

# Aggressive Behaviors among Primary School Teachers and Their Impact on Their Teaching, Well-Being, and Relationships

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## ABSTRACT

Aggressive behaviors among colleagues in school units is a current, yet less studied phenomenon in educational research. The present study aims to fill the gap that exists in literature as in Greece, there is no research that examines the impact of colleagues' aggression on educational work. More specifically, the research examines the opinion of primary school teachers regarding the relationship between aggression displayed in the school environment by colleagues and educational work. For the collection and analysis of the research data, an explanatory correlational design was used. According to the findings of the research, in the primary schools of Attica aggression is observed in the behavior of all members of a teachers' association and has a negative impact on educational work. Aggression displayed by the members of a teachers' association determines the quality of the relationships that are developed between teachers, affects their emotional state, and negatively affects their teaching.

**Keywords:** educational work, primary school teachers, school aggressive behaviors, teachers' disputes.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Educational work has been a matter of great concern for the educational and scientific community (Mantas *et al.*, 2009; Pedagogical Institute, 2009; Zouganeli *et al.*, 2007). Although the main concern of all is the improvement of educational work and the empowerment of students, Greek research data show that teachers face many problems which are related to the lack of cooperation with the school principal and non-friendly relationships with their colleagues (Thanou *et al.*, 2019; Saiti, 2015; Vergidis, 2008). Moreover, it is widely accepted that the negative climate of a school can affect the performance of teachers and have a negative impact on students (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2014; Inayatullah & Jehangir, 2012; Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006). Also, teachers claim that they are not properly trained to deal with behavioral problems that occur in the school environment (Zergiotis, 2014; Galand *et al.*, 2007; Kavanagh, 2018). It is, therefore, easily understood that although everyone wants to promote a positive school climate that will strengthen the relations between the members of the school community and benefit students through a productive learning process, in practice this is not always feasible.

International research data show that aggression has a negative impact on both teachers and their educational work (Galand *et al.*, 2007). In Greece, although researchers often study the impact of aggression on students (Alexopoulos & Kokkinos, 2018), the relationship between aggression that is displayed in the school environment and educational work is an object of research that needs further study. The purpose of this research is to fill this gap by examining the impact of colleagues' aggression on educational work.

## II. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

### A. Teacher Victimization in the School Premises

In school premises, aggression is not a new phenomenon but can be very common (OEPEK, 2008; Kapa *et al.*, 2018; Ruff *et al.*, 2004). It can be observed in the behavior of all the members of the school community and affects their interpersonal relationships (Zergiotis 2014; Belogianni, 2016). The research topic of teachers' victimization is most common in studies of American schools as 80% of USA primary and secondary school teachers have been victimized at least once a year (American Psychological Association, 2016; McMahon *et al.*, 2014) and can be found in studies of other countries, as teachers' victimization increases over the years (Köiv, 2015). Although the main perpetrators are students, quite often the teachers are victimized by their students' parents, their colleagues, or the school principal. Quite often principals appear to abuse their power and use some colleagues as means of teachers' victimization, while the rest of the colleagues accept the role of the observer because they are afraid of being also victimized (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; Köiv, 2015; McMahon *et al.*, 2014; Tiesman, 2013).

According to international research, teachers can be physically assaulted through gestures, the throwing of an object or even the use of a weapon and non-physically assaulted in cases of verbal abuse, threats, gossip, obscene comments or intimidation (Can & Caglar, 2017, McMahon *et al.*, 2014; Tiesman, 2013; Wei *et al.*, 2013). In addition, teachers can be sexually harassed or have their personal belongings stolen (McMahon *et al.*, 2014; Wei *et al.*, 2013).

Other common examples of aggression directed against teachers are injustice, discrimination against them, negative criticism, lack of professional recognition, manifestations of professional jealousy, refusal to give them the material they need for their work, excessive control of their work, hostile behavior, unreasonable remarks, disrespect, and insinuation that they should resign (Celikoz & Celikoz, 2017; Van de Merwe *et al.*, 2015). The school principal plays an important role in the manifestation of aggression since, not only the lack of a principal's support is characterized as a form of teachers' victimization (McMahon *et al.*, 2017), but also teachers can be victimized by the school principal through psychological bullying and attacks aimed at their professional competence (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015).

Although all teachers can be victimized, the gender of teachers can be related to their victimization. As research review proves male teachers are more likely to be victimized in USA and female teachers are more often victimized in Turkey (Celikoz & Celikoz, 2017; Martinez *et al.*, 2016). Also, teachers with less working experience and younger teachers are more likely to be victimized, not only by their students but also by their colleagues (Martinez *et al.*, 2016; Wei *et al.*, 2013). Substitutes, special education teachers, teachers who have a master's degree and teachers who work in city schools are the most usual victims together with the teachers who tend to blame themselves and those who are conscientious, submissive, and introverted (Martinez *et al.*, 2016; Van de Merwe *et al.*, 2015; Wei *et al.*, 2013). On the other hand, teachers who have their principal's support are less likely to be victimized (Martinez *et al.*, 2016).

The victimization of teachers acts as a threat to their personal and professional prestige and leads to their isolation from the other members of the school community (Celikoz & Celikoz, 2017; De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; Kõiv, 2015). Researchers propose that victimized teachers do not take an active part in decision-making at school, they do not have loose social interactions with the other members of the school community, and they characterize the school as an unattractive workplace, often thinking of resigning or changing profession (Celikoz & Celikoz, 2017; De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; Fahie & Davine, 2014). Teachers-victims characterize their experience as traumatic and they usually experience anxiety, frustration, disappointment, fear, burnout, or depression, they have low self-confidence and self-esteem and they sometimes feel helpless (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; Okçu & Cetin, 2017; Van de Merwe *et al.*, 2015). So, one can assume that teachers' victimization can also influence their health, as they often experience physical symptoms such as headaches, musculoskeletal pains, stomachaches, hypertension, heartache or trembling and their state of health often affects their family life (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; Van de Merwe *et al.*, 2015).

In addition, low levels of aggression can create a negative climate in schools while exposure to high levels leads to the emotional exhaustion of teachers (Okçu & Cetin, 2017; Poling *et al.*, 2019). The behavior of principals plays an important role in the impact of aggression on educational work as teachers, who do not have their principals' support when they are victimized, declare themselves to be very upset, blame themselves and feel insecure and weak. Also, aggressive practices of principals can lead to teachers'

depression, anxiety, frustration, irritation, lack of trust and motivation, decreased job satisfaction and reduced productivity (Can & Caglar, 2017; McMahon, Reaves *et al.*, 2017).

### III. OBJECTIVES

The research aims to examine the experiences of primary school teachers as recipients of aggressive behavior from their colleagues and their opinion on how it affects their educational work.

The research tries to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How often do colleagues display aggressive behavior in the school premises?
- 2) How do principals' aggressive behavior and tense relations between teachers affect educational work?
- 3) To what extent are teachers' gender, age and working experience related to their victimization?
- 4) To what extent are teachers' gender, age and working experience related to the impact of aggression on educational work?

### IV. METHOD

The method of quantitative approach was chosen, and an explanatory correlative design (Creswell, 2015) was followed in order to collect data and answer the abovementioned research questions. A structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions was designed and implemented. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part recorded the demographic characteristics of the participants, and the second part was aiming to seize their experiences and views on colleagues' aggressive behavior.

The research was preceded by a pilot application of the questionnaire to teachers of provincial cities. To deal with the adversities that would arise due to the pandemic, the questionnaire was converted into an electronic one and was distributed to the participants via the internet.

#### A. Sample

The research focused on primary school teachers of Attica (Greece) and the researchers used the method of convenient sampling for the selection of the data (Creswell, 2015). 156 primary school teachers of Attica participated in the research. 16.7% of the participants were men and 83.3% were women. 61.5% of the educators were teachers, 32.7% were teachers of specialties and 5.8% were special education teachers (table I). 37.8% of the participants had a Master's degree and 1.9% had a Doctorate Degree.

TABLE I: TEACHING SPECIALTY

| Teaching specialty                  | Frequency | Percent, % |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| French language teacher (PE05)      | 5         | 3.21       |
| English language teacher (PE06)     | 19        | 12.18      |
| German language teacher (PE07)      | 3         | 1.92       |
| Visual Arts teacher (PE08)          | 4         | 2.56       |
| Physical Education teacher (PE11)   | 8         | 5.13       |
| Teacher (PE70)                      | 96        | 61.54      |
| Special Education teacher (PE70.50) | 4         | 2.56       |
| Special Education teacher (PE71)    | 5         | 3.21       |
| Music teacher (PE79.01)             | 4         | 2.56       |
| ICT teacher (PE86)                  | 5         | 3.21       |
| Drama teacher (PE91.01)             | 3         | 1.92       |
| Total                               | 156       | 100        |

Teachers with diverse individual and occupational characteristics, who work in different school units, participated in the research, enhancing in this way the representativeness of the sample (see Tables II-V).

TABLE II: AGE

| Age   | Frequency | Percent, % |
|-------|-----------|------------|
| 22-30 | 23        | 14.7       |
| 31-35 | 18        | 11.5       |
| 36-40 | 20        | 12.8       |
| 41-45 | 23        | 14.7       |
| 46-50 | 24        | 15.4       |
| 51 +  | 48        | 30.8       |
| Total | 156       | 100        |

TABLE III: YEARS OF WORKING EXPERIENCE

| Years of working experience | Frequency | Percent, % |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1-10                        | 44        | 28.2       |
| 11-20                       | 61        | 39.1       |
| 21-30                       | 29        | 18.6       |
| 31 +                        | 22        | 14.1       |
| Total                       | 156       | 100        |

TABLE IV: STATE OF EMPLOYMENT

| State of employment                                             | Frequency | Percent, % |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Permanent (having a permanent position in school)               | 85        | 54.5       |
| Permanent (at the disposal of the primary education department) | 4         | 2.6        |
| Permanent (attached from another school or area)                | 11        | 7.1        |
| Substitute                                                      | 56        | 35.9       |
| Total                                                           | 156       | 100        |

TABLE V: MARITAL STATUS

| Marital status | Frequency | Percent, % |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Single         | 48        | 30.8       |
| Married        | 94        | 60.3       |
| Divorced       | 14        | 9          |
| Total          | 156       | 100        |

### B. Data Analysis

The coding and analysis of the research data were realized using the software IBM SPSS 27 and following the principles of descriptive and inductive statistics. A combination of frequency distribution measures, central tendency measures and measures of variability offered a more comprehensive understanding of the research data. Moreover, the Chi-square test and r-Spearman were used for the correlation of the research's results with the gender, age and working experience of the participants.

TABLE VI: COLLEAGUES' AGGRESSION IN THE SCHOOL PREMISES (DISTRIBUTION MEASURES/CENTRAL TENDENCY MEASURES AND MEASURES OF VARIABILITY)

| Colleagues' aggression in the school premises                                                                    | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|------------|
| How often do the teachers at your school conflict with each other?                                               | 15.4% | 51.9%  | 24.4%     | 7.1%  | 1.3%       |
| How often do you conflict with your colleagues?                                                                  | 31.4% | 55.8%  | 10.9%     | 1.9%  | 0%         |
| How often does your principal support you in a possible confrontation with the other members of the school unit? | 11.5% | 11.5%  | 35.9%     | 26.9% | 14.1%      |

TABLE VII: COLLEAGUES' AGGRESSION IN THE SCHOOL PREMISES (DISTRIBUTION MEASURES/CENTRAL TENDENCY MEASURES AND MEASURES OF VARIABILITY)

| Colleagues' aggression in the school premises                                                                    | Median | Std. Deviation | Variance |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------------|----------|
| How often do the teachers at your school conflict with each other?                                               | 2      | 0.853          | 0.727    |
| How often do you conflict with your colleagues?                                                                  | 2      | 0.689          | 0.495    |
| How often does your principal support you in a possible confrontation with the other members of the school unit? | 3      | 1.173          | 1.377    |

### C. Reliability and Validity of Research

The present research has a high degree of validity. The research tool took its final form after its pilot application to teachers of provincial cities, thus enhancing the validity of its content (Creswell, 2015). The statistical analysis of the research data prevented the subjective analysis by the researchers, while the use of a questionnaire as a research tool enhanced the reliability of the research process. In addition, during the analysis of the research data, the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire were checked by calculating the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the questionnaire. The results show that the reliability of the questionnaire is very good (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.79).

## V. RESULTS

### A. Colleagues' Aggression in the School Premises

Data analysis shows that in primary schools of Attica aggression can be observed in the behavior of the members of a teachers' association (assembly). Tables VI-VII clearly show that, although rarely, aggression can be observed in the interpersonal relationships of teachers. 51.9% of the participants said that the teachers at their school rarely conflict with each other, and 55.8% claimed that they rarely conflict with other colleagues. Moreover, although most of the participants claimed that their principal supports them in a possible confrontation with the other members of the school unit (median: 3), the standard deviation (1.173) shows us that there is a disparity in the responses of the participants, which is reinforced by the fact that 23% of the participants admitted that their principal rarely or never supports them in a possible confrontation with the other members of the school unit. It is therefore easily understood that aggression, although in some cases does not frequently occur, is present in the behavior of the members of a teachers' association.

Through the  $X^2$  test and spearman correlation coefficient were not identified any relationships between the gender/age/working experience of the participants and their answers to the questions.

### B. Teachers' Relations and Educational Work

The results of the research show that the quality of the interpersonal relationships of the members of a teachers' association affects teachers and makes them change their behavior while being on the school premises. As shown in Tables VIII-IX, the participants admitted that tense relations between the members of a teachers' association make them

minimize the interpersonal relationships in the school premises (median:3). 59.6% of the participants said that they feel sad, angry, or ashamed when their colleagues gossip or accuse them unfairly and this alters their readiness to work. However, only 33.4% of the participants admitted that colleagues' attacks aimed at their professional competence make their health worse, and this is perceived by their students, while most of the participants disagreed with this statement (median: 2).

From the analysis of the results in Table X-XI, it is understood that the behavior of the school principal affects teachers to a considerable extent and has a significant impact on their educational work. 75.7% of the participants stated that when their principal does not support them in the confrontation they have with a student, they feel helpless. Several teachers also admitted that the confrontation with the school principal causes them stress and affects the way they teach (median:3) and 76.9% of the participants claimed that a principal's intention to over-control their work causes them irritation and hurts the quality of their teaching. The above assumptions, combined with the fact that 92.4% of the participants agreed with the view that the humiliation of a teacher by the school principal is a traumatic experience that negatively affects the quality of his/her work, lead to the

conclusion that the school principal plays an important role in the proper functioning of the school and affects educational work in a considerable extent.

The analysis of the results of Tables XII-XIII shows that although most of the participants did not agree with this position (median: 2), 39.1% of the participants admitted that several colleagues are not willing to help teachers who do not have a good relationship with the school principal and in some cases, they cause further problems in their educational work. This fact, combined with the assumption that the psychological violence that is used by the members of a teachers' association harms not only the quality of a teacher's work but also his/her professional reputation (median: 3), highlights the fact that all forms of teachers' active or passive aggression harm the quality of their colleagues' educational work. This is also reinforced by the view adopted by 68% of the participants, who claimed that if the members of a teachers' association do not have good relations this is perceived by the students and negatively affects the learning process. It is therefore easily understood that the aggression displayed by the members of a teachers' association affects the mental and emotional state of the teachers, determines the quality of the relationships that are developed between teachers and negatively affects educational work.

TABLE VIII: TEACHERS' RELATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL WORK- QUESTIONS 1-3 (DISTRIBUTION MEASURES/CENTRAL TENDENCY MEASURES AND MEASURES OF VARIABILITY)

| Teachers' relations and educational work                                                                                               | I totally disagree | I disagree | I agree | I totally agree |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|---------|-----------------|
| Tense relations between the members of a teachers' association make me minimize the interpersonal relationships in the school premises | 7.7%               | 17.3%      | 44.9%   | 30.1%           |
| I feel sad, angry, or ashamed when my colleagues gossip or accuse me unfairly and I don't have a strong will to work                   | 14.1%              | 26.3%      | 37.8%   | 21.8%           |
| Colleagues' attacks aimed at my professional competence make my health worse, and this is perceived by my students                     | 23.7%              | 42.9%      | 27.6%   | 5.8%            |

TABLE IX: TEACHERS' RELATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL WORK- QUESTIONS 1-3 (DISTRIBUTION MEASURES/CENTRAL TENDENCY MEASURES AND MEASURES OF VARIABILITY)

| Teachers' relations and educational work                                                                                               | Median | St. deviation | Variance |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------|----------|
| Tense relations between the members of a teachers' association make me minimize the interpersonal relationships in the school premises | 3      | 0.887         | 0.786    |
| I feel sad, angry or ashamed when my colleagues gossip or accuse me unfairly and I don't have a strong will to work                    | 3      | 0.972         | 0.944    |
| Colleagues' attacks aimed at my professional competence make my health worse, and this is perceived by my students                     | 2      | 0.851         | 0.725    |

TABLE X: TEACHERS' RELATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL WORK- QUESTIONS 4-7 (DISTRIBUTION MEASURES/CENTRAL TENDENCY MEASURES AND MEASURES OF VARIABILITY)

| Teachers' relations and educational work                                                                                                           | I totally disagree | I disagree | I agree | I totally agree |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|---------|-----------------|
| When my principal does not support me in the confrontation, I have with a student I feel helpless.                                                 | 6.4%               | 17.9%      | 40.4%   | 35.3%           |
| When I become involved in a conflict with the school principal, I get stressed, and my teaching is affected.                                       | 10.9%              | 35.9%      | 37.2%   | 16%             |
| A principal's intention to over-control my work causes me irritation and hurts the quality of my teaching.                                         | 6.4%               | 16.7%      | 42.3%   | 34.6%           |
| I believe that the humiliation of a teacher by the school principal is a traumatic experience that negatively affects the quality of his/her work. | 3.2%               | 4.5%       | 35.3%   | 57.1%           |

TABLE XI: TEACHERS' RELATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL WORK- QUESTIONS 4-7 (DISTRIBUTION MEASURES/CENTRAL TENDENCY MEASURES AND MEASURES OF VARIABILITY)

| Teachers' relations and educational work                                                                                                           | Median | St. deviation | Variance |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------|----------|
| When my principal does not support me in the confrontation, I have with a student I feel helpless.                                                 | 3      | 0.890         | 0.792    |
| When I become involved in a conflict with the school principal, I get stressed, and my teaching is affected.                                       | 3      | 0.887         | 0.787    |
| A principal's intention to over-control my work causes me irritation and hurts the quality of my teaching.                                         | 3      | 0.878         | 0.772    |
| I believe that the humiliation of a teacher by the school principal is a traumatic experience that negatively affects the quality of his/her work. | 4      | 0.731         | 0.534    |

TABLE XII: TEACHERS' RELATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL WORK- QUESTIONS 8-10 (DISTRIBUTION MEASURES/CENTRAL TENDENCY MEASURES AND MEASURES OF VARIABILITY)

| Teachers' relations and educational work                                                                                                                                                    | I totally disagree | I disagree | I agree | I totally agree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|---------|-----------------|
| I notice that several colleagues are not willing to help teachers who do not have a good relationship with the school principal, and they cause further problems in their educational work. | 19.2%              | 41.7%      | 26.3%   | 12.8%           |
| The psychological violence that is used by the members of a teachers' association negatively affects the quality of a teacher's work and harms his/her professional reputation.             | 3.2%               | 13.5%      | 49.4%   | 34              |
| If the members of a teachers' association do not have good relations, this is perceived by the students and negatively affects the learning process.                                        | 5.1%               | 26.9%      | 46.2%   | 21.%            |

TABLE XIII: TEACHERS' RELATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL WORK- QUESTIONS 8-10 (DISTRIBUTION MEASURES/CENTRAL TENDENCY MEASURES AND MEASURES OF VARIABILITY)

| Teachers' relations and educational work                                                                                                                                                    | Median | St. deviation | Variance |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------|----------|
| I notice that several colleagues are not willing to help teachers who do not have a good relationship with the school principal, and they cause further problems in their educational work. | 2      | 0.931         | 0.867    |
| The psychological violence that is used by the members of a teachers' association negatively affects the quality of a teacher's work and harms his/her professional reputation.             | 3      | 0.766         | 0.586    |
| If the members of a teachers' association do not have good relations, this is perceived by the students and negatively affects the learning process.                                        | 3      | 0.820         | 0.673    |

The correlation of participants' responses to their gender, age and working experience showed that participants' responses are not correlated with the above-mentioned demographic characteristics. Through the  $X^2$  test and spearman correlation coefficient, no relationship was observed between the gender and the responses of the participants. Only the following relationships were identified:

- 1) Weak negative relationship between age and the answers to the questions of Table XIV.
- 2) Weak negative relationship between working experience and the answers to the questions of Table XV.

TABLE XIV: CORRELATION OF THE QUESTIONS WITH AGE

| Coefficient    | Variable                                                                                                                                                                                     | Measure                 | Age    |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------|
| Spearman's rho | I feel sad, angry, or ashamed                                                                                                                                                                | Correlation coefficient | -0.164 |
|                | when my colleagues gossip or accuse me unfairly and I don't have a strong will to work.                                                                                                      | Sig (2-tailed)          | 0.040  |
|                |                                                                                                                                                                                              | N                       | 156    |
|                | I notice that several colleagues are not willing to help teachers who do not have a good relationship with the school principal, and they create further problems in their educational work. | Correlation coefficient | -0.169 |
|                |                                                                                                                                                                                              | Sig (2-tailed)          | 0.034  |
|                |                                                                                                                                                                                              | N                       | 156    |

TABLE XV: CORRELATION OF THE QUESTIONS WITH WORKING EXPERIENCE

| Coefficient    | Variable                                                                                                                                                                        | Measure                 | Working experience |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Spearman's rho | A principal's intention to over-control my work causes me irritation and hurts the quality of my teaching.                                                                      | Correlation coefficient | -0.172             |
|                |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Sig (2-tailed)          | 0.032              |
|                |                                                                                                                                                                                 | N                       | 156                |
|                | The psychological violence that is used by the members of a teachers' association negatively affects the quality of a teacher's work and harms his/her professional reputation. | Correlation coefficient | -0.233             |
|                |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Sig (2-tailed)          | 0.003              |
|                |                                                                                                                                                                                 | N                       | 156                |

From the above correlation, it follows that the quality of the interpersonal relationships of the members of a teachers' association affects the behavior of all teachers regardless of their gender, age and working experience. Only some aspects of the colleagues' aggression have a more negative impact on younger colleagues as well as on those who have less working experience.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The international research data support the view that teachers are often victimized in the school premises, mainly by students, but they can be victimized by parents, colleagues, or the principal of the school unit (McMahon *et al.*, 2014; Tiesman *et al.*, 2013). Although aggression harms all teachers, some individual characteristics of teachers (e.g., age, gender, working experience) alter the way they deal with aggression and make them more vulnerable to it (Martinez *et al.*, 2016; Wei *et al.*, 2013).

Teachers who have to deal with aggressive forms of behavior are often stressed and exhausted emotionally, they feel weak, they lose their sense of self-worth, they are cut off from social interaction in the school and in many cases they are thinking of changing professions (Can & Caglar, 2017; Celikoz & Celikoz, 2017; Ceballos & Carvalho, 2020; Fahie & Devine, 2014; Kõiv, 2015; McMahon *et al.*, 2017; Okçu & Cetin, 2017; Van de Merwe *et al.*, 2015). The present research confirms some of the existing research data and further highlights the impact of aggression on educational work. In primary schools of Attica, aggression, although it does not occur with great frequency, can be observed in the behavior of a teacher's colleagues. Aggression that may be displayed by the members of a teachers' association determines the quality of the relationships that are developed between teachers, affects their emotional state, and negatively affects educational work. Although aggression harms all teachers, certain individual characteristics such as young age and little working experience can enhance the impact of certain forms of aggression. The impact of aggression on educational work is reflected in the conclusions drawn regarding the following four research questions.

### A. How Often Do Colleagues Display Aggressive Behavior in the School Premises?

In primary schools of Attica aggression can be displayed by the members of a teachers' association. This is not surprising as aggression in schools is particularly common (OEPEK, 2008; Kapa *et al.*, 2018; Ruff *et al.*, 2004; Zergiotis, 2014). As conflicts between the members of a school unit are an everyday phenomenon (Thanou *et al.*, 2019; Saiti, 2015), it is not surprising that aggression can be observed even in the interpersonal relationships of the members of a teachers' association. Not only primary school teachers of Attica may rarely conflict with their colleagues but also some teachers admit that they do not have their principal's support in a confrontation with other members of the school unit, which is a form of victimization according to McMahon *et al.* (2017).

### B. How Do Principals' Aggressive Behavior and Tense Relations Between Teachers Affect Educational Work?

Most of the participating teachers minimize their social interactions in the school when they notice that the relations between the members of a teachers' association are tense. In addition, many teachers feel sad, angry, or ashamed when their colleagues gossip or accuse them unfairly. This is not surprising, as not only does aggression hinder opportunities for social unification, but also the threat to the personal or professional prestige of teachers creates negative feelings and contributes to their isolation (Kōiv, 2015; Pavlov *et al.*, 2012; Van de Merwe *et al.*, 2015). However, colleagues' attacks affect only a small portion of teachers by making their health worse and generally do not affect the interaction they have with their students.

It is generally accepted that the principal's support empowers teachers and acts as a catalyst for the harmonious relationships between the members of a school community (Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2015; Maryati *et al.*, 2020). It is therefore not surprising that primary school teachers not only feel helpless when they do not have principals' support during the confrontation with the other members of the school unit but also they get stressed when they are involved in a conflict with their principal, they get annoyed when their principal tries to over-control their work, they characterize as a traumatic experience the humiliation of a teacher by the principal and they admit that their relationship with the principal affects the quality of their teaching.

These findings confirm those of international research, according to which the psychological violence of a school principal creates anxiety, stress, and irritation to teachers, leads them to emotional exhaustion and reduces their productivity (Can & Caglar, 2017; De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; McMahon *et al.*, 2017; Okçu & Cetin, 2017; Van de Merwe *et al.*, 2015). The psychological violence that may be used by the members of a teachers' association has a negative impact on the quality of teachers' work as well as on their professional reputation, confirming the findings of international research (Celikoz & Celikoz, 2017). Finally, poor relationships in a teachers' association are often perceived by students and have a negative impact on the learning process.

From the above conclusions, it is easily understood that the aggression which is displayed in the school premises should

not be underestimated, since all forms of aggressive behavior, which can be observed among colleagues, have negative effects on teachers, create a negative school climate and negatively affect the educational work and the learning process.

### C. To What Extent Are Teachers' Gender, Age and Working Experience Related to Their Victimization?

According to international research data teachers' gender differentiates both the frequency and the form of their victimization (Martinez *et al.*, 2016; McMahon *et al.*, 2014). The present research does not confirm the above-mentioned research data, as the gender of teachers does not differentiate the frequency of their victimization. According to this research, teachers' age does not differentiate the intensity of victimization by their colleagues and teachers' working experience does not affect their victimization. This is surprising as it contradicts the international research data, according to which teachers with less working experience are more often victimized in the school environment (Berlanda *et al.*, 2019; Emmerová & Kohútová, 2017; Gerberich *et al.*, 2014; Lokmić *et al.*, 2013; Martinez *et al.*, 2016). It is therefore easily understood that the gender, age and working experience of teachers do not affect the degree of their exposure to aggressive forms of behavior in the school premises and aggression, which is present in colleagues must be treated by all teachers.

### D. To What Extent Are Teachers' Gender, Age and Working Experience Related to the Impact of Aggression on Educational Work?

Teachers' gender does not differentiate the frequency of their potential victimization and its impact on their educational work since both male and female teachers at primary schools of Attica, when they are repeatedly victimized, question their professional choice, and tend to abandon their profession. The above finding contradicts the research of Moon *et al.* (2019), according to which only female teachers express a desire to leave their profession.

Some aspects of colleagues' aggression may have a more negative impact on younger primary school teachers of Attica. During the practice of educational work, younger teachers feel anger or shame more easily when they are unfairly accused by their colleagues, and they believe that their colleagues do not support the teachers who have a conflict with the school principal. It is, therefore, important to further investigate the relationship between the age of teachers and the impact of aggression, as it will lead to safe conclusions that will allow the development of appropriate strategies for younger teachers' empowerment.

According to the findings of the research, some aspects of aggression may negatively influence primary school teachers of Attica who have less working experience. So, teachers with less working experience get more easily irritated when their principal tries to over-control their work and they are more easily affected by the psychological violence that the members of a teachers' association may display. Although the above conclusions need further investigation, it is easily understood that teachers with less working experience must be empowered to be able to deal with the aggression that is displayed on the school premises.

## VII. LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSITIONS

The main limitation of the research is the fact that it took place during a period of distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the teachers were more concerned about issues related to online learning and less about issues related to the face-to-face practice of educational work.

However, the findings of the research are of great importance, as they show that aggression among colleagues is present in Greek primary schools and concerns all teachers independently of their age, gender or working status. Also, the present study demonstrated that inter-colleague's aggression has a negative impact on educational work and affects the general learning process.

Taking into account the limitations and the findings of the research, it is concluded that it would be interesting to conduct larger-scale research at a national level (using probability sampling methods) to examine the opinion of teachers, while the school units are open, and the lessons are carried out traditionally. In addition, it would be interesting to carry out similar research on secondary school teachers as well as private teachers to get spherical knowledge of the issues under investigation.

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