THE IMPACT OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION TEACHERS

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Abstract

Teaching is one of the professions in which individuals are more likely to develop high levels of anxiety and stress. The persistence of these symptoms can lead to severe depressive cases. Nevertheless, numerous teachers are able to react functionally while facing these professional difficulties by developing positive psychological capacities that oppose the negative symptomatology. This study examines the impact of positive psychological capital (PsyCap) on psychological distress of primary and secondary education teachers. The sample consists of 425 teachers in public and private schools aged between 26 and 62 years. For this purpose, we used the Psychological Capital Questionnaire and the scales of Depression, Anxiety and Stress. Findings show that optimism is the variable with the highest positive impact on psychological distress, because the most optimistic teachers showed lower ratings of anxiety, depression and stress. The negative correlations between all the variables in the study suggest that the higher the PsyCap values are, the lower the psychological anguish of the teachers. In this study, it was also possible to confirm that teachers with ages between 45 and 62 and with academic qualifications higher than degree level reveal greater medium values of psychological distress.

Keywords: positive psychological capital, anxiety, depression, stress, teachers

The professional activity plays a key role in any person's life because not only it provides the means to gain a living but also contributes to define his or her own personal identity. Therefore, it should offer the basis for economic stability, comfort and safety in such a way that an individual becomes aware of his or her own wellbeing and, consequently, of his or her personal and professional achievements. On the other hand, it can also induce distress and compromise the mental and physical health of the individual, since all professionals can or may suffer from anguish. Certain professional activities are particularly liable to the emergence of those symptoms due to their specific characteristics. Such is the case of teachers, who communicate face-to-face with others. Due to the exposure of teachers to severe psychological distress, various authors have included teaching in the list of high-risk jobs (Rusli, Edimansyah, & Naing, 2008).

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However, even in view of potentially problematic situations, many teachers react adaptively to the difficulties of the profession and develop positive reactions that enable them to respond favourably in adverse situations (Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, & Hirst, 2014). Liu, Chang, Fu, Wang, and Wang (2012) showed that adequate ratings of positive psychological capital (PsyCap) can relieve the symptoms of depression, and implicitly, mediate the association between occupational stress and anxiety.

The purpose of this research is to analyse the impact of PsyCap on the distress of primary and secondary education teachers within the framework of this issue. This study is particularly important due to the fact that PsyCap includes four variables (optimism, hope. self-efficacy, and resilience) that can be fomented and are fundamental resources to deal with extreme life contingencies. Studies conducted by Cunha, Rego, Lopes, and Ceitil (2008) and Dawkins, Martin, Scott, and Sanderson (2013) suggest that people with greater psychological capital perform better, have higher psychological well-being and less psychic suffering, as they learn to deal with their own problems and overcome obstacles by not giving in to the pressure, no matter the situation they find themselves in. Being individual conditions (and not personality traits), if well incremented and managed, the PsyCap dimensions may help teachers face the contingencies inherent to their profession (Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, & Avolio, 2015).

Positive Psychological Capital

According to positive psychology, taking an optimistic point of view encompassing every opportunity, motivation and human skill under consideration has psychological and physiological benefits. Within this framework, Luthans and Youssef (2007) developed a new paradigm and suggested PsyCap, which identifies the skills associated with self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, and hope as facilitators of pro-active harmony and strengthens the behaviour and attitude towards work commitment, commitment to others and to the organisation. Although the four components of PsyCap seem to have some resemblances among them, they were validated as conceptually and empirically independent constructs (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010).

Psychological capital can be defined as a state of positive individual development characterized by: (1) showing the self-efficacy required to be successful in challenging tasks; (2) giving positive attributions to present-day and upcoming success; (3) being perseverant towards goals and, whenever necessary, redirect them or the way to achieve them (hopes); (4) being skilled to overcome obstacles or handle pressure in adverse situations (resilience) (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Luthans et al. (2015) stated that when combined, self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience have synergetic effect and this construct is the best predictor of performance and satisfaction of each of the dimensions that constitute it individually.

Psychological Distress

Occupation plays an essential role in people's lives as they are committed to it for many years. When an occupation is satisfactory, it generates pleasure, joy and, above all, wellbeing (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015); when it is meaningless, it can become a threat to physical and/or psychological integrity and thus generate psychological distress in the worker, including symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012).

Anxiety

Anxiety is a complex phenomenon that emerges as a reaction to stressing stimuli, i.e., when individuals believe that environmental conditions impose requirements that overcome their personal resources. However, anxiety does not have to have negative connotations. On the one hand, it can be regarded as weakness and shown in situations of uncertainty and failure; on the other hand, it may be perceived as positive and stimulating for individuals (Barlow, 2002). Hallstrom and McClure (2000) refer to the fact that anxiety may facilitate performance when it raises the rating of impulsiveness. Nevertheless, it can inhibit performance because when impulsiveness is raised, the individual cannot select the correct response.

Depression

Depression is considered to be one of the major problems at the workplace because its symptoms affect decision-making and cooperation among workers (Leykin, Roberts, & Derubeis, 2011). This results in low productivity, absenteeism, and turnover and economic costs. As far as the cognitive point of view is concerned, Huguet et al. (2016) refer to the one that determines a negative opinion of events, the so-called negative cognitive schemes responsible for depression. Authors defend that the disfunctional scheme of the depressed individual is dominated by negative awareness (beliefs and suppositions) of himself, of the world and of the future, which generates negative automatic thoughts and is a factor of cognitive vulnerability that leads to this pathology. Thus, depression emerges as the result of the individual's global inhibition, and it affects the way he or she looks at the environment, perceives reality, is aware of events, and shows his or her emotions. It is considered a disease of the human organism as a whole, compromising the individual as a whole, with psychic, social and physical dimensions. When depressed, the individual shows decreased ratings of self-esteem and self-confidence, common to anxiety and stress (Adler et al., 2006).

Stress

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2015) and the United Nations refer to stress as a real world epidemics and the disease of the twentieth century. It is also common to associate stress with professional occupation because changes in society have implications on the workplace. This topic has been discussed in manifold ways and related to various factors: work overload, professional instability, the need to increase productivity and success in ever-more demanding markets, social pressure, and inter-personal relations. Lazarus (2006) refers that stress results from imbalanced inter-action, either real or felt, between the constraints of the moment, resources and potential response of the individual. Nevertheless, this imbalance may emerge because the situation truly requires excessively from the individual. Several studies (e.g., McIntyre et al., 2015; Tomioka, Morita, Saeki, Okamoto, & Kurumatani, 2011) state that not only stress has a direct effect but it also has an indirect effect on depression and generates particular psychological responses.

Constraints of the Job as Teacher and the Relieving Role of PsyCap

The educational challenges of present-day society and those of teachers are increasingly more demanding and permanent. In the last thirty years, there have been deep social changes with effect on behaviour, lifestyles, attitudes and values with direct implications on school life and on the job of teachers (Gold & Roth, 1993).

Lambert, McCarthy, Fitchett, Lineback, and Reiser (2015) defined teachers' discomfort as a phenomenon emerging from their professional environment, particularly from the shortcomings of the workplace, lack of human and material resources, violence in the classroom, and physical breakdown. This framework causes bio-physical exhaustion in teachers and ultimately diseases, such as high blood pressure, mental disturbances and stress.

Being a teacher means choosing one of the most demanding jobs as far as exposure to occupational stress is concerned. As mentioned in international literature, 33% of medical leaves in the USA are due to stress (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Sann (2003) added that the rate of absenteeism of French teachers fluctuated between 4.5% and 6.5% during the 1970s and 1980s; however, the highest values were in the 1990s. The absenteeism of the French teachers was 21.3% in the case of primary school teachers and 9.5% in the case of secondary schools teachers.

Due to frequent changes, teachers need to adapt to new challenges permanently, to new working ways and new requirements that often result in the perception of lack of self-control. This perception is strengthened by related feelings of pessimism about the future, disturbed self-confidence, and often the difficulty of resisting and showing the necessary resilience to deal with mishaps. The emerging weaknesses lead to less effective performance, less commitment to the organization and to health disturbances (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007; Luthans, Luthans, & Avey, 2014). However, difficult situations do not always imply negative emotions; they may constitute a challenge and a way to develop skills and strategies for problem-solving situations. Within this framework, the concept of well-being is related to the way individuals evaluate their lives positively and re-dimension and rebuild their adjustment to their environment (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013). Peterson, Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, and Zhang (2011) state that new generations need to be taught about resilience, hope and optimism in order to make them fit to resist depression, be able to lead a happier and more productive life, and be aware that the way of dealing with events and hazards is more important than the events and hazards themselves. The authors also write that optimistic individuals tend to interpret their troubles as transitory, controllable and specific to certain situations. Pessimistic individuals believe that their problems last forever, under-estimate everything they do and are uncontrolled.

Subjective well-being has emerged as a field of research for positive psychology and the importance of PsyCap for the workers' well-being and to strengthen results in their professional activity and in the organization has been pointed out (Luthans et al., 2015). We can, thus, accept that teachers may use various strategies that will make them able to tackle professional problems, including positive psychological skills (self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, and hope) (Cascio & Boudreau, 2011; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009).

According to the literature mentioned above (e.g., Avey et al., 2010; Lazarus, 2006), there is a close relationship between PsyCap and psychological distress. Based on this claim, this work aims to analyse how those two realities connect with each other and influence the well-being of primary and secondary education teachers. Hence, the following hypotheses were defined:

H1: It is expected that there are significant differences in the variables that refer to PsyCap and to depression, anxiety and stress depending on gender, age, academic qualifications, and years of professional experience

H2: Optimism is the PsyCap variable with larger impact on the psychic suffering of primary and secondary education teachers.

H3: It is expected that the more optimistic primary and secondary education teachers have less psychic suffering.

Method

The questionnaire was the methodological procedure used for this research due to the accurate nature of its structure and practical administration, making it adaptable as a pedagogical tool. This correlational study is grounded on the paradigm of quantitative research that aims to determine the relationships between the variables under focus.

Participants

Four hundred and twenty-five teachers from nationwide primary and secondary education schools participated in this survey. It is a convenience sample and all the teachers agreed to participate in the study voluntarily. They were aged between 26 and 62 (M = 37.47; SD = 6.88) and 83.8% of them were female. In terms of education, most respondents (84%) had a first degree and 16% had undertaken postgraduate studies. Regarding the professional experience of the respondents, four categories were considered: up to 3 years, between 3 and 5 years, between 6 and 10 years and over 10 years. Only 11.5% of teachers had less than 3 years of professional experience and 51.8% had over 10 years of professional experience.

It is worth mentioning that 60.7% of the teachers are married, 30.1% are single and 9.2% mentioned having another marital status. Regarding level of teaching, 33.9% teach in primary schools, 51% in secondary school and only 15.1% in preparatory school.

Another aspect that is essential to refer concerns the regions where the teachers work. In this sense, the different country zones were aggregated in 7 regions in accordance with the level II Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistical purposes (NUTS).

However, we have opted to join Madeira and the Azores Archipelago in a single category named islands, which left us with only 6 regions: North, Centre, Lisbon, Alentejo, Algarve, and Islands. The majority of teachers belong to the North region (49.4%).

Materials and Procedure

PCQ. Developed and validated by Luthans et al. (2007), the PCQ acronym for Psychological Capital Questionnaire was adapted to the Portuguese context by Machado (2008). Its 24 items were adapted from scales previously published in literature on self-efficacy (Parker 1998), resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993), optimism (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994), and hope (Snyder et al., 1996).

Each dimension is composed of 6 items and respondents answer according to a 6-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree to 6 – strongly agree). Thus, the higher the mean values of items, the higher the PsyCap ratings.

In the original study (Luthans et al., 2007), every dimension of the questionnaire showed alpha Cronbach coefficients over .80. This suggests that the internal consistence is adequate (Kline, 2000). In order to validate the PCQ, the authors carried out a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the maximum likelihood estimation method and this showed a good rate of adequacy to the model [SRMR = .05; CFI = .93; RMSEA = .05] (Hu & Bentler, 1995). In our study, an identical procedure was used to evaluate the psychometric properties. The data obtained through the post-hoc analysis suggested some modifications that lead to a better model adjustment with the covariations in the errors of the subtests with similar characteristics, namely in the hope dimension. With the purpose of better adjust the model, we eliminated some manifest variables: items 1 and 5 related to self-efficacy and items 3 and 7 related to optimism.

The main keys of adjustment resulting from the CFA revealed adequate adjustment to a four-factor model [$\chi 2 = 2.89$; df = 163; $p < .01$; CFI = .90; TLI = .88; RMSEA = .07]. The internal consistence obtained for each one of the factors was: .77 for self-efficacy, .74 for hope, .72 for resilience and .65 for optimism.

EADS-21. The EADS-21 is an adaptation of the *Depression, Anxiety Stress Scales* (DASS) designed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) and tested for the Portuguese population by Pais-Ribeiro, Honrado, and Leal (2004).

The self-administered questionnaire is composed of 21 items and evaluates three different areas: anxiety, depression and stress. Each item corresponds to an affirmative sentence that recalls negative emotional symptoms. The respondent identifies his or her emotional condition experienced the week before. There are four possible answers for each sentence, organized into a Likert scale, where 0 corresponds to "it is not applicable to me" and 3 corresponds to "it is very often applicable to me". Totals for each dimension are reached through the values of the 7 items and may range from 0 to 21. The higher the score, the more negative the emotional conditions of the individual are and, consequently, the more intense his or her distress is.

Regarding the internal consistency of the EADS-21, the Cronbach's alpha was used to determine it. The findings indicated .79 for anxiety, .83 for depression and .89 for stress. These results suggest quite suitable values. In our study, a CFA was conducted and after the post-hoc analysis, we eliminated items 2, 9, 10 (anxiety), 3, 6, 21 (depression) and 6 (stress), which resulted in indices' adjustment much more adequate to a three-dimension model [$\chi 2 = 3.01$; df = 74; $p < .001$; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .07]. The internal consistency obtained for each of the factors was fairly acceptable: .84 for anxiety, .79 for depression and .88 for stress.

Procedure

The questionnaire composed of the PCQ, the EADS-21 and a set of questions on social-demographic characteristics were introduced into a specially-designed platform. The link was sent by email to teachers of various primary and secondary schools across country (Portugal) and the explanation of the aims of this survey was attached. We included a pledge of confidentiality and also assured that findings would be strictly used for academic purposes.

Results

In order to test the outlined hypothesis, we began by analysing the distribution of the variables in this study, using the following criteria: Kolmogorov-Smirnov adjustment test in demand to test the distribution normality, and the Levene test to test the homogeneity of variance, and after verifying that the distribution was in accordance with the normality patterns, parametric tests were used.

In order to verify the first hypothesis, we analysed the singularities in terms of sociodemographic characterization. With the objective of facilitating statistical analysis, the ages of respondents were organized into two groups: those aged between 26 and 44 and those aged between 45 and 62. There were only significant differences involving the age variable in terms of anxiety [$t(423) = -2.89$, $p = .004$], the older teachers presenting higher medium values.

Regarding gender, findings showed that, albeit the mean values of women were higher than those of men, there were no relevant differences in any of the EADS-21 dimension. As regards education, data showed that there were only statistically relevant differences in anxiety [$t(423) = -2.07$, $p = .039$], and particularly higher in teachers with postgraduate studies.

Empirical evidence shows that particular types of behaviour may be developed in order to face pressure and adverse daily mishaps because there is a significant negative association between the PsyCap and distress with a favourable impact on anxiety, depression and stress. We wanted to find out which dimensions of the PCQ showed the highest mean scores and underpinned self-efficacy.

When comparing mean values for gender, we found no statistically significant differences in any of the PsyCap dimensions and had similar findings regarding the age of the respondents. We found out that men teachers aged between 26 and 44 showed higher mean values in every dimension. As far as education is concerned, teachers with postgraduate studies showed higher mean values in every dimension, despite significant differences regarding self-efficacy [$t(423) = -3.11$, $p = .002$], resilience [$t(423) = -2.04$, $p = .041$], and hope [$t(423) = -2.70$, $p = .007$]. Comparisons as to the seniority of teachers showed no significant differences from the PsyCap as far as this variable is concerned.

In relation to marital status, three categories were considered: single, married and other, with results showing that single teachers present the lowest medium values in all the EADS-21 dimensions, although those differences are only significant for anxiety [$F(2, 422) = 3.10$, $p = .046$]. The data analysis also allowed us to determine that there are no statistical significant differences in any of the EADS-21 dimensions [anxiety: $F(3, 421) = .54$, $p = .654$; depression: $F(3, 421) = .72$, $p = .162$; stress: $F(3, 421) = .41$, $p = .742$] considering the year they are teaching.

Regarding marital status, no significant statistical differences were found in any of the PsyCap dimensions [self-efficacy: $F(2, 422) = .28$, $p = .749$; resilience: $F(2, 422) = .95$, $p = .384$; optimism: $F(2, 422) = 2.93$, $p = .054$; hope: $F(2, 422) = 1.41$, $p = .245$].

The mean difference according to the year that the teachers teach shows that there are significant statistical differences in terms of levels of resilience [$F(3, 421) = 3.00$, $p = .030$] and hope [$F(3, 421) = 4.19$, $p = .006$]. It was found that although primary education teachers present higher medium results when it comes to resilience, optimism and hope, secondary education teachers have higher medium values in self-efficacy (Table 1).

Table 1
Difference of the means of PsyCap taking in consideration the educational cycle in which the teachers are lecturing

	1st Cycle		2nd Cycle		3rd Cycle		Secondary			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*Sig.*
Self-efficacy	3.67	0.62	3.83	0.59	3.72	0.69	3.77	0.49	1.24	.294
Resilience	3.59	0.56	3.81	0.54	3.68	0.57	3.73	0.49	3.00	.030*
Optimism	3.42	0.58	3.53	0.54	3.36	0.65	3.46	0.58	1.11	.344
Hope	3.52	0.62	3.79	0.58	3.56	0.60	3.69	0.52	4.20	.006*

*Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard-deviation; *p < .05*

With the purpose of verifying the second hypothesis, we tried to determine the impact of the PsyCap on distress among primary and secondary education teachers. The findings show that the PsyCap variable with the highest rating of impact:

- On anxiety [R^2 = .10; *SD* = .52; *F* = 11.75; *p* < .001] is optimism (β = -.16; *p* = .016);
- On depression [R^2 = .51; *SD* = .52; *F* = 37.46; *p* < .001] is optimism (β = -.40; *p* < .001) and hope (β = -.16; *p* = .017);
- On stress [R^2 = .44; *SD* = .54; *F* = 26.33; *p* < .001] is optimism (β = -.25; *p* < .001) and hope (*stress*: β = -.14; *p* = .043).

As the coefficients β are negative, we can conclude that the higher the ratings of optimism and hope, the lower the rating of distress among teachers.

Taking into account what was suggested in the third hypothesis, we then determined whether the most optimistic teachers showed lower ratings of anxiety, depression and stress, and reorganized the optimism variable in two groups according to its mean value (*M* = 3.50): Group 1 (Low Optimism) and Group 2 (High Optimism). Statistics showed there were significant differences in the groups´ mean values according to their lower or higher optimism in the depression and stress variables (Table 2), and that the higher the optimism, the lower the distress of teachers. These findings indicate that optimism is a characteristic that prevents individuals from experiencing distress.

Table 2
Difference of the means in psychological distress of teachers considering the optimism

	Low optimism		High optimism			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t-test*	*Sig.*
Anxiety	1.38	0.55	1.28	0.51	1.97	.050
Depression	1.78	0.64	1.39	0.47	6.95	.000**
Stress	2.00	0.62	1.68	0.55	5.44	.000**

*Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard-deviation; **p < .001*

We checked the association between the PCQ and the EADS-21 variables and found a significant correlation between all dimensions under study. The high correlations between the strongly associated PCQ variables (self-efficacy, resilience, optimism and hope) indicate that they may be united for a common purpose and constitute a single construct entitled PsyCap, enabling individuals to answer to adversities favourably. The same applies to the EADS-21 dimensions (anxiety, depression and stress) and, being strongly associated, they indicate a construct that could be called distress (Table 3).

Table 3
Correlations between anxiety, depression, stress and PsyCap

	M	*SD*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
Anxiety (1)	1.33	0.54	-						
Depression (2)	1.59	0.60	.64**	-					
Stress (3)	1.85	0.61	.71**	.76**	-				
Self-efficacy (4)	3.79	0.62	-.26**	-.32**	-.29**	-			
Resilience (5)	3.68	0.54	-.24**	-.31**	-.35**	.67**	-		
Optimism (6)	3.50	0.67	-.29**	-.50**	-.42**	.54**	.60**	-	
Hope (7)	3.62	0.59	-.28**	-.43**	-.40**	.65**	.69**	.71**	-

*Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard-deviation; **p < .001*

Negative correlations between the PCQ and EADS-21 variables show that the PsyCap and distress are associated in an opposite way; whenever one increases, the other decreases, and vice-versa. The highest correlations between positive psychological skills and distress are those emerging from the connection between optimism and stress (r = -.49, p < .001).

Discussion

Roche, Haar, and Luthans (2014) suggested that the findings of positive psychology contribute to improve individual and collective functioning and promote psychological well-being. Positive experiences strengthen minds and shape behaviours because they prepare people for day-to-day adversities and stimulate the boldness required to tackle problems.

To test the first hypothesis, we analysed the differences in the PCQ dimensions in accordance with the level of schooling of primary and secondary education teachers. We found that the higher the qualifications, the higher the PsyCap values, namely: self-efficacy, resilience and hope, which allows us to partially corroborate the third hypothesis. In agreement with Luthans et al. (2014), self-efficacy operates as a basis of positivity, so the bigger the capacity to mobilize the cognitive resources and the necessary actions for a well succeeded performance, the more confident people feel, trying harder to make positive choices. In the same line, Cunha et al. (2008) defend that the more people adjust to the functions they perform and the better the knowledge about people they have, the more effort they

make to reach their goals and better adapt to situations that cause psychic suffering. Conclusions go against the studies conducted by Luthans et al. (2015), who affirm that people who are more confident are more persistent and have more positive thoughts. In this sense, Snyder and Lopez (2009) defend that self-efficacy is directly associated with the belief that subjects need to have in order to make their competencies and knowledge produce the desired effects. Sweetman, Luthans, Avey, and Luthans (2011) add that the sense of self-efficacy is associated with areas in which individuals have more confidence, experience, knowledge, and mastery. Therefore, the higher their academic qualifications, the higher their positive psychological capacities. Parallel to this, negative relations were found between self-efficacy and psychic suffering, namely when it comes to anxiety. Luthans et al. (2014) refer that the higher the cognitive resources, the bigger the probability of reaching positive results, both at personal and professional level. The authors add that self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, and hope, when reconciled, have a higher effect on performance and on individual satisfaction, than when used individually. For Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2015), having hope encompasses the development of oriented actions to reach a goal, namely the necessary motivation to define the path towards it and the different alternatives to reach it. According to Picado (2009), the lack of acknowledge on the part of all employers, in the face of the effort made to increase the academic level and, consequently, professional performance, translates into psychic suffering, and it can be minimized through PsyCap. Schwazer and Schwitz (2004) refer that the bigger the personal investment, the bigger the professional development of the teacher and the capacity to deal with adversities. These results contradict the ones obtained in our study.

Compared to age, we found that older teachers present higher levels of psychic suffering. However, only statistically significant differences were verified with regard to anxiety. These results are congruent with the ones found by Renshaw, Long, and Cook (2015), which reveal that the higher the age the bigger the emotional exhaustion. Similar results were found by McIntyre et al. (2015), who refer that younger teachers showed higher stress levels than the older ones. Our results indicate no significant differences between the teachers aged 26-44 years, who present higher medium levels in all PsyCap dimensions. Our conclusions match the findings of Norman, Avey, Nimnicht, and Pigeon (2010), according to which age is positively correlated with self-efficacy and resilience.

Concerning genre, several studies (e.g., Collie et al., 2012; Lambert et al., 2015) refer that women show higher medium levels of anxiety and depression than men. Nevertheless, that difference is not verifiable with regard to stress. However, our study did not reveal significant statistical differences when it comes to genre. Results may be explained by the nature of the function and the responsibilities assigned to it. The teacher's activity is one of the few where the genre factor has no importance, both in the task definition and task responsibilities or even on the function layout. As for PsyCap, we found that male teachers present higher medium values in all the analysed dimensions, but they do not differ significantly. Results go against the ones obtained by Rego, Marques, Leal, Sousa, and Cunha (2010), who affirm that genre is not correlated with any PsyCap dimensions.

With regard to marital status, the study showed that single teachers have the lowest medium values in all the EADS-21 dimensions. Nevertheless, the existence of significant differences is only found when it comes to anxiety. In the same sense, Pinto (2000) affirms

that married or divorced teachers show higher values of psychic suffering than single ones, which can be explained by the inherent familiar responsibilities and the constant uncertainty experienced nowadays in this profession. This showed that married teachers have the lowest values in all the PsyCap dimensions.

We found that anxiety, depression and stress differ significantly depending on the year teachers teach. Secondary education teaching assistants have higher medium values in all dimensions than basic education teachers. According to Jesus (2005), it is in secondary school that teaching-related unease is most felt. Therefore, this situation is fundamentally due to the students'high demands for interpersonal relations in this level of teaching. Research conducted by Nunes (2010) identified significantly lower levels of stress in secondary school than in basic education teaching. These results contradict our study and do not reveal the existence of significant differences regarding this variable. These results go against the results obtained in PsyCap, according to which teachers who teach in the second cycle of education have higher medium values in resilience, optimism and hope, and teachers who teach secondary education present higher values in self-efficacy. Nevertheless, these differences are only significant regarding resilience and hope. Luthans et al. (2015) refer that resilience and hope, when combined, have a higher effect on performance and individual satisfaction than when used individually.

The aim of this study was to analyse the impact of the PsyCap on the distress of primary and secondary education teachers. Following the data analysis, optimism was found to be the PsyCap variable with the highest positive impact on every dimension of the EADS-21; the higher the optimism ratings, the lower the distress of teachers. These results go against the second hypothesis initially formulated and in the direction of the studies carried out by Luthans et al. (2014), who suggested that optimism made people more resistant to depression, offering them greater satisfaction and a more productive life. Costa (2012) refers that optimistic people are healthier, have bigger longevity and well-succeed careers, as well as a happier life with less stress and anxiety when facing setbacks. Following up on this idea, Avey, Reichard, Luthans and Mhatre (2011) affirm that it is fundamental that new generations become more resilient and optimistic, for which reason it is vital to promote training programmes towards that end.

Seligman et al. (2009) add that it is essential to create conditions to optimize or train optimistic ways to face life's experiences and increase the positive emotions in order to anticipate a positive future and look affirmatively to reality. In this context, Avey et al. (2010) refer that when we face reality assertively, the stress reduction happens in an indirect way, as more positive and cheerful environments are created. On this, Seligman et al. (2009) state that optimism is supported not just by wellbeing but also by the situations. Therefore, favourable situations must be created in a permanent way to strengthen self-efficacy and professional performance. On the other hand, negative events must be faced as transitory and specific to concrete situations, so they should not affect organizational and individual performance. Nonetheless, Luthans et al. (2015) warn that unrealistic optimism makes people vulnerable and prone to affect individual and organizational performance. Therefore, ideally one should show simultaneously high positive and negative expectations in relations to future events. Hope was also shown to affect depression and stress positively, with results similar to those obtained by Luthans et al. (2007), who stated that individuals with high rat-

ings of hope show determination in the pursuit of aims and are able to define ways to attain them regardless of what may come ahead. Studies conducted by Avey et al. (2010) also showed that there is an opposite relation between hope and stress.

Based on our findings, we tried to determine whether more optimistic teachers showed lower ratings of anxiety, depression and stress, and concluded that optimism operates as a positive element that protects subjects from distress. However, the second hypothesis was not fully supported because, despite the mean values of anxiety being higher in less optimistic teachers (pessimistic), this dimension did not contain significant statistical differences. Our findings support those obtained by Seligman et al. (2009), who showed that optimistic individuals face negative events as transitory and specific to certain situations, and positive events should be developed permanently. According to Sheldon, Boehm, and Lyubomirsky (2013) optimistic individuals are more resistant to frustration, are happier and able to tackle adversities more positively, learning from their mistakes and, therefore, showing reduced ratings of anxiety, depression and stress. These results contradict the results obtained by Leal, Röhr, and Acioly-Régnier (2011), which reveal that teachers with more optimistic and resilient characteristics are prone to overcome difficulties. Jesus (2005) refers that when teachers develop strategies to face and overcome demands and professional difficulties, they feel more motivated and accomplished at professional and personal level, consequently having less psychic suffering. Bakker and Oerlemans (2012) highlighted the importance of the Psycap both for workers' well-being and for the profits of the organization.

Following the data analysis, optimism was found to be the PsyCap variable with the highest positive impact on every dimension of the EADS-21; the higher the ratings of optimism, the lower the distress of teachers. These results go against the second hypothesis initially formulated and in the direction of the studies carried out by Luthans et al. (2014), who suggested that optimism made people more resistant to depression, offering them greater satisfaction and a more productive life. The authors added that it is essential to create conditions to optimize or train optimist attitudes to face life experiences, expand positive emotion and have a more positive look at reality in the future. Thus, optimism is reinforced by good and bad events and favourable situations must be created permanently in order to improve and strengthen self-efficacy and a more satisfactory professional performance (Bandura, 2012). Furthermore, negative events should be faced as temporary, transitional and particular to certain situations in order not to affect the organizational and individual performance negatively (Pluess, & Belsky, 2013; Renshaw et al., 2015).

Hope was also shown to affect depression and stress positively, with similar results to those obtained by Luthans et al. (2007) who stated that individuals with high ratings of hope show determination in the pursuit of aims and are able to define ways to attain them, regardless of what may come ahead. Studies conducted by Avey et al. (2010) also showed that there is an opposite relation between hope and stress.

Based on our findings, we tried to determine whether more optimistic teachers showed lower ratings of anxiety, depression and stress, and concluded that optimism operates as a positive element that protects subjects from distress. However, the second hypothesis was not fully supported because, despite the mean values of anxiety being higher in less optimistic teachers (pessimistic), this difference is peripherally significate. Findings support those obtained by Seligman et al. (2009) who showed that optimistic individuals face negative events as transitory and specific to certain situations, while positive events should be developed permanently.

Conclusion

Nowadays, unprecedented uncertainty prevails, with direct effect on the career of teachers who face increasingly more challenging situations. Over the years, those adversities tend to result in symptoms of anxiety and stress, which can lead to serious depressive disturbances (WHO, 2015).

Teachers' discomfort, particularly distress, is not new and has been studied by various researchers (e.g., Moreno-Jiménez, Hernández, & Gutiérrez, 2000; Sann, 2003). Their work shows that psychological problems are more or less related to teachers' social and working conditions.

Being a teacher inevitably involves being in permanent contact with third parties and that it is a permanent challenge. Therefore, stress emerges gradually. It is worth mentioning that Tomioka et al. (2011) stated that occupational stress is identified as a predictor of anxiety and symptoms of depression. However, many teachers tackle professional setbacks functionally and develop positive psychological skills that counteract negative symptoms.

Various authors (e.g., Avey et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2014) pointed out the beneficial consequences of individuals with high ratings of PsyCap, including increased self-esteem and psychological well-being. Positive experiencing strengthens the intellect, makes people happier and shapes individual and collective behaviour because it endows individuals with the skills required to tackle day-to-day setbacks, stimulating them to sort problems out (Lyubomirsky, 2013).

According to Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2015), well-being at the work place has acquired major importance and the inherent costs to its promotion reflect these results. However, only with approaches based on evidence it is possible to select the adequate interventions, otherwise all the invested resources are wasted, with ineffectiveness triggering counterproductive practices. Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, and Avolio (2015) add that the development of supported PsyCap strategies, besides promoting well-being, also has a positive impact on performance. Strength and positive psychological capabilities may be developed and effectively managed to increase satisfaction and create added value to the organizations (Youssef & Luthans, 2013).

The fact that well-being and living standards are not referred to in the theoretical approach to the PsyCap is a constraint of this study. Furthermore, it would have been interesting to determine whether the PsyCap mediates or moderates symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress. It is also important to emphasize that variables related to career stability should have been included, such as type of work contract and the ability to combine professional demands with family ones. Therefore, a replication of this study would have been interesting in order to overcome these gaps.

Assuming that it is not possible to conclude or provide definite answers from this study, we believe this is a contribution to the discussion on the importance of PsyCap for the distress of primary and secondary education teachers and, consequently, for their organizational productivity. A strong concurrence between our findings and those shown in many other studies (e.g., Bakker & Oerlemans, 2012; Luthans et al., 2007; Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013) indicates the validity of our guidelines.

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