

STANISŁAWA BYRA

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6095-279X>

DOROTA CHIMICZ

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9531-4376>

ANNA MARIA PASSASEO

University of Messina, Italy

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3190-7943>

MARIANO INDELICATO

University of Messina, Italy

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7709-0492>

PASSION AND WELLBEING AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATORS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF STRESS*

Introduction: The wellbeing of special educators is a key factor that influences the quality of their work and the effectiveness of the support provided to learners with special educational needs. One psychological resource that may promote wellbeing is passion, conceptualised in two forms: harmonious and obsessive. However, there is still a lack of research that would examine how passion relates to the wellbeing of special educators and which additional factors may shape this relationship.

Research Aim: The aim of the study was to determine the association between harmonious and obsessive passion and wellbeing among special educators, and to examine whether perceived occupational stress moderates these relationships.

Method: The study was conducted with the use of a crosssectional design and included 277 special educators working in mainstream and special schools. Data were collected using standardised instruments: the Psychological WellBeing Questionnaire, the Passion Scale, and the Perceived Occupational Stress Questionnaire. Associations between the variables were exam-

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ined through correlation analyses and moderation analyses (PROCESS macro, model 1).

Results: Correlational analyses showed that harmonious passion was significantly and positively associated with wellbeing among special educators, regardless of their workplace setting, whereas no significant correlations were found between obsessive passion and wellbeing. The moderation analysis revealed that occupational stress moderated the relationship between harmonious passion and wellbeing, but this effect occurred only among special educators working in mainstream schools. The positive association between harmonious passion and wellbeing was present only among individuals who reported low levels of perceived occupational stress.

Conclusions: The findings highlight the importance of fostering harmonious passion and reducing occupational stress to strengthen the psychological wellbeing of special educators, particularly those who work in mainstream educational settings.

Keywords: harmonious passion, obsessive passion, psychological wellbeing, perceived occupational stress, special educators

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, responding to learner diversity has become a major point of reference for educational practice, policy, and research. Across both mainstream and special school settings, schools are increasingly expected to respond to diverse developmental, cognitive, sensory, emotional, and behavioural needs. With this changing educational context, the role of special educators has gained particular significance, as their work is central to the provision of pedagogical, therapeutic, and relational support that enables pupils with diverse needs to participate meaningfully in educational life.

Within this context, the profession of special educators occupies a particularly demanding professional position. Their role encompasses instructional, therapeutic, counselling, and administrative responsibilities, as well as sustained collaboration with families and multidisciplinary teams (Hallaråker et al., 2025; Jortveit & Kovač, 2021; Plichta, 2014). In many educational settings, they also act as mediators, advocates, and facilitators of inclusion at the interface between education, health care, and social services (Anderson & Östlund, 2019; Cameron et al., 2024; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Johansson, 2021). These broader responsibilities are relevant here because they add to the relational, organisational, and role-related demands under which special educators work, and thus form part of the professional context in which passion, occupational stress, and psychological well-being are shaped.

The workplace context of special educators differs in ways that are directly relevant to how their role is organised and enacted. In mainstream schools, their work is typically embedded in heterogeneous classrooms and depends heavily on cooperation with general teachers, instructional adaptation, and the balancing of individual support with the demands of the entire class. These conditions may increase role ambiguity, time pressure, and dependence on collaborative arrangements (For-

lin, 2001; Haug, 2017; Mihajlovic, 2020; Takala et al., 2009). In special schools and other specialised settings, work is more continuously organised around pupils with intensive and ongoing support needs, which places greater emphasis on individualised instruction, behavioural support, close monitoring, and frequent pedagogical decision-making. At the same time, these settings are also associated with substantial extra responsibilities, workload pressures, and tensions between ideal and enacted role expectations (Bettini et al., 2019; O'Brien et al., 2019; Williams & Gersch, 2004). Comparative evidence suggests that the difference between mainstream and special schools may concern less the sheer amount of strain experienced than the configuration of stressors, resources, and supports through which work is organised. Time-related pressures appear more salient in mainstream settings, whereas resource-related pressures and the complexity of pupil needs are more prominent in specialised settings, which in some studies also offer stronger collegial support (Cappe et al., 2017; Otrębski, 2022; Williams & Gersch, 2004). For this reason, workplace setting is treated here as a professional context relevant to the interplay between occupational stress, personal resources, and psychological well-being.

Given the complexity of these professional demands, the question of psychological well-being becomes especially salient in understanding the functioning of special educators. In the present study, well-being is understood in eudaimonic rather than purely hedonic terms. Whereas hedonic approaches focus primarily on positive affect and life satisfaction, the eudaimonic perspective emphasises positive psychological functioning, development, and the realisation of human potential (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As Ryff and Keyes (1995) argued, such indicators as happiness and life satisfaction do not fully capture what it means to function well psychologically. Ryff's model of psychological well-being conceptualises well-being through six interrelated components: 1) *self-acceptance*, understood as a positive yet realistic attitude toward oneself, including awareness and acceptance of one's strengths and limitations; 2) *positive relations with others*, which refers to the capacity to build warm, trusting, and empathic relationships; 3) *autonomy*, expressed in self-determination, inner regulation, and the ability to act according to one's own values and judgement rather than external pressures; 4) *environmental mastery*, which reflects a sense of competence in managing everyday demands and navigating surrounding conditions effectively; 5) *purpose in life*, defined by having meaningful goals, a sense of direction, and a conviction that one's life is guided by valued aims; and 6) *personal growth*, which involves openness to new experiences, continued development, and the striving to realise one's potential (Ryff, 1989a, 1989b, 2014; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). This framework appears especially relevant in the case of special educators, whose professional functioning depends not only on emotional balance, but also on agency, meaning, relational competence, and the capacity to act effectively in complex educational settings.

Passion is a potentially important factor in explaining why some special educators remain engaged and psychologically sustained despite demanding pro-

fessional conditions. According to Vallerand's dualistic model, passion refers to a strong inclination toward an activity that individuals value, enjoy, and regard as important to their identity (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2012, 2015). The model distinguishes between harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion reflects a more autonomous and flexible form of internalisation, in which engagement in a valued activity remains integrated with other areas of life. Obsessive passion, by contrast, reflects a more controlled and pressured form of internalisation, in which the activity assumes a rigid and conflict-generating role. This distinction is important because passion is not uniformly beneficial. Meta-analytic and theory-driven work indicates that harmonious passion is more strongly linked to adaptive functioning and well-being, whereas obsessive passion is more often associated with tension, persistence under pressure, difficulties disengaging, and less favourable intrapersonal outcomes (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Curran et al., 2015; Fernet et al., 2014; Forest et al., 2011, 2012; Vallerand et al., 2024).

Findings from research on teachers support the relevance of this distinction in educational settings. Harmonious passion has been associated with greater work satisfaction and more adaptive professional functioning, whereas obsessive passion has been linked to less flexible involvement and a greater risk of maladaptive outcomes, particularly under taxing work conditions (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Fernet et al., 2014). For special educators, these dynamics may be especially consequential because the emotional and organisational demands of their work are often prolonged and cumulative. Existing research shows that limited resources, professional isolation, organisational strain, and demanding pupil needs are linked to stress, burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and intentions to leave the profession (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Herman et al., 2023; Park & Shin, 2020; Robinson et al., 2019). Conversely, supportive school conditions and stronger job resources appear to be associated with more sustainable professional functioning (Herman et al., 2023; Murangi et al., 2022; Sawatske et al., 2024).

Within this framework, perceived occupational stress is understood as a subjective appraisal of work-related strain arising from the relation between professional demands and the personal and contextual resources available to the educator (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This understanding is consistent with transactional approaches to stress, according to which stress does not reside solely in objective conditions but emerges when the person-environment relationship is appraised as taxing or as exceeding available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, 1987). It is also supported by research, which shows that special educators' stress is shaped not only by pupil needs, but also by school leadership, climate, workload, professional isolation, and broader working conditions (Herman et al., 2023; Jeon et al., 2021; Murangi et al., 2022). Because the present study assesses overall perceived occupational stress, it does not distinguish empirically between challenge-related and hindrance-related forms of stress. In

occupational stress research, challenge-related stressors are typically understood as demands that may be experienced as taxing but also as potentially conducive to growth, mastery, or achievement, whereas hindrance-related stressors are more likely to obstruct goal attainment and to be associated with strain and impaired functioning (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Horan et al., 2020; LePine et al., 2005). Rather, stress is treated as a global experienced condition of pressure and burden, and any reference to eustress or distress should therefore be understood as conceptual rather than directly tested in the present study.

This understanding of stress provides the rationale for the proposed model. In many studies, occupational stress is analysed as an explanatory or mediating mechanism that links broader antecedent conditions with psychological or work-related outcomes (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; LePine et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2019). Likewise, in research on passion, mediation models are frequently used to explain how contextual antecedents translate into work-related and psychological outcomes through harmonious or obsessive passion (Forest et al., 2012; Ho et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2022). In the present study, however, stress is conceptualised as a moderator. The question, therefore, is not only whether passion is associated with psychological well-being, but also whether this association changes under different levels of perceived occupational stress. This line of reasoning is also compatible with the Job Demands–Resources perspective, which assumes that occupational functioning depends on the balance and interaction between job demands and available resources, and that resources may become particularly important under conditions of high demand (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). From this perspective, perceived occupational stress may be treated as a boundary condition of the relationship between passion and psychological well-being. Harmonious passion may be expected to support positive functioning when professional demands remain manageable, whereas its beneficial role may weaken when strain becomes more pronounced. Conversely, obsessive passion may become especially consequential under conditions that intensify internal pressure and conflict (Curran et al., 2015; Vallerand, 2015). Conceptualising stress as a moderator thus makes it possible to examine more precisely the circumstances under which passion is linked to psychological well-being.

This contextual distinction also provides the basis for expecting that the relationships between passion, perceived occupational stress, and psychological well-being may not be uniform across special educators employed in mainstream and special schools. Harmonious passion may be more likely to support psychological well-being in contexts that offer clearer role expectations and stronger collegial support, whereas its beneficial role may be weaker under conditions of greater role ambiguity, coordination demands, or time pressure. Likewise, the moderating role of perceived occupational stress may vary across workplace settings because stress is embedded in context-specific constellations of demands, resources, and support

rather than functioning solely as an individual experience (Cappe et al., 2017; Mihajlovic, 2020; Otrębski, 2022; Sawatske et al., 2024; Williams & Gersch, 2004).

Although the literature on teacher passion, stress, and professional functioning has expanded considerably, most previous studies have focused on job satisfaction, burnout, engagement, or more general forms of subjective well-being. Far less attention has been devoted to psychological well-being understood in eudaimonic terms, particularly among special educators and in relation to the conditional role of occupational stress (Curran et al., 2015; Ryff, 2014; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Limited evidence is also available on whether these relationships differ between educators employed in mainstream and special schools (Cameron et al., 2024; Sawatske et al., 2024). In response to these gaps, the present study examines the associations between harmonious passion, obsessive passion, perceived occupational stress, and eudaimonic psychological well-being among special educators who work in both settings, while also examining whether workplace setting differentiates these associations.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

Previous findings suggest that the relationship between passion and well-being in special educators is complex and context dependent. Stress emerges as a pivotal factor that can either strengthen or weaken this connection and thus transform passion from a sustaining source of professional vitality into a pathway toward exhaustion and disengagement. Despite growing recognition of this interplay, empirical research that would examine the moderating role of stress in the passion–well-being relationship among special educators remains limited. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to examine how varying levels of stress influence the extent to which passion (harmonious or obsessive) predicts the psychological well-being of special educators, employment in special schools and mainstream schools.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses were tested in the study: H1: Harmonious passion is positively correlated with psychological well-being in special educators; H2: Obsessive passion is negatively correlated with psychological well-being in special educators; H3: Perceived occupational stress serves as a moderator of the relationship between harmonious and obsessive passion and psychological well-being in special educators. H4: The place of employment of special educators (special vs mainstream schools) significantly differentiates the relationship between passion and psychological well-being, as well as the moderating role of perceived occupational stress.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study sample consisted of special educators employed in both special schools and mainstream schools. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) formal education in the field of special pedagogy; and (b) employment as a special educator in either a special or mainstream school; c) having passion. Recruitment was conducted through contact with school principals, who were provided with a detailed description of the study's aims and procedures. Special educators who agreed to participate were informed about the anonymity of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage. Upon completion of the questionnaire set, responses were placed in sealed envelopes and submitted at a designated location within the school. Ultimately, the invitation to participate in the study was extended to 502 special education teachers employed in various schools across Poland, of whom 280 responded. Three sets of questionnaires were excluded due to substantial incompleteness of the data. The individuals included in the study met the criteria for having passion, as specified in the instrument used. The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for scientific research. The participants signed informed consent to take part in the study before completing the research instruments. These consent forms were stored separately from the research data and were subsequently anonymised by removing all personal identifiers.

The study was conducted from October 2025 to January 2026. Data were collected using three specific instruments. These were: the Passion Scale, The Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire, and The Perceived Occupational Stress Questionnaire. Sociodemographic data and information related to professional functioning were also collected.

The Passion Scale (PS) (Marsh et al., 2013; Polish adaptation by Mudło-Głagolska et al., 2019). PS is a 12-item instrument designed to assess two dimensions of passion: Harmonious Passion (HP) and Obsessive Passion (OP). Respondents rated each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Reliability indices in the present sample were satisfactory: HP – Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$; OP – Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$.

The Psychological Well-being Questionnaire Ryff (Polish adaptation by Karaś and Ciecuch, 2017). Its abbreviated version comprises 18 items, each rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The instrument yields six subscale scores: Autonomy (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$), Environmental Mastery (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$), Personal Growth (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$), Positive Relations with Others (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$), Purpose in Life (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$), and Self-Acceptance (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$). A total score provides a general index of psychological well-being, with higher scores reflecting greater levels of well-being. In the present sample, internal consistency was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$).

The Perceived Occupational Stress Questionnaire by Chirkowska-Smolak and Grobelny (2016) is a 10-item instrument designed to assess occupational stress as the perceived fit between the employee and their work environment. Respondents rate each item on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often), with reference to the past month. The total score reflects the overall intensity of perceived occupational stress, with higher scores indicating greater levels of stress. In the present sample, internal consistency was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

DATA ANALYSIS

The analyses were conducted in three stages. In the first stage, independent samples Student's *t*-tests were conducted to compare the levels of passion, psychological well-being, and perceived occupational stress between special educators employed in special schools and those working in mainstream schools. In the second stage, Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between passion, psychological well-being, and perceived occupational stress. In the third stage, moderation models were tested using the PROCESS macro for SPSS, with bootstrapping based on 5,000 subsamples. Specifically, the moderating role of perceived occupational stress in the relationship between passion and psychological well-being was assessed.

RESULTS

A total of 277 special educators participated in the study, including 148 (53.4%) employed in special schools and 129 (46.6%) working in mainstream schools. The sample was predominantly female ($n = 238$; 85.9%). The mean age of participants was 46.66 years ($SD = 8.34$). The majority resided in urban areas ($n = 213$; 76.9%). In terms of professional advancement, 27 participants (9.7%) were classified as novice teachers, 80 (28.9%) held appointed status, and 170 (61.4%) were chartered teachers. Most respondents were employed in public schools ($n = 262$; 94.6%). The average length of professional experience was 19.15 years ($SD = 10.22$).

Descriptive Statistics of the Analysed Variables

The variables included in the study: passion, psychological well-being, and perceived occupational stress, were analysed in relation to the place of employment (special vs mainstream schools) of special educators. Comparisons were conducted using independent samples Student's *t*-tests. The results indicate that psychological well-being does not differ significantly between special education teachers employed in special schools ($M = 76.00$) and those working in mainstream schools

[$M = 75.88$; $t(275) = 0.15$; $p = 0.442$]. Both special educators working in special schools and those employed in mainstream schools demonstrated higher levels of harmonious passion ($M = 27.87$ and $M = 29.22$, respectively) than obsessive passion ($M = 17.52$ and $M = 18.44$, respectively). No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups in the intensity of harmonious passion [$t(269) = -1.50$; $p = 0.134$] or obsessive passion [$t(274) = -1.47$; $p = 0.148$]. It is worth noting that when indicating the presence of passion, nearly all participants from both groups referred to such non-professional activities as reading, travelling, making music, engaging in sports or fitness, and self-development pursuits. Only a few responses mentioned passion for teaching or working with children and adolescents.

A statistically significant difference was found between the two groups of special educators in terms of perceived occupational stress. Educators employed in mainstream schools reported higher levels of perceived stress ($M = 26.12$) compared to those working in special schools [$M = 23.26$]; $t(275) = 3.75$; $p < .001$]. The difference was significant.

Correlation Analysis Between Variables

Table 1 below presents the correlation coefficients for both groups of participants. The correlation analysis revealed that harmonious passion was positively associated with psychological well-being and negatively associated with perceived occupational stress, both among special educators employed in special schools and those working in mainstream schools. However, the established relationships are relatively weak. No statistically significant correlations were found between obsessive passion and either psychological well-being or perceived occupational stress in either group.

Table 1

Correlations between passion (harmonious, obsessive), psychological well-being, and perceived occupational stress in special educators

	1	2	3	4
Educators employed in special schools				
1.Harmonious passion	-			
2. Obsessive passion	-0.24**	-		
3. Psychological well-being	0.25**	-0.11	-	
4.Perceived occupational stress	-0.18*	0.07	-0.31***	-
Educators employed in mainstream schools				
1.Harmonious passion	-			
2. Obsessive passion	-0.31***	-		
3. Psychological well-being	0.17*	-0.14	-	
4.Perceived occupational stress	-0.27**	-0.12	-0.24**	-

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$

Source: Authors' own study.

Because age and length of professional experience may influence levels of passion, occupational stress, and wellbeing, these variables were statistically controlled in the correlational analysis. The results indicated that, within the group of educators employed in special schools, no significant relationships were observed between these variables: age and: stress ($r = -0.001, p = 0.990$), harmonious passion ($r = 0.139, p = 0.101$), obsessive passion ($r = 0.093, p = 0.265$), and well-being ($r = 0.092, p = 0.270$); length of professional experience and: stress ($r = -0.140, p = 0.088$), harmonious passion ($r = 0.131, p = 0.081$), obsessive passion ($r = -0.075, p = 0.367$), and well-being ($r = 0.068, p = 0.411$). In contrast, within the group of educators employed in mainstream schools, one statistically significant (albeit weak) association was identified: age and: stress ($r = -0.137, p = 0.123$), harmonious passion ($r = -0.023, p = 0.771$), obsessive passion ($r = -0.003, p = 0.974$), and well-being ($r = -0.006, p = 0.946$); length of professional experience and: stress ($r = -0.183, p = 0.038$), harmonious passion ($r = -0.020, p = 0.823$), obsessive passion ($r = -0.119, p = 0.179$), and well-being ($r = 0.101, p = 0.253$). It was established that shorter professional experience was associated with higher levels of perceived stress in this group of special educators.

Moderation Analysis – Testing the Moderating Role of Perceived Occupational Stress in Relationships Between Passion and Well-being

To investigate whether perceived occupational stress moderated the relationship between passion and psychological well-being, a moderation analysis was performed. Moderation analyses were conducted separately for special educators employed in special schools and those working in mainstream schools. See Table 2 below for details.

The moderation analysis conducted among special educators employed in special schools indicated that perceived occupational stress did not moderate the relationship between harmonious passion and psychological well-being. In contrast, among special education teachers working in mainstream schools, perceived occupational stress significantly moderated this relationship ($\Delta R^2 = .04$; $F(3.122) = 12.74$; $p < .001$). Harmonious passion was positively associated with psychological well-being, but this effect was significant only among individuals who claim to experience low levels of perceived occupational stress ($B = .209$; $SE = .102$; $t = 3.11$; 95% CI [.021, .422]).

Table 2

Moderating effects of harmonious passion and perceived occupational stress on psychological well-being in special educators

	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Educators employed in special schools						
Model $R^2=.16$, $F(3.140) = 7,73$, $p<.001$						
Constant	77.059	7.1312	10.805	0.000	62.960	91.1579
Harmonious passion	0.232	0.260	0.892	0.374	-.2821	.7460
Perceived occupational stress	-2.955	0.300	-0.984	0.049	-.1121	-.0998
Harmonious passion x Perceived occupational stress	-0.011	0.012	-1.102	0.871	-.0234	.0211
Educators employed in mainstream schools						
Model $R^2=.26$, $F(3.122) = 6.91$, $p<.001$						
Constant	85.732	5.907	14.512	0.000	74.102	97.3641
Harmonious passion	0.208	0.523	3.290	0.000	-.3121	-.1038
Perceived occupational stress	-2.177	0.059	3.685	0.000	-.3334	-.1014
Harmonious passion x Perceived occupational stress	0.007	0.002	3.570	0.004	.0033	.0016

Source: Authors' own study

DISCUSSION

The objective of the present study was to investigate the association between passion and psychological well-being among special educators, differentiated by their workplace setting (special schools versus mainstream schools), while considering the moderating role of perceived occupational stress. The study, therefore, tested hypotheses concerning the relationship between harmonious and obsessive passion and psychological well-being in special educators employed in special schools and those who work in mainstream schools. It also examined whether the level of perceived occupational stress would play a significant role in determining the nature of this relationship. The results partially supported the proposed hypotheses.

As anticipated, the results revealed a positive association between harmonious passion and psychological well-being among special educators. It is important to emphasise that this positive correlation was found in both groups of special educators; however, the relationship was slightly stronger among those employed in special schools. Balanced engagement in a personally meaningful non-work activity, which integrates harmoniously with other daily responsibilities, was linked to higher levels of subjective well-being. These results are consistent with previous studies (Vallerand, 2012), including studies conducted among teachers (Moé, 2016)



and special educators (Hamama et al., 2013). Engaging in a personally meaningful and passionate non-professional activity that harmoniously integrates into the daily functioning of special educators may serve as a source of personal growth, joy, and satisfaction. Such involvement can function as a valuable resource for relieving emotional occupational strain and strengthening psychological resilience. Consequently, it may be associated with psychological well-being, expressed through self-acceptance, personal development, and a sense of fulfilment (Vallerand et al., 2024).

The results of our study indicated no statistically significant associations between obsessive passion and psychological well-being in either group of special educators. Therefore, the hypothesis that proposed a negative correlation between these variables was not supported. The obtained results are consistent with previous findings indicating that, in contrast to harmonious passion, obsessive passion does not contribute to predicting increased satisfaction among teachers (Carbonneau et al., 2008).

The study also examined whether the level of perceived occupational stress significantly moderates the relationship between harmonious passion and psychological well-being among special educators. The analyses revealed a differentiated pattern depending on the type of educational setting. Perceived occupational stress acted as a significant moderator only in the group of special educators employed in mainstream schools, whereas no such effect was observed among those working in special schools. This indicates that the strength of the association between harmonious passion and psychological well-being depends on the level of stress experienced in the workplace, but only within a specific subgroup. In mainstream schools, harmonious passion was positively related to psychological well-being exclusively among individuals who reported low levels of perceived occupational stress, suggesting that high occupational stress may suppress or neutralise the positive psychological mechanisms typically associated with harmonious passion. In contrast, among educators working in special schools, the relationship between harmonious passion and psychological well-being remained stable regardless of the level of perceived stress, indicating that stress did not function as a moderator in this subgroup. This may suggest the presence of different contextual or organisational factors that buffer the impact of stress or shape the role of passion differently in this environment. Consequently, occupational stress was found to play a moderating role only among educators employed in mainstream schools.

The final hypothesis examined the significance of the workplace setting of special education teachers (i.e., special schools versus mainstream schools). It was assumed that differences in roles, responsibilities, daily professional activities, and educational context might translate into differences in engagement in passionate activities, psychological well-being, and the perception of occupational stress (Sawatske et al., 2024). Interestingly, the differences between special educators working in special schools and those employed in mainstream schools emerged only

in the level of perceived occupational stress. No statistically significant differences were found in terms of passion or psychological well-being. Moreover, special educators employed in mainstream schools reported significantly higher levels of perceived occupational stress.

The correlational analyses controlled for participants' age and length of professional experience, and the results showed that these variables did not account for the associations among the key constructs. Across both groups of educators, no meaningful relationships emerged, with the exception of one weak association observed in mainstream schools, where shorter professional experience was linked to higher perceived stress. Overall, age and tenure did not influence the pattern of correlations obtained in the study.

In summary, this research highlights the important role of passion in shaping the eudaimonic well-being of special educators. Although the concept of passion has been widely examined across various professional and personal domains, it has not previously been explored within this specific population. The findings indicate that harmonious passion, in particular, plays a decisive role in fostering educators' eudaimonic well-being. This aligns with the conclusions of Paquette and Vallerand (2026), who emphasise that harmonious passion is associated with a service-oriented mindset, whereas obsessive passion is linked to a self-serving orientation. Given that serving others is a defining characteristic of the work of special educators, this distinction is especially relevant. Paquette and Vallerand's research further shows that a service orientation positively predicts personal adaptive and organisational outcomes, while a self-serving orientation is associated with counterproductive organisational behaviours and limited personal adaptive outcomes.

It should be emphasised, however, that obsessive passion at work does not play a major role in undermining well-being. In some cases, it may even help individuals adapt to work demands and resources, thereby reducing psychological and organisational distress (Fernet et al., 2025). Moreover, both harmonious and obsessive passion contribute to well-being, as each influences basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2010), satisfaction of which supports eudaimonic well-being and the individual's pursuit of self-realisation.

Although the results of the present study indicate a positive and significant correlation between eudaimonic well-being and harmonious passion, they do not reveal negative associations between obsessive passion and well-being. This pattern suggests that, within this professional group, the potentially maladaptive aspects of obsessive passion may be less pronounced or may not manifest in the same way as in other occupational contexts. These findings gain particular relevance when considered in light of the career motivations typical of special educators, whose professional choices are strongly oriented toward helping others and responding to the needs of vulnerable populations. Prosociality identified in numerous studies as a central component of psychological well-being appears to be deeply embedded in the professional identity

of special educators. Their work is grounded in values such as empathy, commitment, and a sense of responsibility for the development and functioning of their students (Irvan et al., 2024). Such value-driven engagement may act as a protective factor, thus reinforcing the positive effects of harmonious passion while simultaneously buffering against the potential risks associated with obsessive passion. In this context, passion may be more strongly integrated with a sense of purpose and meaning, which aligns closely with the eudaimonic dimension of well-being.

The literature offers important contributions on prosociality, career choice, and their relationship with well-being. For instance, using Social Value Orientation (SVO), Murphy and Ackermann (2014) argue that individuals' decisions are shaped by the extent to which their motivations are intertwined with concern for others. Similarly, Falk and Graeber (2020), through the "saving a life" paradigm, show (consistently with the findings of the present study) that prosocial behaviours do not develop universally but depend on the individual's relationship with the context in which they operate. In the case of special educators, the mere presence of pupils with special needs appears to be a sufficient source of motivation, regardless of whether they work in special or mainstream schools.

As in the previously mentioned studies, the present research identifies a positive and significant correlation between eudaimonic well-being and harmonious passion. However, it does not reveal negative correlations between obsessive passion and well-being. Further, other studies have demonstrated significant associations between personal motivational factors (such as passion, self-efficacy, and mindset) and indicators of eudaimonic well-being (including meaning in life, psychological well-being, and positive affect; see Sigmundsson et al., 2025).

In the context of teaching, it has also been shown that stress arising from emotional strain can activate the motivation to reshape one's professional identity by fostering more sustainable and health-promoting approaches to work. Eudaimonic well-being plays a functional role in this transformative professional learning, enabling teachers to process trauma and thereby supporting self-preservation (Chiu & Fleming, 2025). This helps explain why perceived occupational stress acts in the present study as a moderating factor only among special educators who work in mainstream schools. It is in these settings that disability poses greater challenges, requiring not only intensive work with pupils but also complex interactions with curricular teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results obtained, the following conclusions can be formulated: harmonious passion emerged as a significant predictor of wellbeing among special educators, irrespective of workplace setting. In contrast, obsessive passion showed

no association with wellbeing, indicating that it does not operate as a detrimental factor within this professional group. Furthermore, perceived occupational stress moderated the relationship between harmonious passion and wellbeing only among educators who work in mainstream schools, where higher stress levels appear to constrain the benefits of harmonious passion. Special educators in mainstream settings also reported significantly higher levels of stress than those employed in special schools, although no differences were observed in levels of passion or wellbeing. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of fostering harmonious passion and reducing occupational stress – particularly within mainstream educational environments – to promote the wellbeing of special educators.

LIMITATIONS

Despite the valuable and insightful findings generated by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample of special educators was heterogeneous in certain respects, with an over-representation of teachers working in urban areas and in public schools. Second, the inclusion criteria did not account for the length of experience in working with pupils with special educational needs, which may have influenced the intensity of perceived occupational stress. Third, the relatively small proportion of explained variance in eudaimonic well-being suggests that other important variables, not included in the present study, may play a significant role. Given these research findings, it would be desirable for future studies to examine the extent to which special educators display a eudaimonic personality and, consequently, how their work may be shaped by proactive coping, basic psychological needs, flow, and mindfulness in creating transformative learning contexts. Finally, the cross-sectional design constitutes a constraint, as it precludes the examination of temporal dynamics and thus prevents establishing whether passion influences well-being or whether higher levels of well-being may, in turn, foster the development of passion.

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PASJA I DOBROSTAN U PEDAGOGÓW SPECJALNYCH: MODERUJĄCA ROLA STRESU

Wprowadzenie: Dobrostan pedagogów specjalnych stanowi kluczowy czynnik wpływający na jakość ich pracy oraz efektywność wsparcia udzielanego uczniom ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi. Jednym z psychologicznych zasobów mogących sprzyjać dobrostanowi jest pasja, ujmowana w dwóch formach: pasji harmonijnej i obsesyjnej. Wciąż jednak brakuje badań wyjaśniających, w jaki sposób pasja wiąże się z dobrostanem pedagogów specjalnych oraz jakie czynniki mogą dodatkowo oddziaływać na tę relację.

Cel badań: Określenie związku między pasją harmonijną i obsesyjną a dobrostanem u pedagogów specjalnych oraz sprawdzenie, czy postrzegany stres zawodowy pełni funkcję moderatora tych zależności.

Metoda badań: Badanie zrealizowano w schemacie przekrojowym, obejmując 277 pedagogów specjalnych pracujących w szkołach ogólnodostępnych i specjalnych. Dane zebrano za pomocą standaryzowanych narzędzi: Kwestionariusza Dobrostanu Psychologicznego, Skali Pasji oraz Kwestionariusza Postrzeganego Stresu Zawodowego. Zależności między zmiennymi analizowano z wykorzystaniem korelacji oraz analiz moderacji (makro PROCESS, model 1).

Wyniki : Analizy korelacyjne wykazały, że pasja harmonijna była istotnie i pozytywnie związana z dobrostanem u pedagogów specjalnych (niezależnie od ich miejsca pracy), istotnych korelacji nie stwierdzono natomiast między pasją obsesyjną a dobrostanem. Analiza moderacji ujawniła, że stres zawodowy moderował związek między pasją harmonijną a dobrostanem, lecz efekt ten wystąpił wyłącznie w grupie pedagogów specjalnych pracujących w szkołach ogólnodostępnych. W tej grupie badanych pozytywna relacja między pasją harmonijną a psychologicznym dobrostanem utrzymywała się jedynie u osób z niskim poziomem postrzeganego stresu zawodowego.

Wnioski: Wyniki ujawniają znaczenie wspierania pasji harmonijnej oraz redukcji stresu zawodowego w celu wzmacniania psychologicznego dobrostanu u pedagogów specjalnych, szczególnie pracujących w szkołach ogólnodostępnych.

Słowa kluczowe: pasja (harmonijna, obsesyjna), psychologiczny dobrostan, postrzegany stres zawodowy, pedagodzy specjali