

# PECULIARITIES OF TEACHERS' INFERIORITY FEELING AND EXPERIENCED STRESS

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## **Abstract**

The present research deals with peculiarities of links between the feeling of inferiority and stress among teachers. Significant distribution of inferiority feeling indicators with regard to age and years of service was identified. Distribution of stress indicators with regard to age is significant. The disclosed significant link between the feeling of inferiority and stress indicators can be explained by mutual interaction: the feeling of inferiority can serve as a source of stress for teachers and, in turn, experienced stress could enhance the natural feeling of inferiority, which is inherent to all.

**Keywords:** *self-esteem, the feeling of inferiority, stress.*

## **Introduction**

In recent decades, self-esteem and stress peculiarities of representatives of various age groups and professions became particularly relevant and intensively studied. Among representatives of professions probably the focal attention is paid to such peculiarities of teachers' self-esteem and stress that are primarily related to job satisfaction (Green-Reese & Johnson, 1991), work motivation (Alizadegani, Zaini, & Delvari, 2014), relations between teachers and pupils (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011), etc.

Teachers' self-esteem is very important in the teaching process. It is believed that the teacher's self-esteem is directly related to the formation of the pupil's self-esteem (Finn, 1992), creates conditions to develop the pupil's value, while he/she is becoming a full-fledged personality (Paliukaitė, 2005). All of it is inextricably related to the quality of teaching (Rossie, 1999), which is important preparing pupils for professional activities and self-fulfilment in all stages of life. Self-esteem in all these studies is to be related to the type of the attitude towards oneself: positive or negative relation to oneself (Baumeister, Campbell, Kreuger, & Vohs, 2003). However, in this case, the mechanisms of the formation of self-esteem, the role in the personality development are inexplicable. Meanwhile, individual psychology uses the inferiority feeling, a phenomenon that is close to self-esteem, which describes development of an unbroken and dynamic personality (Adler, 2004). It is stated that the feeling of inferiority is natural, inherent to every human being, a phenomenon motivating personality development (Adler, 2004). Thus, it is indicated that the personality seeks to cope with the situation that led to the feeling of inferiority either by acquiring corresponding skills, proficiencies or by seeking superiority with regard to other people (Adler, 2004; Bickhard & Ford, 1979). It can

be assumed that the choice of the profession is related to possibilities of compensating for the feeling of inferiority. This way, the person who has chosen the teacher's profession, may seek to compensate for his/her feeling of inferiority for account of pupils, seeking superiority with regard to them and this way adversely affecting pupils' personality development and using the non-adequate model of compensating for the feeling of inferiority. The direction of compensation for the feeling of inferiority depends on the level of the teacher's social interest. Developed social interest directs the individual to compensate for the feeling of inferiority in the socially useful direction (Ansbacher, 1992). Undeveloped social interest, on the contrary, encourages teachers to consolidate his/her personal standing, regardless of pupils' needs and interests. This means that the teacher, in a sense, makes use of pupils. Thus, researches on peculiarities of teachers' feeling of inferiority would be important because their results would help to suitably organize the teaching process (Pryor & Tolleruci, 1999), solve problems of interpersonal relations with pupils, resulting from changing requirements, extensive changes in the life of the society.

The feeling of inferiority acts both as a phenomenon motivating to act and it is accompanied by various emotions: anxiety, grief, despair, shame, shyness, disgust, etc. (Bickhard & Ford, 1979; Smith, 2009), general bigger emotional reactivity to the environment. The experience of inferiority may be accompanied by tension, dissatisfaction with oneself, arousing due to failure to meet standards, the person does not feel sufficiently capable to fulfil tasks, experiences pressure from the environment, etc. These symptoms are consistent with the conception of experienced stress. Thus, there arises a question regarding links between the feeling of inferiority and experienced stress. All the more so since the teacher's profession is attributed to the group of such professions which distinguish themselves by the best conditions to experience stresses (Johnson, 2005). Experienced stress can be determined by the specificity of the teacher's activities: successful pedagogical activities require involvement of the teacher into interpersonal relations with pupils both at the cognitive and emotional level (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011).

Therefore, it may be that in addition to the already widely studied teacher's stress sources, which include the specificity of the teacher's work, administrative school requirements, a financial reward for work and the society's attitude to the teacher's work, peculiarities of the teacher's personality, which include the feeling of inferiority, can also be sources of stress. Identification of such links could help to provide psychological support for teachers, effectively coping with stress. Thus, due to the lack of research on links between the feeling of inferiority and stress and considering the relevance of the said phenomena, ensuring effective psychological support for teachers, supporting their wellbeing and productively organizing educational activities, the **research aim** is to reveal links between teachers' self-esteem and experienced stress, considering seniority and age.

**Research objectives:**

1. To disclose teachers' feeling of inferiority according to age and years of service.
2. To disclose teachers' experienced stress with regard to age and years of service.
3. To disclose interrelations between inferiority feeling and experienced stress.

**Research object:** teachers' inferiority feeling and experienced stress.

**Methodology**

**The target group.** The research package was distributed to 154 teachers from different Lithuanian schools, who attended in-service training courses, so they are not randomly selected. Filled answers were returned by 132 teachers (86 %). 118 (89%) of them were female and 14 (11%) male. Female group of teachers dominated, so the answers of male teachers were not used in the statistical analysis. Such distribution of males and females correspond to the

distribution according to gender in schools of Lithuania. The remaining respondents were distributed to age groups according to age limits, which were established by Gučas (1990). There were 45 (38 %) first maturity adults (between 24 and 34 years old) and 73 (62%) second maturity adults (between 35 and 60 years old). Teachers' seniority varies from 1 to 25 years. Teachers were grouped into three groups according to seniority: 39 (33 %) teachers with less than 5 years of seniority; 50 (42%) teachers with seniority between 6 and 15 years; and 29 (25%) teachers with more than 15 years' seniority. Respondents' distribution according to age is not consistent with the distribution according to seniority ( $C=0,07; p<0,05$ ), therefore, both distributions of demographic variables were used in the statistical analysis: according to age and according to seniority.

### Research methods

The level of inferiority feeling in the sample was measured using the Inferiority Feeling Index (Strano & Dixon, 1990). The Inferiority Feeling Index consisted of two parameters: evaluation of family members and self-evaluation. Each parameter consisted of 30 peculiarities, evaluated by respondents employing Likert-type scale (where 6 points mean *totally suitable* and 1 point means *very unsuitable*). The Inferiority Feeling Index was measured as differences between evaluations of family members and self-evaluation. A more negative difference was interpreted as a strong feeling of inferiority; a difference close to zero position indicated adequate self-esteem or weak feeling of inferiority; a more positive difference was treated as a weak feeling of inferiority or seeking superiority (Strano & Dixon, 1990). Index values in the three groups distributed as follows: high inferiority feeling ( $N=38$ ), adequate self-esteem or low feeling of inferiority ( $N=35$ ), low feeling of inferiority (tendency to superiority) ( $N=45$ ). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale of evaluation of family members was 0.68; for the scale of self-evaluation, 0.80. These coefficients enabled to use the Inferiority Feeling Index for investigation of the group (Vaitkevičius, Saudargienė, 2006).

Intensity of stress was identified using Stress Index Scale (Fisher, Corcoran, 1987). The scale consists of 25 statements describing the individual's feeling. They have to be evaluated using Likert 7-point scale: 1 (never); 2 (very rarely); 3 (rarely); 4 (occasionally); 5 (most of the time); 6 (most often); 7 (always). The reliability indicator for this sample is quite high (*Cronbach alpha* 0.89), therefore, the methodology is appropriate for individual evaluation (Vaitkevičius, Saudargienė, 2006). According to the answers to the checklist about stress, respondents were divided into 3 groups: respondents with estimates between 25 and 75 were attributed to a low level of stress; from 76 to 125, to a moderate level of stress; from 126 to 175, to a high stress level.

Thus, key variables of this research are indicators of self-esteem/the feeling of inferiority and experienced stress. Additional demographic variables are age and seniority.

**Statistical analysis.** Research data were calculated employing 17.0 SPSS software. Because distribution of indicators of the measured phenomenon did not satisfy normal distribution requirements, non-parametrical criteria were used for statistical analysis. Links between indicators of stress and the level of inferiority with regard to age and seniority were assessed using contingency coefficient;  $\Delta\chi^2$  criterion was used for comparison of contingency coefficient.

### Research results and their discussion

#### Peculiarities of Inferiority feeling according Demographic Descriptive

Due to a small number of males, only female responses were used in further statistical calculations. Therefore, the obtained results and conclusions reflect the peculiarities of only this target group and could not be applied to other age groups and professions.

This group of investigated persons is dominated by second maturity representatives (62%). Besides, the representatives of this group are characterized by dominating (38%) low indicators of the feeling of inferiority, which indicate tendencies of seeking superiority. Indicators of the high level of the feeling of inferiority (32%) and indicators of adequate self-esteem (30%) are repeated in similar frequencies. Thus, only one third of teachers evaluate themselves adequately, while other two groups of teachers either experience a very strong feeling of inferiority (32%) or compensate for it seeking superiority (38%). It could be assumed that the latter group of teachers might seek superiority in the classroom with regard to pupils and this way may adversely affect the general atmosphere of the class, relations with the pupils. Meanwhile, the first group of teachers may distinguish itself more by psychosomatic complaints, experienced stress, etc.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Inferiority Feeling Indicators according to Age

Age group	Level of inferiority feeling						Total	
	High		Low (adequate)		Low (superiority seeking)			
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
First maturity	10	22%	12	26%	23	52%	45	38%
Second maturity	28	38%	23	32%	22	30%	73	62%
<b>Total</b>	38	32%	35	30%	45	38%	118	100%

As it can be seen in Table 1, the indicators of the feeling of inferiority of the majority (38%) of second maturity teachers correspond to the strongly expressed feeling of inferiority. Meanwhile, these indicators are characteristic to the minority (22%) of first maturity teachers. Indicators of the feeling of inferiority of the majority (52%) of first maturity teachers show the endeavour of superiority, while the frequency of such indicators among second maturity teachers is significantly lower (30%). Such distribution of parameters is statistically significant ( $C = 0,23, p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2.** Distribution of Inferiority Feeling Indicators according to Seniority

Groups by seniority	Level of inferiority feeling						Total	
	High		Low (adequate)		Low (superiority seeking)			
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
< 5 years	12	31%	9	23%	18	46%	39	33%
6-15 years	18	36%	19	38%	13	26%	50	42%
>15 years	8	28%	7	24%	14	48%	29	25%
<b>Total</b>	38	32%	35	30%	45	38%	118	100%

Years of service of the majority (50%) of teachers of this sample is between 6 and 15 years, while seniority of the smallest group of teachers (25%) exceeds 15 years (see Table 2). Considering that the study took place during in-service training courses, it can be assumed that teachers with the least and medium seniority are most motivated to improve their qualification, although in-service training could be most relevant for the group of teachers with the longest seniority.

As it can be seen from Table 2, the indicator of the feeling of inferiority of almost half (46%) of teachers with the least seniority shows tendencies of seeking superiority, the indicator of the feeling of inferiority of a smaller share of representatives of this group (23%) shows

adequate self-esteem. The indicator of the feeling of inferiority of the rest (31%) of teachers with the least seniority shows strongly expressed feeling of inferiority. The same distribution of indicators of the feeling of inferiority is characteristic to teachers whose seniority is the longest. Thus, according to the distribution of indicators of the feeling of inferiority, the groups of least experienced teachers and teachers who have the biggest teaching experience are the most similar. Meanwhile, the distribution of indicators of the feeling of inferiority among representatives with average teaching experience is almost the opposite: among them the majority (38%) were the teachers whose indicator of the feeling of inferiority corresponds to adequate self-esteem (low inferiority level) and almost the same size teachers' group (36%) consisted of those whose indicator of the feeling of inferiority corresponds to experiencing of a very strong feeling of inferiority. Such distribution of indicators of the feeling of inferiority with regard to years of service is statistically significant ( $C = 0,33$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ).

Having compared distribution coefficients of indicators of the level of the inferiority feeling with regard to age and seniority, it was identified that the distribution of indicators of the feeling of inferiority with regard to seniority was statistically significantly stronger than the distribution of indicators of the feeling of inferiority with regard to age ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 4,38$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ). Thus, it can be assumed that manifestation of the feeling of inferiority is more related to experience in the workplace rather than to general life experience.

Thus, with regard to this sample, the distribution of indicators of the inferiority feeling shows significant links of the inferiority feeling with age and seniority. These data do not confirm A. Adler's (2003) statement about the universality of the feeling of inferiority, its independence from gender, age, occupation, seniority. This discrepancy could be explained by the fact that the investigated group of teachers can be very uneven in terms of social and cultural circumstances, which could have had different impact on personality development, career choice and further entrenchment in life. Besides, it can also be assumed that stronger manifestation of the feeling of inferiority, associated with work experience rather than with age, also depends on the specificity of the sample. The study was attended by teachers attending in-service training courses, the attendance of which, on the one hand, may indicate dissatisfaction with the existing qualification, on the other hand, the possibly experienced stronger feeling of inferiority due to lack of qualification. Namely this can be very relevant for least experienced and most experienced teachers. The latter may have a particularly relevant need to update their knowledge.

#### **Peculiarities of Experienced Stress according to Demographic Descriptive**

Indicators of the majority (40%) of teachers of this sample show a very high level of experienced stress, indicators of experienced stress of about one third of teachers (34%) are moderate. Stress indicators of the least share of teachers (26%) show the lowest level of experienced stress (see Table 2). Distribution of stress indicators with regard to age reveals the following regularities: indicators corresponding to average (45%) and low (33%) levels of experienced stress prevail among first maturity teachers. Stress indicators of the minority (22%) of this age group show a high level of experienced stress. Completely opposite tendencies are observed among second maturity teachers. Indicators of experienced stress of the majority (51%) of teachers of this age group show high level of stress, while stress indicators of the smallest group of teachers of this age show the lowest experienced stress levels. Such distribution of indicators of experienced stress with regard to age groups is statistically significant ( $C=27$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ). This is not consistent with other researchers' results, which did not establish any links between age and stress level (Green-Reese & Johnson, 1991; Qusar, 2011).

**Table 3.** Distribution of Experienced Stress Indicators according to Age

Age group	Level of experienced stress						Total	
	High		Moderate		Low			
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
First maturity	10	22%	20	45%	15	33%	<b>45</b>	<b>38%</b>
Second maturity	37	51%	20	27%	16	22%	<b>73</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100%</b>

Thus, younger teachers more often experience moderate and low intensity stress, while older teachers more often experience high intensity stress. It can be assumed that younger teachers are not yet exhausted by stressful situations of the teacher's profession, which they probably more often treat as challenges, encouraging to cope with them. Meanwhile, it can be assumed that senior teachers have more accumulated negative experiences, which are no longer treated as challenges encouraging to act. It is more likely that these experiences become a negative hue of routine work. Besides, such regularity can be explained by psycho-physiological differences too. Senior teachers' organisms are no longer that resistant to experienced stress, are prone to cardiovascular diseases; therefore, even small objective changes in the environment can cause bigger subjective changes of experienced stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Furthermore, it may be that although senior teachers experience stress, due to the formed self-efficacy they can adequately cope with it (Akpochafo, 2014).

**Table 4.** Distribution of Experienced Stress Indicators according to Seniority

Groups by seniority	Level of inferiority feeling						Total	
	High		Moderate		Low			
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
< 5 years	15	38%	13	34%	11	28%	<b>39</b>	<b>33%</b>
6-15 years	20	40%	17	34%	13	26%	<b>50</b>	<b>42%</b>
>15 years	12	41%	10	34%	7	25%	<b>29</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100%</b>

As shown in Table 4, stress indicators of the slight majority (38%) of teachers with the least experience correspond to the high level of experienced stress. Other experienced stress indicators of this age group are evenly distributed and correspond to the average (34%) and low (28%) levels of experienced stress. The same tendencies are observed in other groups of seniority. Both teachers with average and the biggest teaching experience (respectively 40%; 41%) slightly more often experience high level of stress. Slightly more rarely they experience stress corresponding to the average (respectively 34%; 34%) and low (respectively 26%, 25%) experienced stress levels. Such distribution of experienced stress indicators is not statistically significant ( $C=0,22$ ,  $p>0,05$ ). It can be assumed that seniority is less related to experienced stress levels than age. This partly contradicts to the results, which disclosed that teachers with longer seniority experienced bigger stress (Akpochafo, 2014) but confirms the results, according to which seniority is not related to stress level (Qusar, 2011).

#### **Peculiarities of Links between Indicators of Inferiority Feeling and Experienced Stress**

As it can be seen in Table 5, indicators of inferiority feeling of the majority of teachers (58%), whose stress indicators correspond to the low level of stress, are consistent with

the endeavour of superiority. The remaining share of teachers of this group distributed as follows: according to indicators of inferiority feeling 26% can be attributed to the high level of experienced feeling of inferiority, while the minority (16%) of them distinguish themselves by adequate self-esteem. Thus, the low level of stress is characteristic to teachers, who distinguish themselves by seeking superiority in the presence of low manifestation of the feeling of inferiority. Meanwhile, teachers whose stress indicators correspond to highly experienced stress distributed conversely. Indicators of the inferiority feeling of the majority of them (51%) show strong manifestation of inferiority. Inferiority indicators of the minority of them (26%) show low manifestation of the feeling of inferiority with a tendency to seek superiority. Teachers whose stress indicators correspond to moderately experienced stress are more often attributed to the group of teachers who evaluate themselves adequately (40%) and seek superiority (38%). Such regularities of distribution are statistically significant ( $C = 0,3$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 5.** Distribution of the Inferiority Feeling and Experienced Stress Indicators

Groups by seniority	Level of inferiority feeling						Total	
	High		Low (adequate)		Low (superiority seeking)			
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
<b>Low</b>	8	26%	5	16%	18	58%	<b>31</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>Moderate</b>	9	22%	16	40%	15	38%	<b>40</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>High</b>	21	51%	14	29%	12	26%	<b>47</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Total</b>	38	32%	35	30%	45	38%	<b>118</b>	<b>100%</b>

Thus, it can be assumed that teachers with higher manifestation of inferiority also distinguish themselves by stronger experienced stress, while teachers with lower manifestation of inferiority, seeking superiority, distinguish themselves by a lower level of experienced stress. This confirms the results of the qualitative research, stating negative impact of experienced stress on self-esteem (Alizadegani, Zaini, & Delaware, 2014).

The study resulted in inconsistent results regarding links between self-esteem and experienced stress in the context of demographic variables. It may be that research results also depend on peculiarities of the population (Green-Reese & Johnson, 1991). This way, what is found with regard to one sample of the teachers does not necessarily recur with regard to another sample of teachers, bearing in mind the differences of the education policy in various countries. Besides, it can be assumed that experienced stress and self-esteem can be affected by the size of a school, workload, satisfaction with work (Green-Reese & Johnson, 1991; McCarthy, Lambert, & Reiser, 2014) and other factors that were not considered in this study.

### Conclusions

Summarizing research results, the following conclusions can be drawn with regard to this sample:

1. Younger teachers are more often inclined to seek superiority than senior teachers. The latter more often tend to underestimate themselves, more often distinguish themselves by experiencing inferiority than younger teachers. Teachers with the biggest and least work experience more often tend to seek superiority than teachers whose seniority is moderate. The latter are more often inclined to underestimate themselves.

2. Younger teachers more often experience moderate and low intensity stress, while senior teachers more often experience high intensity stress. Links between the intensity of experienced stress and years of service are not significant.

3. Teachers with bigger manifestation of inferiority distinguish themselves by stronger experienced stress.

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## PECULIARITIES OF TEACHERS' INFERIORITY FEELING AND EXPERIENCED STRESS

### *Summary*

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Teachers' self-esteem is very important in the teaching process. It is believed that the teacher's self-esteem is directly related to the formation of the pupil's self-esteem. Meanwhile, individual psychology uses the inferiority feeling, a phenomenon that is close to self-esteem, which describes development of an unbroken and dynamic personality. It is stated that the feeling of inferiority is natural, inherent to every human being, a phenomenon motivating personality development. Therefore, it may be that in addition to the already widely studied teacher's stress sources, which include the specificity of the teacher's work, administrative school requirements, a financial reward for work and the society's attitude to the teacher's work, peculiarities of the teacher's personality, which include the feeling of inferiority, can also be sources of stress. Identification of such links could help to provide psychological support for teachers, effectively coping with stress. Thus, due to the lack of research on links between the feeling of inferiority and stress and considering the relevance of the said phenomena, ensuring effective psychological support for teachers, supporting their wellbeing and productively organizing educational activities, the **research aim** is to reveal links between teachers' self-esteem and experienced stress, considering seniority and age.

**The target group.** The research package was distributed to 154 teachers from different Lithuanian schools, who attended in-service training courses, so they are not randomly selected. Filled answers were returned by 132 teachers (86 %). 118 (89%) of them were female and 14 (11%) male. Female group of teachers dominated, so the answers of male teachers were not used in the statistical analysis.

**Research methods.** The level of inferiority feeling in the sample was measured using the Inferiority Feeling Index. Intensity of stress was identified using Stress Index Scale

**Research Results.** It was found that inferiority feeling indexes are correlated with age and job experience ( $p < 0,05$ ). Stress indicators are correlated with age ( $p < 001$ ). Teachers with higher manifestation of inferiority also distinguish themselves by stronger experienced stress, while teachers with lower manifestation of inferiority, seeking superiority, distinguish themselves by a lower level of experienced stress ( $p < 0,05$ ).

### **Conclusions**

1. Younger teachers are more often inclined to seek superiority than senior teachers. The latter more often tend to underestimate themselves, more often distinguish themselves by experiencing inferiority than younger teachers. Teachers with the biggest and least work experience more often tend to seek superiority than teachers whose seniority is moderate. The latter are more often inclined to underestimate themselves.

2. Younger teachers more often experience moderate and low intensity stress, while senior teachers more often experience high intensity stress. Links between the intensity of experienced stress and years of service are not significant.

3. Teachers with bigger manifestation of inferiority distinguish themselves by stronger experienced stress.