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Preschool Teachers' Job Satisfaction

POVZETEK – Ključna vloga vzgojitelja se nanaša na njegove poklicne in osebne kompetence, ki jih vsakodnevno uporablja v praksi. Kot odziv učitelja na posamezne vidike njegovega dela se pojavi zadovoljstvo z delom, ki ima lahko pozitiven ali negativen predznak, odvisno od učiteljeve ocene. Cilj raziskave je vpogled v percepcijo delovne vloge in zadovoljstvo z delom vzgojiteljev v vrtcih. V raziskavi je sodelovalo 536 vzgojiteljev, dve vprašanji odprtega tipa pa sta bili sestavni del anketnega vprašalnika, v katerem so morali našteti tri izkušnje pri delu, s katerimi so bili najbolj zadovoljni, in tri, s katerimi so bili najmanj zadovoljni. Rezultati, pridobljeni z metodo kvalitativne analize, kažejo, da vzgojitelji kot glavne vire zadovoljstva pri svojem delu navajajo neposredno delo z otroki, uspeh in napredek otrok ter odnose z drugimi vzgojitelji, strokovnimi sodelavci in starši. Največji viri nezadovoljstva vzgojiteljev so povezani z neprimernimi delovnimi pogoji in slabim položajem v družbi ter odnosom družbe do poklica vzgojitelja. Dobljeni rezultati so prispevek k profesionalnemu razvoju vzgojiteljev z namenom izboljšanja kakovosti njihovega dela in osebnega razvoja.

ABSTRACT – The key role of preschool teachers relates to using their professional and personal competencies in daily practice. Depending on the teachers' assessment, their job satisfaction reflects either a positive or a negative response to specific aspects of teaching. This research aims to provide insight into preschool teachers' perception of their job role and job satisfaction. A total of 536 teachers participated in the survey and answered two open-ended questions in which they were asked to list three of the most and least satisfying experiences at work. The results obtained by the method of qualitative analysis have shown that preschool teachers see the main sources of job satisfaction in their direct work with children, in the success and progress of children, and in their relations with fellow teachers, expert staff and parents. The biggest sources of dissatisfaction include inadequate working conditions, low status in society, and the attitude of society toward the teaching profession. The results obtained contribute to the professional development of preschool teachers with the aim of improving their work quality and personal development.

1 Introduction

The fundamental role of early childhood and preschool education is to create optimal conditions that will enable the quality development of preschool-age children. According to the 2030 Agenda, every boy and girl must enjoy access to high-quality preschool education, and the preschool teacher is a decisive factor in the educational process. The teacher's key role relates to using their professional and personal competencies in daily practice, thus creating a dynamic pedagogical process. Moreover, critical attitudes toward educational practice and continuous reflection and learning provide teachers with space for their professional growth and development (Maksimović and Osmanović, 2018). In this respect, job satisfaction presents the teachers' response to specific job aspects and can be either positive or negative depending on the teachers'

assessment of their job and the institution's management. In other words, job satisfaction refers to how an individual feels at work and how the heads of the organization meet the needs of their employees (Slišković et al., 2016). The principals of educational institutions that focus on job satisfaction will foster a supportive environment as they understand that this can affect the institutional culture (Starc, 2015). Neutrality does not go along with professional engagement. As some authors claim (Čotar Konrad and Kukanja Gabrijelčič, 2014; Erdamar and Demirel, 2016), teaching implies an emotional context because the participants are emotionally involved in mutual relations. Teachers' positive work attitude and enthusiasm are reflected in their work with children, colleagues and parents. It has been shown that a job which creates a sense of pleasure, enjoyment or satisfaction motivates preschool teachers to enjoy working and look forward to coming to work, which consequently affects the quality of their educational work (Kafetsios and Zampetakis, 2008; Tatalović Vorkapić and Jelić Puhalo, 2016; Tatalović Vorkapić and Lončarić, 2013).

A comparison of the available literature on the job satisfaction of professionals who work with children has shown that much research has been done on class teachers, while preschool teachers have been involved to a lesser extent. Factors that have been shown to increase job satisfaction include positive relationships with children, interaction with fellow employees, a competitive salary, job security, the organizational environment, a positive atmosphere, and connection, cooperation and collegiality (Bhamani, 2012; Lambert et al., 2016; Tatalović Vorkapić and Jelić Puhalo, 2016). Maforah (2015) adds the factors of working conditions and preschool teachers' autonomy. The absence of these components creates an environment that can cause stress, which has also been confirmed by the research conducted by Dolenc and Virag (2019). However, whenever the mentioned components are fulfilled, preschool teachers' job satisfaction increases, which contributes to the well-being of the entire staff of the educational institution, to the overall cohesion, and to the improvement of the status of the preschool teachers' profession. In addition to teacher turnover, examining teacher job satisfaction can reveal different benefits or problems they have at work, which is why the paper focuses on the perspective of preschool teachers.

Job satisfaction is a multidimensional concept and different researchers have defined it in different ways. Wang, Lin and Liang (2017) claim that job satisfaction originates from the teachers' comparison of job expectations with real results, and implies teachers' reactions to work. According to some authors (e.g., Kafetsios and Zampetakis, 2008; Tabancali, 2016), job satisfaction reflects an individual's overall assessment of where they work and of their job as a whole. Another way of describing job satisfaction relates to the teacher's feelings about the job or about how their needs are met in the workplace. The teacher shows either positive or negative feelings toward the job, and those feelings may be somewhat independent. Research has shown that teachers have a high level of energy and enthusiasm, focus and work engagement, which speaks in favor of a positive affective state (e.g., Erdamar and Demirel, 2016; Kafetsios and Zampetakis, 2008). On the contrary, negative feelings are characterized by repulsion or dislike for the workplace, where various negative emotions can occur (Kafetsios and Zampetakis, 2008). Sources of preschool teachers' dissatisfaction related to job responsibilities, i.e., increasing the workload, were also recognized. Some of the consequences of job dissatisfaction are withdrawal and lack of productivity, which lead to changes in

the workplace as a whole (Grant et al., 2019; Spector, 1997). More recent studies (e.g., Grant et al., 2019; Tatalović Vorkapić and Jelić Puhalo, 2016) indicate a correlation between the mental health of early childhood and preschool teachers, their job satisfaction, and the quality of their interaction with children.

Generally, when job satisfaction reflects an opinion about work and its various aspects, it refers to the degree to which a person likes (satisfaction) or dislikes (dissatisfaction) their job. Job satisfaction can be considered a global feeling about the job or a related constellation of attitudes about different job aspects.

In addition to the individual's attitude, job satisfaction also has a component of expectation. Teachers reflect on their experiences at work, and work assignments are closely related to their individual job expectations. Spector (1997) mentions several main reasons for job satisfaction, primarily treating employees with respect and fairness, thus creating a positive attitude and a sense of well-being. This relates to the approach that the heads of the organization take toward employees as this affects the organization's operations, either positively or negatively. Employees' feedback on job satisfaction is also considered important because it helps identify the areas requiring improvement. Furthermore, the principals of educational institutions need to know the effects of job satisfaction to avoid the factors that can affect the institutional culture and lead to low productivity and a high staff turnover rate. Stressful requirements, poor working conditions and a lack of professional recognition can be predictors of job dissatisfaction and turnover rates (Farewell et al., 2022; Torquati et al., 2007).

Finally, it should be pointed out that the job satisfaction of employees in educational institutions is crucial for the long-term growth and development of any educational system in the world (Bhamani, 2012) and requires the support and attention of society, researchers and educational policy makers (Lambert et al., 2016). However, most research in this area is much more focused on various other institutions and the business world, while few studies cover the field of early childhood and preschool education and care (Grant et al., 2019), which is an important reason for addressing this issue in the paper.

Based on what has been presented in the paper, we start from the definition of job satisfaction (Evans, 1997, p. 328), which recognizes the two main components of job comfort (how (un)satisfying the conditions and circumstances at work are for the individual) and job fulfillment (the level of an individual's (dis)satisfaction with personal achievements within significant job aspects) and includes "a state of mind determined by the extent to which the individual perceives his/her job-related needs to be met".

2 Research methodology

Research aim and questions

This research is part of a larger study aimed at examining some of the characteristics of the job of preschool teachers. The main goal of this research is to complement and deepen the results of the quantitative part of the study by analyzing teachers' experiences (experienced situations) related to their job satisfaction. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the theoretical framework within which the qualitative part of the

study was designed is based on some aspects of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction and job meaningfulness are considered key prerequisites for making decisions about leaving or keeping a job, and different experiences and situations at work generally play a significant role in the life of the professional. Namely, the experience of job satisfaction generates life satisfaction and can result in better productivity and creativity (Keleş and Findikli, 2016; Slišković et al., 2016). In this context, the *aim* of this research is to gain an insight into the perception of teachers' job satisfaction in their daily work in preschool institutions. In line with the aim and the theoretical framework, two *research questions* were formulated in the paper:

☐ What are the aspects of preschool teachers' job satisfaction in their direct educational practice with children?
☐ What are the aspects of preschool teachers' job satisfaction in their relations with fellow teachers, expert staff, principals and parents?

Participants

A total of 536 preschool teachers participated in the survey. As for their work experience in preschool institutions, the majority have up to five years of service (39.9 %), followed by 5 to 15 years (28.7 %), 16 to 25 years (18.2 %), while the percentage of teachers with 26 and more years of service is the lowest (13 %). As for their professional qualifications, the majority of teachers have a college degree (73.13 %), followed by those with a university degree (23.70 %), while 2.42 % of teachers finished secondary education.

Research instrument and the way of conducting research

The survey was conducted in 2021/2022 in an online environment (via Google Forms) and its participants were teachers working in preschool institutions in the city of Zagreb and Zagreb County. For the purpose of conducting this survey, two open-ended questions were formulated, in which teachers were asked to list three of the most and least satisfying experiences/situations at work.

Research methods

Since teachers were asked to list three of the most and least satisfying experiences/situations at work, their answers to the two open-ended questions were analyzed using the method of qualitative analysis. The collected data were analyzed as follows: the units of analysis consisted of all answers about the highest satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In this way, two units of analysis were created, containing the responses of individual research participants (or parts of the responses) defined as coding units. Initial codes representing the first level of data abstraction were attached to the coding units. After initial coding, all codes were revised and classified into parent categories according to the similarity in meaning. In further analysis, the original categories were revised and grouped according to similarity. Some categories were reduced, i.e., analytically merged with other categories, or expanded, i.e., subcategories were created. This process depended on the data quantity and quality, which means concrete, clear and broader descriptions in participants' answers. This was followed by a revision of the categories, and their merging and organizing into themes.

3 Results and discussion

Data analysis was approached thematically. In accordance with the defined research questions, the analysis of the research results included two content and thematic units related to teachers' job satisfaction through their most and least satisfying experiences and situations at work:

- □ in their direct educational work with children and
- □ in their relations with fellow teachers, expert staff, principals and parents.

To demonstrate the representation of the same elements of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, the above data can be observed with respect to their mutual relations. Therefore, they were elaborated and presented through the following themes and their corresponding sub-themes:

□ Theme 1: *Preschool teachers' job satisfaction related to children*
- □ Sub-theme 1.1: S*atisfaction with their work and relationship with children, satisfaction with children's activity and interest;*
- □ Sub-theme 1.2: *Feeling their own success through the child's progress.*

□ Theme 2: *Preschool teachers' job satisfaction related to cooperation with other teachers, expert staff and parents*
- □ Sub-theme 2.1: *Positive feedback;*
- □ Sub-theme 2.2: *Challenges in relationships;*
- □ Sub-theme 2.3: *A sense of personal fulfillment at work;*
- □ Sub-theme 2.4: *A desire for continuous learning and professional development.*

Preschool teachers' job satisfaction related to children

When addressing the work situations and experiences they are most satisfied with, teachers mostly describe working with children, more specifically activities with children, relationships with children, certain characteristics of children's behavior and children's progress, which are all interconnected elements. An analysis of participants' answers shows they find satisfaction in working with children which includes mutual warm emotions. These are some examples: "*I am pleased when my children show me love and trust...*"; "*My heart is completely filled with joy when it comes to children and anything related to children and creativity.*"; "*Children's hugs when I come to work...*"; "*When a child welcomes me with open arms and a smile on their face.*". Furthermore, when it comes to the child's active behavior as one of the important sources of satisfaction, teachers mention the child's natural desire to participate in joint play and learning, as well as their willingness to engage and accept the planned suggestions and activities, but also the importance of children's ideas ("*Their ideas impress me every time; sometimes when preparing the material we imagine the situation might work in one way, but then the children take us into a completely new, different direction.*"). In addition to the natural motivation of children to participate in activities, teachers point out other positive characteristics such as the child's curiosity, openness, cheerfulness and desire to explore and learn ("*Children's openness, smiles, the wonder in their eyes.*"). The majority of teachers' answers show that children are the most important factor of their job

satisfaction, yet certain characteristics of children's behavior represent possible sources of dissatisfaction. For example, teachers highlight some children's lack of cooperation and interest in activities in the educational group: "*There are problems with aggressive and disinterested children.*"; "*... and an increasing number of hyperactive children who fail to concentrate on the activity.*".

A great source of job satisfaction is also the teachers' feeling of success through the children's progress and the direct recognition of the children's implementation and realization of anything related to the educational process ("*When I see children developing and progressing before my eyes.*"; "*I am happy with the results of my personal engagement and work with a child with special needs.*"; "*When I feel that I am "the wind at the children's backs" and their support in things they find difficult to do, and when I see that they have made progress.*"; "*When a child told me "you have taught me this".*"). The analysis of teachers' answers shows that their satisfaction is conditioned by the fact that they can help children, which reflects the teachers' motivation and desire to contribute to early childhood education and care and the child's overall well-being. Concerning their (lack of) success in working with children, teachers mention the complexity of working with certain children and inadequate working conditions ("*Having too many children in the group makes it harder to approach the child individually, which makes it difficult to work.*"; "*I feel dissatisfied when I cannot provide each child with as much as I should.*"; "*Obsolete principles of work, not much or almost nothing has been digitized – tedious and boring administration and red tape, so I cannot devote myself to the children as much as I would like.*"). In the context of concerns related to working with children, teachers emphasize possible children's injuries ("*When a child is at risk, or injuries, accidents, conflicts are the hardest for me, because I am responsible, and I feel the worst in such situations.*"). It is interesting that when offering these answers, teachers also indicate possible solutions, such as reducing the number of children in educational groups and having more than two teachers working in the same shift, thus highlighting their own satisfaction and individualized approach, as well as the safety of children and meeting their basic existential and psychological needs.

Preschool teachers' job satisfaction related to cooperation
with fellow teachers, expert staff and parents

When it comes to job satisfaction related to colleagues, the participants primarily emphasize collegial and friendly relations at work. Furthermore, their answers show they value cooperation and support received from fellow teachers, but also from the expert staff and the principal ("*I am also satisfied with the professional support and friendliness of the expert team, my fellow teachers, and the positive and professional working atmosphere in the kindergarten where I work.*"). They stress the importance of collegiality, teamwork, a motivating working atmosphere, as well as good overall interpersonal relationships ("*I can discuss anything with my work colleagues, exchange experiences. Teachers have established successful cooperation with the principal and the expert staff.*"; "*I am very pleased when we cooperate as a team.*"; "*Support of the expert staff, a supportive and positive relationship in the team.*"; "*Teamwork in the relationship with my colleagues.*"). In particular, teachers express their satisfaction with the positive feedback they receive from other stakeholders in education. They are pleased when their peers show them appreciation and accept their ideas, and when they are en-

gaged and active ("*I am satisfied when I have a colleague who is open to cooperation, who is on a similar "level" and is willing to work and exchange information...*"; "*I am satisfied when my suggestions on working arrangements are appreciated, praised or met with a positive and constructive criticism, with an emphasis on cooperation.*"). On the other hand, teachers' job dissatisfaction originates from poor relations in the work team, i.e., with fellow teachers, expert staff and the principal. When it comes to dissatisfaction with the support of superiors, participants mention the principal's lack of understanding and lack of support in some initiatives, emphasizing excessive control and distrust or disrespect ("*When the principal does not appreciate what we do; we want to educate ourselves, and they make it impossible.*"; "*The pressure coming from the principal that sometimes makes me feel scared and anxious.*"). In this regard, teachers also see a source of dissatisfaction in the lack of support of the expert staff, and to some extent they resent the expert staff for approaching them from the position of superiors ("*When the expert team acts as a hierarchical superior and as superior experts, instead of co-experts.*"). Teachers lack concrete assistance and support coming from the expert staff in problem situations, an appreciation of teachers and their competencies, and a general understanding of their work ("*When the expert staff act as if we teachers are not professionals but less educated staff.*"). Dissatisfaction also comes from the expert staff's criticism and direct control over their work ("*I am not satisfied with the relationship between the expert team and teachers. They should offer assistance and support, not supervision.*").

In the context of job satisfaction and cooperation with the stakeholders in education, most teachers highlight the importance of their partnership with parents. An analysis of teachers' answers has shown that positive parental feedback on teachers' work is related to job satisfaction ("*I am happy to see that parents are satisfied and tell us that the child feels comfortable in kindergarten.*"; "*I care about information from parents when they express satisfaction with the child's happiness and joy in attending kindergarten.*"). Furthermore, teachers feel satisfied when they can help parents raise their children, offering them their knowledge and advice. Teachers feel that parents have confidence in them, which in turn creates a partnership with the parents ("*I am most satisfied when I achieve a partnership with parents, when we work together for the benefit of the child, and when we succeed.*"). Furthermore, it is always a pleasure for teachers when they receive direct support and positive feedback from parents and members of the expert team, which gives them the feeling that they are recognized as experts and competent professionals ("*When I am perceived as competent and educated by parents and the expert team.*"; "*I am satisfied when my suggestions at parent-teacher conferences are met with appreciation, praise, or a positive and constructive criticism with an emphasis on partnership. And when the parents respect me as a teacher and as a person.*"). On the other hand, teachers point out certain dissatisfaction that generally comes from poor relations with parents, i.e., possible obstacles and misunderstandings in communication that make cooperation difficult. Kindergarten is a community with its own culture, peculiarities, rules, and certain professional features. Teachers are dissatisfied when parents do not refer to them as professionals ("*When they call me "nanny", I personally consider this a sign of disrespect.*"; "*We are considered babysitters, and kindergarten a place that provides childcare while parents are at work.*"). In addition, teachers emphasize that some parents sometimes do not take their professional opinion

and suggestions seriously ("*It is easier for parents to find an answer on the internet where all sorts of things are available, and they take this information for granted.*"). According to teachers' answers, it is evident that they are dissatisfied with parents' unrealistic expectations and excessive demands, their lack of cooperation that implies a lack of interest on the part of some parents, and with the difficulties in communication ("*They do not have time, they are constantly in a hurry; after kindergarten they take children to after-care programs.*"). When addressing difficulties in communication with parents, teachers warn of their wrong parenting styles ("*Parents are becoming increasingly "worse" – an extremely permissive parenting style.*"; "*Parents are overindulging their children; the children do not want to go home unless the parents buy what they have promised.*"). Teachers also suggest organizing a number of quality lectures and workshops conducted by teachers or members of the expert team, so that parents can find new ways of fulfilling their parental responsibilities for the well-being of the child and their own parental satisfaction. It can be concluded that the teachers who participated in this survey appreciate it very much when their work is publicly recognized and considered valuable, and when they are praised for their success at work.

A part of the participants' satisfaction was also generated and described through their sense of personal fulfillment, achievement, professional progress and satisfaction ("*Putting aside some bad situations, some problematic parents, colleagues, associates... I just can't imagine doing anything else. At work, I feel that I am fulfilling my mission in this earthly world.*"). The teachers are delighted with the progress in their work, which is mostly reflected in the progress of children, but also in the progress of trainee teachers ("*When I feel and see the motivation of students and trainees after working in our kindergarten.*"). In the context of personal fulfillment and achievement, it should be stressed that when teachers talk about their success at work, they are mostly referring to the development and progress of children, which supports the earlier categories of answers indicating that one of the key elements of their satisfaction lies in the progress of children ("*When I design incentives, form a new center, or supplement the existing one with new materials, and the children explore and use the materials with excitement and great curiosity, in accordance with their logic.*"). As already mentioned, it is important for teachers to see and notice the results of their work; to feel personal satisfaction with their work (level of personal achievement and internal motivation), but also to receive recognition from others (parents, expert staff, principals and the wider community). In addition to the above elements, the teachers see a source of their satisfaction also in some of their personal traits and professional qualities, such as creativity, resourcefulness, openness, responsibility and a desire for constant learning and personal development ("*I am satisfied with the symbolic creative process, the quality documentation of the process, and with how the space has been adapted to the needs of children and adults.*"; "*Opportunities for innovation, imagination and creativity at work.*"; "*Professional and personal growth and development through everyday situations with children at work.*"; "*When I educate myself about something new and have the option of continuous education.*").

4 Conclusion

This research aimed to gain an insight into the perception of preschool teachers' job satisfaction in their daily practice in preschool institutions. The first research question focused on determining teachers' job satisfaction in their direct educational work with children. The obtained results have shown that teachers see the main sources of satisfaction in the direct work with children; in the children's success and progress; in the children's interest and desire to participate in activities; in their successful mastery of educational content; in the positive emotional relationship with children; and in happy and satisfied children. The biggest sources of dissatisfaction, according to this research, include inadequate working conditions that relate to having too many children in educational groups, which makes it difficult to approach each child individually and thus provide better professional assistance and support to the more demanding children in educational terms. This is followed by the low status of teachers in society and the attitude of society (and superiors) toward the teaching profession.

As for the second research question, which relates to job satisfaction in relations with fellow teachers, expert staff, principals and parents, the results show that teachers most value supportive and collaborative relationships. In the context of satisfaction, they emphasize the importance of receiving recognition for their work and contribution from parents, expert staff, principals and the wider community. When talking about dissatisfaction, they point out the lack of interest on the part of some parents and permissive parenting styles, which makes communication with parents difficult. Consequently, they emphasize the importance of receiving support and education. Furthermore, teachers mention the lack of support of expert staff as a source of dissatisfaction; they resent the expert staff for approaching them from the position of superiors. In addition to these elements, teachers also see a source of satisfaction in their personal traits and professional qualities, such as creativity, resourcefulness, openness, responsibility and a desire for constant learning and personal development.

According to the available data, in Croatia and worldwide, there is a lack of research on the satisfaction of preschool teachers conducted using the qualitative methodology used in this paper. Therefore, the results of this research have theoretical and practical implications. Principally, the research results are an incentive for gaining a deeper understanding of the possibility of improving initial teacher education, teachers' employment and professional development, and thus improve the quality of preschool teachers' life and work.

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Zadovoljstvo pri delu z vidika vzgojiteljev

Odnos zaposlenih do dela se odraža v njihovem zadovoljstvu z delom, pri čemer velja, da so to občutki, ki jih imajo zaposleni o svojem delu ali določenih vidikih dela (Spector, 1997) oziroma o tem, v kolikšni meri so zadovoljni ali nezadovoljni s svojim delom (Grant idr., 2019). S tem želimo poudariti, da je zadovoljstvo pri delu pogojeno s

tem, kakšen odnos ima oseba do dela, kakšna so njena pričakovanja ter kako in koliko želi pri delu doseči. Pregled literature kaže, da enotne definicije zadovoljstva pri delu ni. Gre za kompleksen konstrukt, ki ga različni avtorji v znanosti različno opredeljujejo. Obstaja več dejavnikov, ki lahko vplivajo na stopnjo zadovoljstva pri delu. Ilyas in Abdullah (2016) poudarjata, da zadovoljstvo pri delu vključuje sledeče elemente: uspešno sodelovanje s sodelavci, naloge, vodenje, organizacijsko strukturo in delovne pogoje. Nadalje se je v eni izmed izvedenih raziskav izkazalo, da povečanje zadovoljstva pri delu pogojuje številne interakcije z otroki, sodelovanje in kolegialnost z drugimi zaposlenimi, varnost zaposlitve ter splošno organizacijsko okolje in pozitivno vzdušje (Edwards in Peccei, 2007).

Delo vzgojitelja velja za izredno občutljivo, zahtevno in odgovorno, pogosto zahteva intenziven fizični in psihični napor. Raziskava avtorjev Pavlović in Sindik (2014) kaže, da viri stresa za vzgojitelje niso neposredno povezani z njihovo primarno vlogo vzgojitelja oziroma z neposrednim delom z otroki, pač pa so to medčloveški odnosi, sodelovanje s starši, administrativna opravila in nasploh slab status vzgojiteljskega poklica v hrvaški družbi. Stres vzgojiteljev je povezan z delovno obremenitvijo, konflikti med sodelavci, slabimi odnosi s starši otrok, časovnimi omejitvami in pritiski (Sass idr., 2011). Druge raziskave, izvedene na manjšem številu vzgojiteljev, kažejo podobne rezultate. Šimić-Šašić, Klarin in Lapić (2011) so izvedle raziskavo, s katero je bilo ugotovljeno, da so vzgojitelji na splošno zadovoljni s svojim delom. Najvišje stopnje zadovoljstva izražajo v kategorijah, ki se nanašajo na neposredno delo z otroki, najmanj pa so zadovoljni z družbenim statusom poklica in številom otrok v vzgojnih skupinah. Eno ključnih vprašanj, s katerimi se sooča sodobno izobraževanje, je, kako podpreti kakovostne vzgojitelje, ki jih v zgodnji predšolski vzgoji in izobraževanju vse bolj primanjkuje.

Raziskave kažejo, da nezadovoljstvo pri delu vodi v umik in pomanjkanje produktivnosti, fluktuacijo vzgojiteljev, kar posledično vodi v zmanjšano produktivnost in spremembe na delovnem mestu (Grant idr., 2019). Podobno raziskava avtorjev Butt in Lance (2005) kaže, da so viri nezadovoljstva vzgojiteljev povezani s kompleksnostjo dela oziroma z naraščajočo delovno obremenitvijo. V tej smeri raziskave avtorjev Gerber, Whitebook in Weinstein (2007) ter Grant, Jeon in Buettner (2019) kažejo na povezavo med duševnim zdravjem vzgojiteljev, njihovim zadovoljstvom pri delu in kakovostjo njihovih interakcij z otroki. Glede na to, da je primarna naloga vzgojitelja vzpostavljanje kakovostne interakcije z otroki, je zadovoljstvo vzgojitelja pri delu izjemno pomembno. Visoka stopnja zadovoljstva vzgojiteljev je povezana s kakovostjo vzgojno-izobraževalnega dela in s tem z izboljšanjem kakovosti življenja otroka v ustanovi za predšolsko vzgojo (Tatalović Vorkapić in Jelić Puhalo, 2016). Sklicujoč se na izvedene novejše raziskave, omenjene avtorice poudarjajo, da tisti otroci, ki so v času zgodnje in predšolske vzgoje in izobraževanja deležni več socialne in čustvene podpore, dosegajo boljše razvojne rezultate.

Če povzamemo vse navedeno, je upravičeno poudariti, da ravno način, na katerega vzgojitelji dojemajo svoje delo, vpliva na njihov odnos do dela. Kadar vzgojitelji svoje delo dojemajo kot naporno ali stresno, so s svojim delom manj zadovoljni in so dlje časa odsotni z dela ter se manj posvečajo svojemu delu. Pomembno je poudariti, da je zadovoljstvo z delom zaposlenih v vzgojno-izobraževalnih ustanovah izrednega pomena za dolgoročno rast in razvoj katerega koli izobraževalnega sistema na svetu (Bhamani, 2012) ter zahteva podporo in pozornost družbe, raziskovalcev in oblikovalcev izobraže-

valnih politik (Lambert idr., 2016). Vendar pa je večina raziskav na tem področju veliko bolj usmerjena v raziskovanje različnih drugih ustanov in poslovnega sveta, le manjši del pa pokriva področje zgodnje in predšolske vzgoje in izobraževanja (Grant idr., 2019), kar je bila spodbuda za izvedbo te raziskave. Raziskovanje zadovoljstva vzgojiteljev pri delu lahko osvetli različne težave ali pa koristi, ki jih imajo pri opravljanju poklica, zato se to delo osredotoča na perspektivo vzgojiteljev. Poleg tega je zadovoljstvo pri delu pomemben dejavnik, ki zahteva dodatno pozornost, hkrati pa je razumevanje in ugotavljanje dejavnikov, ki nanj vplivajo, lahko koristno za uvajanje izboljšav v zgodnjo in predšolsko vzgojo, še posebej v današnjem času, ko so sodobni trendi usmerjeni v zagotavljanje visokokakovostnega okolja za vse otroke (Fiala in Sindik, 2013).

Cilj raziskave, katere rezultati so predstavljeni v tem delu, je bil pridobiti vpogled v percepcijo zadovoljstva z delom vzgojiteljev pri vsakodnevnem delu v ustanovah za predšolsko vzgojo. V raziskavi je sodelovalo 536 vzgojiteljev, dve vprašanji odprtega tipa pa sta bili del anketnega vprašalnika in pri njiju so morali našteti tri izkušnje pri delu, s katerimi so bili najbolj in najmanj zadovoljni. V skladu s tem sta bili zastavljeni dve raziskovalni vprašanji o vidikih zadovoljstva vzgojiteljev pri neposrednem vzgojno--izobraževalnem delu z otroki in o vidikih zadovoljstva vzgojiteljev z odnosi z drugimi vzgojitelji, strokovnimi sodelavci, ravnatelji in starši.

Rezultati, ki smo jih pridobili z metodo kvalitativne analize pri prvem raziskovalnem vprašanju, kažejo, da vzgojitelji navajajo neposredno delo z otroki, otrokov uspeh in napredek, otrokovo zanimanje in željo po sodelovanju v dejavnostih, pozitiven čustveni odnos med vzgojiteljem in otrokom ter srečnega in zadovoljnega otroka kot glavne vire zadovoljstva pri njihovem delu. Zadovoljni so tudi s svojimi osebnimi in poklicnimi lastnostmi, kot so ustvarjalnost, iznajdljivost, odprtost, odgovornost ter želja po nenehnem učenju in osebnem razvoju. Zato poudarjajo pomen opolnomočenja in izobraževanja. Kot največji vir nezadovoljstva so se izkazale neustrezne delovne razmere, ki se nanašajo na preveliko število otrok v vzgojnih skupinah, kar otežuje individualni pristop do vsakega otroka in s tem zagotavljanje kakovostnejše strokovne pomoči in podpore vzgojno zahtevnejšim otrokom, pa tudi slab položaj vzgojiteljev v družbi in odnos družbe (in nadrejenih) do poklica vzgojitelja.

Pri drugem raziskovalnem vprašanju rezultati kažejo, da so za vzgojitelje najpomembnejši podporni sodelovalni odnosi. V kontekstu zadovoljstva poudarjajo pomen tega, da sta njihovo delo in prispevek prepoznana s strani staršev, strokovnih sodelavcev, ravnateljev in širše družbene skupnosti. Pri nezadovoljstvu so poudarjene težave pri sodelovanju in komunikaciji z nekaterimi starši, poudarjajo pomanjkanje podpore strokovnih sodelavcev in dejstvo, da do vzgojiteljev pristopajo s pozicije nadrejenih. Na podlagi navedenega je še posebej pomembno raziskovati in argumentirano obravnavati izzive vzgojiteljskega poklica ter v skladu z rezultati znanstvenih raziskav zagotavljati podporo in spodbujati njegov razvoj. Predstavljeni rezultati te raziskave so prispevek h globlji obravnavi zadovoljstva vzgojiteljev pri delu, hkrati pa tudi oblikovanju priporočil, predlogov in odprtih vprašanj za prihodnje raziskave, katerih cilj je izboljšanje kakovosti življenja in dela vzgojiteljev.

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