice teachers' coping with stress and adjustment is developed.

This combined research approach allows for a focused and detailed analysis of both the internal perceptions and feelings of novice teachers and the external context and influence of mentoring in educational institutions.

### **Presentation and analysis of study results**

#### **Analysis of the results of the research with novice teachers**

According to novice teachers who are exposed to stress, some of *the main reasons*, which they indicated by completing the sentences provided to them are reflected by percentage in Figure 1:



*Figure 1*

By the largest percentage, 78% of novice teachers cited insufficient practical training at university. This affects their confidence, self-esteem, respectively, and the manifestations of stressful situations and experiences.

69% of respondents have difficulty managing the classroom - ensuring a calm climate, good discipline and dealing with challenging student behaviour. These circumstances increase the stress of carrying out their professional duties.

More than half of the novice teachers surveyed (54%) reported that they did not have the support of school leadership to provide mentors (experienced educators who are senior teachers). Although mentoring as a good practice exists in the Bulgarian education system, it has not been systematised within a common programme or a structured approach to support newly recruited teachers. Despite the existence of mentoring, it does not have a positive impact on the effective adaptation and retention of teachers in the teaching profession.

Time management by novice teachers during the all-day school day for 43% of the individuals surveyed also emerged as a cause of perceived and experienced stress.

Probably the lack of communication culture and skills in novice teachers is the reason for the fact that 32% of the respondents reported difficulties in interacting with students, parents and colleagues, which causes stress, especially in conflict situations.

These reasons, mentioned by novice teachers themselves, represent the perspective of people who perceive and experience stress in their professional path. Understanding these reasons is important in order to develop appropriate support strategies and resources to help beginning teachers cope with stress and achieve greater well-being in the teaching profession.

Stress has *various consequences* on the lives and personalities of novice teachers. On completion of the researchers' proposed sentences, they stated the following implications presented in Figure 2:

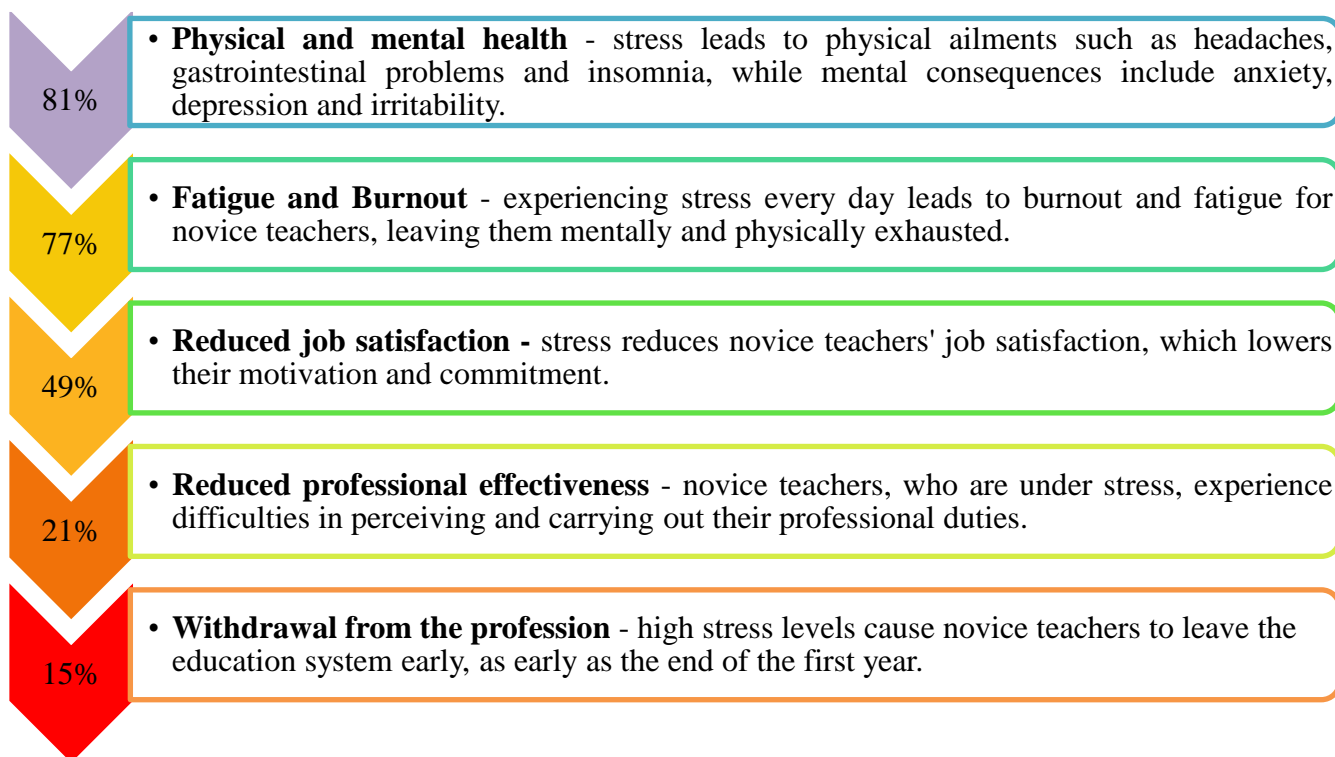


Figure 2

### Analysis of the results of the survey with principals

**Organisation and participants** – the focus groups were conducted with data collection in two smaller subgroups composed of principals from different educational institutions. Respondents were divided into groups of 12 and 13 to ensure active discussion and dialogue.

**Moderator** – each group is led by an experienced moderator who encourages and facilitates directors to share their views and experiences.

**Structure of the discussion** – for the introduction to the topic, the moderator introduces the subjects to the context and objectives of the study.

Participants are encouraged to share their views, opinions and experiences on the two specific questions that are put before them.

**Discussion** – respondents have the opportunity to share their experiences, opinions and recommendations in small groups on the following questions:

- Do the new teachers in your school have a mentor and what is their role in supporting the new teachers?

- What challenges do you face in appointing a mentor and supporting beginning teachers?

The varied answers include concrete examples, personal observations and views.

**Recording and analysis** – focus group discussions are reflected in the form of notes taken by the moderator. The moderator presents the conclusions summarised in the large group and these are complemented and enriched with concrete suggestions.

#### Interpretation of results

1. All principals participating in the survey said that the school they lead has teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience.

2. Only 28% of the respondents have assigned mentors to the novice teachers, with the normative justification of Regulation 15/22.07.2019.

3. Principals noted the following key points on which mentors work with new teachers:

- Provide leadership and guidance on curricular and methodological issues.

- Support the development of curricula and didactic materials, lesson units.
  - Help manage classroom dynamics and manage student behavior.
  - Support for stress resilience and professional development.
4. School principals face a number of challenges related to mentoring and supporting novice teachers. The summary results are presented in Table 1:

Table 1

№	CHALLENGES
1.	<b>Organisation of the mentoring programme</b> – principals need to create and organize a mentoring program that includes finding appropriate mentors, assigning novice teachers to them, and establishing clear roles and responsibilities.
2.	<b>Selection of appropriate mentors</b> – designated mentors must be competent and prepared to support novice teachers. Choosing the right mentors can be challenging, especially if there are insufficient opportunities to train and prepare mentors.
3.	<b>Time management</b> – principals must deal with limited teacher and mentor time. Arranging training sessions and meetings between mentors and novice teachers requires good time management. Mentoring needs to be for at least 3 years.
4.	<b>Definition of resources</b> – principals it is important to provide the necessary resources to train mentors and novice teachers. This may include financial resources, materials and appropriate organisation and infrastructure.
5.	<b>Performance evaluation</b> – principals need to evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring program and support for beginning teachers. This requires monitoring the progress of novice teachers and mentors as well as analysing the results.
6.	<b>Creating motivation</b> – principals need to create motivation among mentors to take on the role of mentors and support novice teachers, especially if this activity is not included in their job description.
7.	<b>Overcoming resistance</b> – some mentors may express resistance to mentoring due to time constraints or lack of appropriate initiatives. Principals need to address this type of resistance and identify and implement a mechanism to overcome it.
8.	<b>Coordination with other tasks</b> – principals have many responsibilities and tasks in the school. The organisation and management of the mentoring programme must be coordinated with other administrative and educational tasks.

All of these challenges require principals to be well-organized, communicative, and adaptable to ensure effective mentoring and support of novice teachers in the school.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study examines novice teacher stress, its causes and consequences, and the role of mentoring in supporting new teachers in Bulgarian schools. Although mentoring practically exists in the Bulgarian education system, it is not identified as a separate programme or practice to introduce newly recruited teachers to the teaching profession. The potential benefits of mentoring, including faster adaptation and improved professional skills of novice teachers, have not been fully realised.

The following **conclusions** can be summarized from the study:

1. Causes of stress in novice teachers analyzed include high expectations, uncertainty, limited resources, and insufficient support from school leaders.
2. The identified consequences of the experienced stress confirm not only the lack of a system for integration of the new staff in the work process, but also emerge as the main reasons for the high levels of early departure from the education system.
3. There is a need to develop a comprehensive and structured mentoring programme to support novice teachers in their professional adaptation and development.

4. The availability of mentors is important, but their roles and responsibilities need to be more clearly defined to ensure effective support for novice teachers.

5. Mentor training is a key factor in the successful performance of the mentoring role. Training opportunities need to be provided to enhance their skills to support and guide novice teachers.

6. Challenges related to the organisation of mentoring and support need to be addressed by establishing clear guidelines, better time management and resourcing.

7. Collaboration between schools, educational institutions and regulators needs to be strengthened to ensure a coherent and effective approach to coaching and mentoring.

Research findings, as well as evidence from a variety of sources, highlight the serious effects of stress on beginning teachers, including reduced work motivation, burnout, psychological problems, and reduced well-being. These factors not only affect the individual health and well-being of teachers, but can also have a negative effect on the quality of education and, consequently, the image of educational institutions.

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