



Well-Being in Education in Poland

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Abstract: The aim of this paper was to check teachers' satisfaction with work, their emotions, their work environment, their work-life balance, and their access to trainings concerning mindfulness, well-being, and self-development. The work, based on a survey conducted among 102 foreign language (mostly English) teachers of different types of schools (i.e., kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, universities, etc.), is concerned with issues related to the well-being of teachers in Poland. Teachers who took part in the quantitative survey between December 2022 and January 2023 gave anonymous answers to the questions concerning their well-being, their attitude to work, their ability to take part in self-development trainings, and their relations at the schools and institutions in which they work. It was planned to find out which teacher groups face more difficulties of different kinds within their working places. The study revealed that teachers who take part in various forms of self-development are more aware of their emotions and ways of dealing with stress than those who do not. Those who work in towns and villages are happier than those who work in cities. Those who work with many pupils suffer from the incessant noise and even rude behaviour of their students. Finally, it was concluded that happier and less stressed teachers, who are able to maintain work-life balance and work in a friendly environment, may become better teachers and better learners. Teachers' health and well-being and positive attitude towards life and work are very important due to the fact that any of these attitudes influence the way in which their students acquire knowledge. Happier teachers teach happier and faster-learning students.

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Introduction

Well-being, which according to various definitions, for instance, in the Cambridge Dictionary (2023), means the state of being healthy and happy, is very important in the everyday lives of all of us. In Psychology Today (Davis, 2019), we may find that: "Well-being is the experience of health, [happiness](#), and prosperity. It includes having good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and the [ability to manage stress](#). More generally, well-being is just feeling well."

Well-being is very important in education, especially after the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. When students are happy, they learn better and faster; when teachers are happy, they conduct their classes in a better way; and in consequence, everyone feels better and more comfortable, not only those who have to acquire knowledge but also those who share it (Spitzer,

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2012). Teachers are the most important links in the whole process of education due to the fact that they shape it and influence students (Baryła-Matejczuk, 2021). Teaching processes involve huge emotional labour because teachers not only give students directions, definitions, check their work, and explain differences between some phenomena, but teaching is also a huge mental challenge. Teachers have to deal with stress, noise, and sometimes the rude behavior of children or even their parents. Sometimes they work under pressure caused by other teachers or their supervisors. A lot of teachers, especially those working in public, i.e., state, or private schools, do not earn much money. (Dziennik Ustaw, 2023) All those aspects mentioned above may lead to burnout, depression, and various illnesses. When it is necessary, teachers should have support and training. They should be aware of how to deal with emotions, stress. What is more, such or similar help should be provided not only for teachers, but also for students. We all must remember that a happy and healthy teacher most often means a happy and motivated student. Human brains use so-called mirror neurons, which allow us to understand the behaviour of other people, but they also respond to what we observe; they enable the imitation of various emotions such as sadness, happiness, and anger (Vetulani, 2014). Mirror neurons play an important role in human relationships; they are crucial, especially in the field of education (Żylińska, 2013).

Method

The answers of 102 teachers (although some of them did not give answers to all questions) who took part anonymously and voluntarily in the survey are presented below. To begin with, what seems important is that 98% of them claimed that teachers need psychological support at work.

Teachers who took part in the survey between December 2022 and January 2023 are 99% women, mostly between 36 and 45 years old, whereas men constitute only 1%, and their ages vary from 26 to 55 years old.

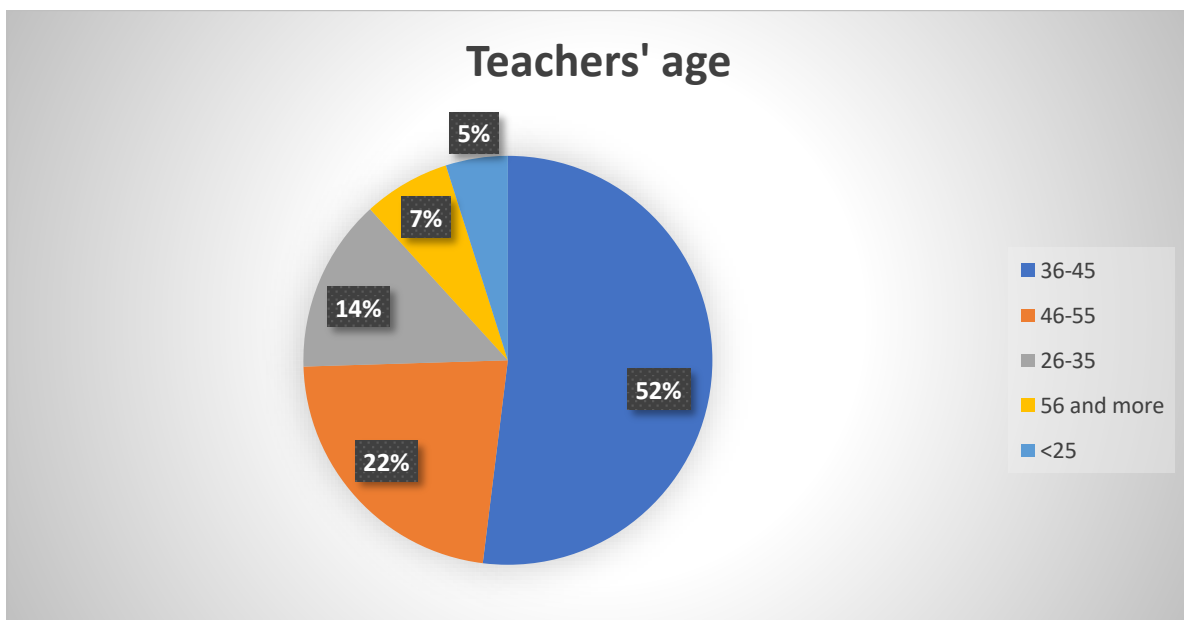


Figure 1. Teachers' Age

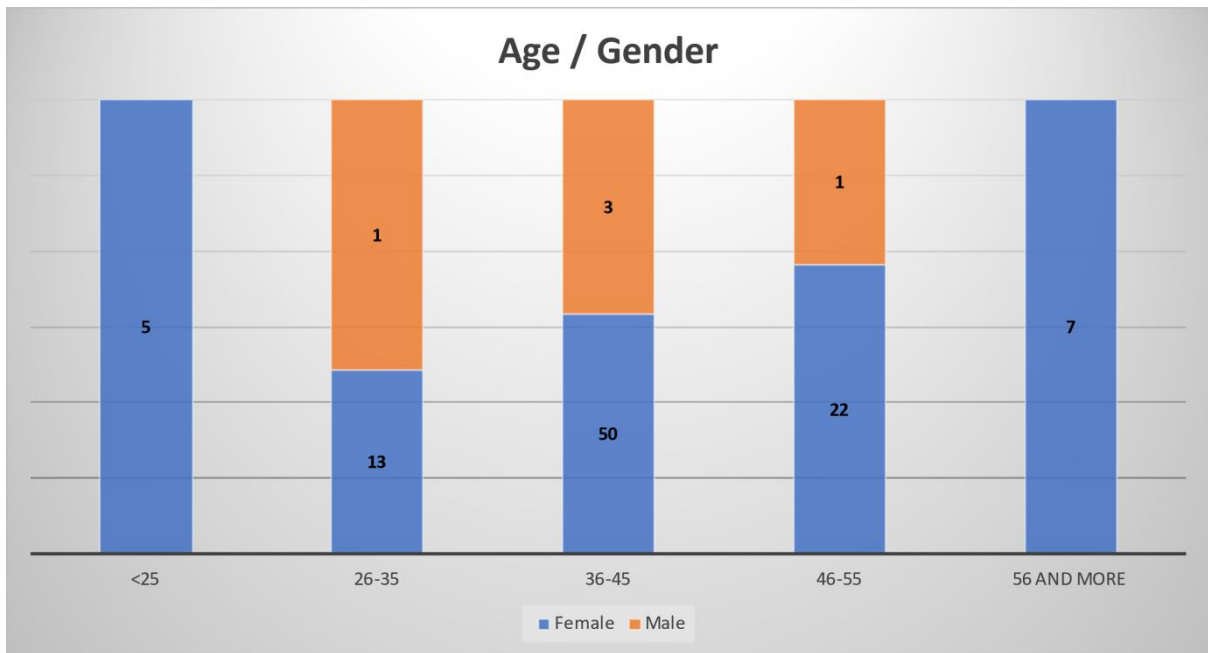


Figure 2. Teachers' Age and Gender

39% of the respondents live in towns smaller than 50 thousand inhabitants, 25% in cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants, 20% live in villages, 9% in cities between 51 and 500 thousand inhabitants, and 7% in cities with 101 to 500 thousand inhabitants.

They work in towns and cities with the same number of inhabitants, respectively.

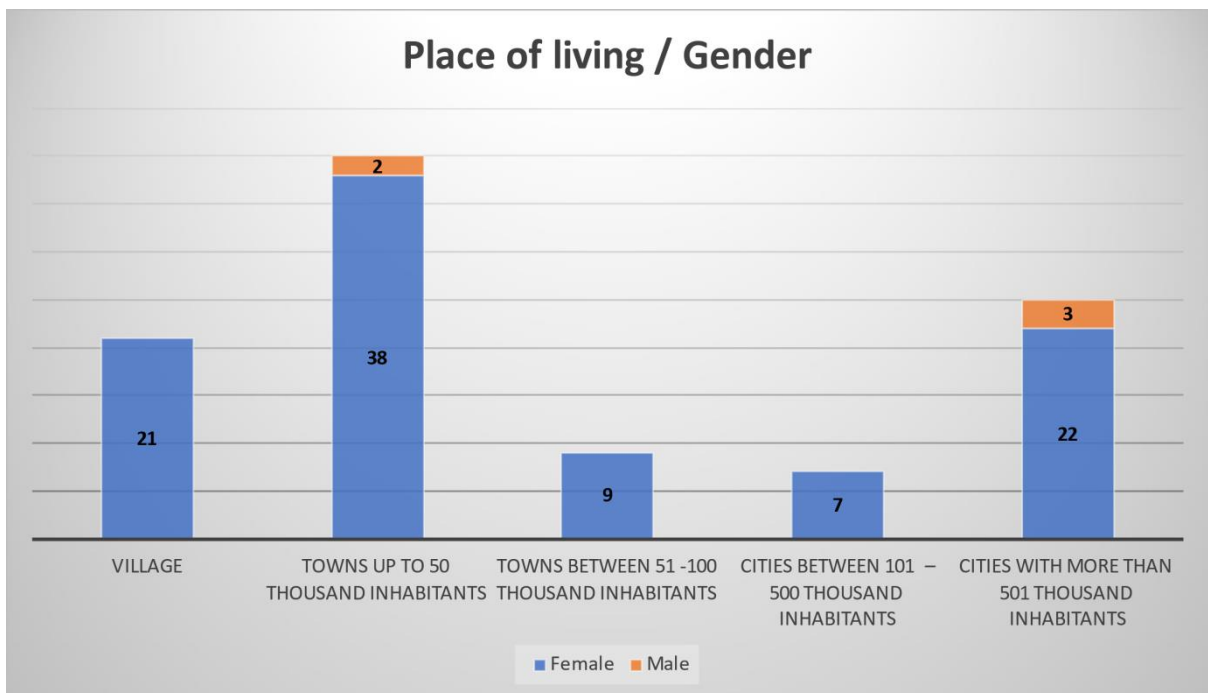


Figure 3. Teachers' Place of Living and Gender

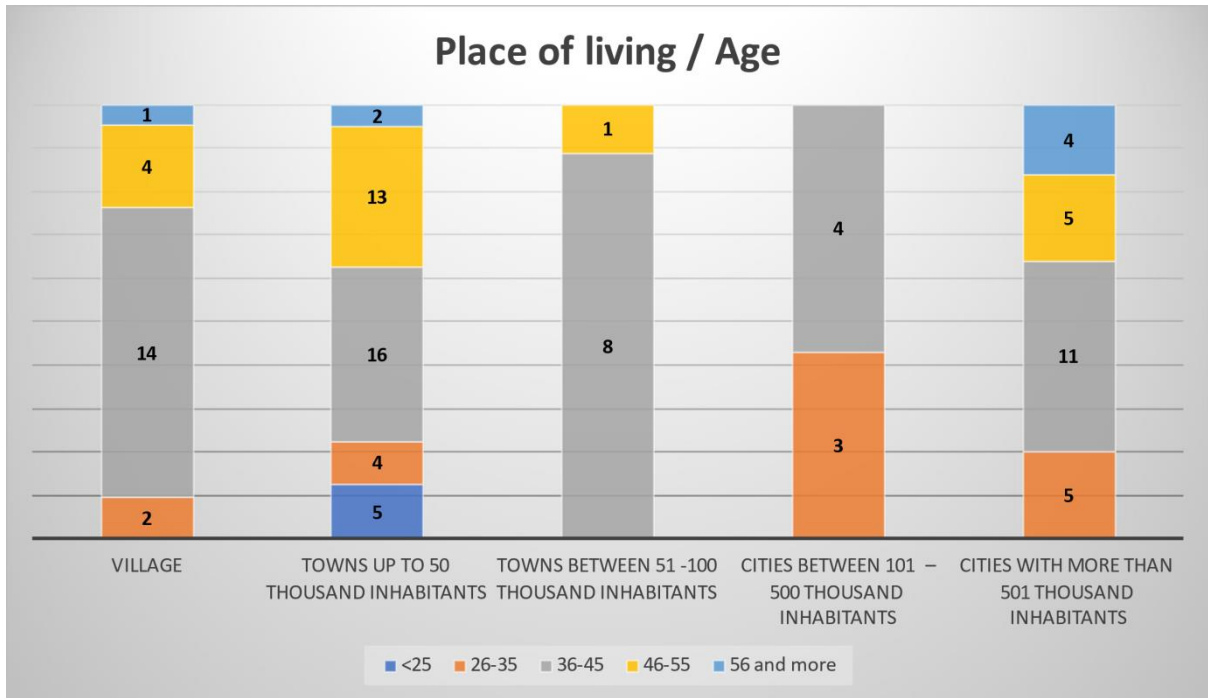


Figure 4. Teachers’ Place of Living and Age

16% of the respondents work in kindergartens, 29% in early school education units, 36% in primary schools grades 4–8, 30% in secondary schools, 5% at universities, 1% in art, 2% in musical schools, 8% in language schools, and 15% are freelancers. Among those teachers who work in the schools mentioned above, 85% work in state and public schools, 13% in private schools, 1% in charter schools, and 1% are only self-employed. 76% of the teachers work in only one place, 23% in two places, and 1% in three places.

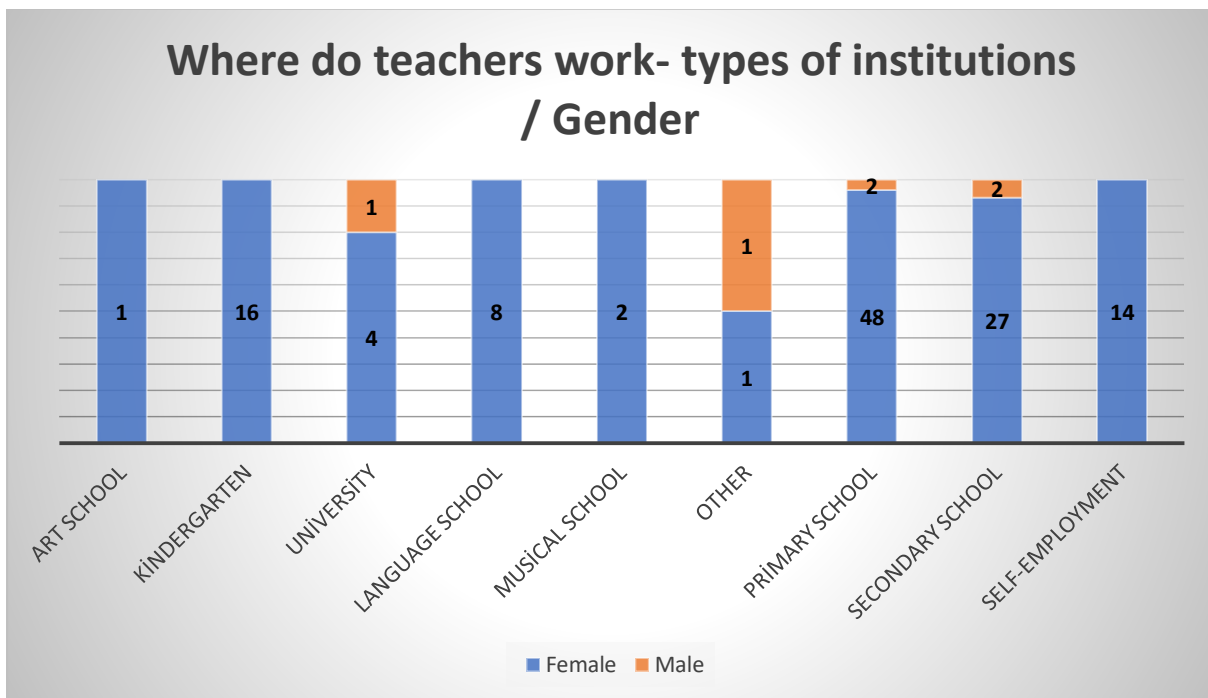


Figure 5. Teachers’ Place of Work and Gender

43% of the respondents answered that there are between 18-26 students in the classes where they teach; 30% of teachers work in classes with less than 18 students, 19% with more than 26 students in a class. The rest of the teachers work individually or with fewer than 6 students.

54% of teachers answered that classes are divided into groups when it comes to language classes, whereas 46% answered that there is no division. In those cases when there is a division 26% of teachers answered that there are between 10-15 students in a group, 18% said that there are more than 18 students in a group, 11% have fewer than 10 students. However, there are some teachers who have between 12-30 students in a class, because there is no division into groups during ESP (English for Specific Purposes) classes in so-called technical secondary schools. On the diagram below, we may see how the situation concerning division into groups looks during language classes in bigger cities and in smaller towns or villages.

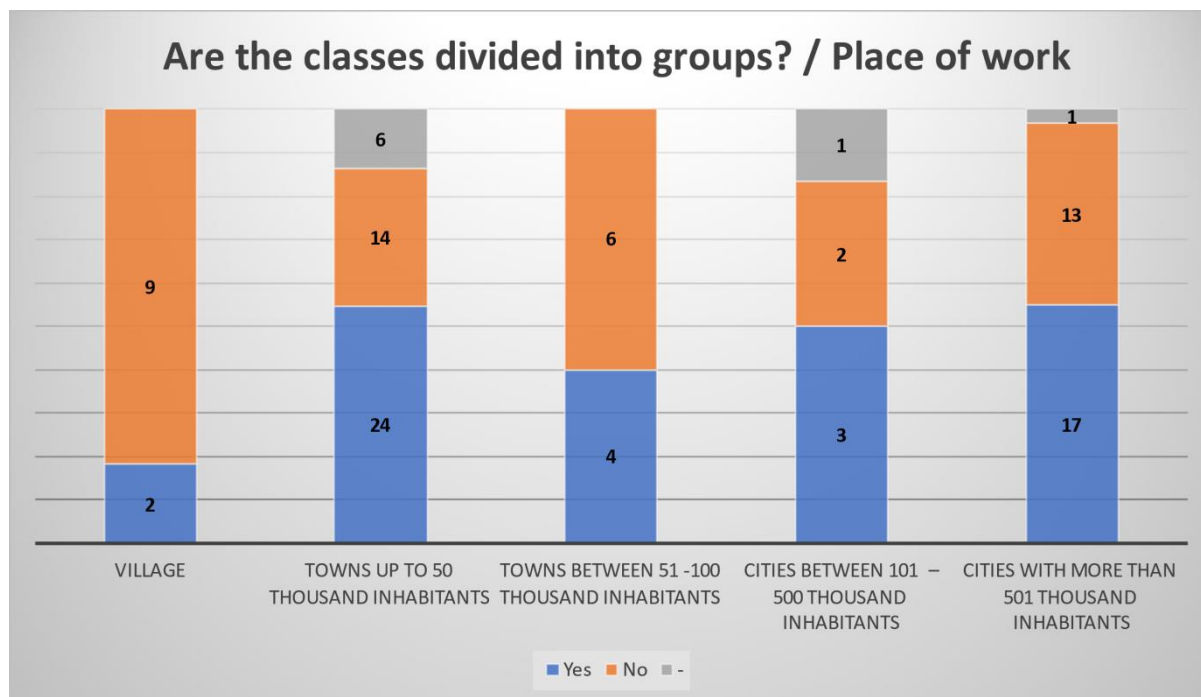


Figure 6. Division Into Groups

According to the received data, language classes are divided into groups more often in towns with less than 50 thousand inhabitants (63%) and cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants (57%), whereas 80% of the respondents living in villages claimed there is no division.

Ethical Procedures

In this study, all rules were followed as stated in the Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions. All participants took part anonymously and voluntarily in the survey.

Results

In my survey, I asked teachers a couple of questions concerning their satisfaction and dissatisfaction with work. I asked them what they liked and/or did not like about their job. 77% of teachers answered that they like their work, whereas 22% stated that they do not like their job. Among those who like their work, 31% said that they just like what they do; 8% admitted that they work in a creative environment; 8% are professionally satisfied and fulfilled; and only 3% admitted that they like their job because of their pay. Among those teachers who are not satisfied with their work, only 1% are happy with their salary, and 1 person likes being a teacher because of job security. 2% admitted that although they do not like their job, they work in creative teams.

Only 79 people responded to my question concerning the causes of their dissatisfaction with work. 65% pointed to too many duties, 75% to low salaries, 34% complain about too many students in a class, 25% feel tired and preoccupied with requirements, and 15% work in an

unfriendly working place, 1% complain about the behaviour of their students' parents, 1 % about students' behaviour, 1% are dissatisfied with the school's management, and 1% complain about commuting. Teachers who are satisfied with their job (40%) live in towns with less than 50 thousand inhabitants, whereas those who are satisfied with their job and live in villages constitute 24%, and those who live in cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants constitute 22% of all respondents.

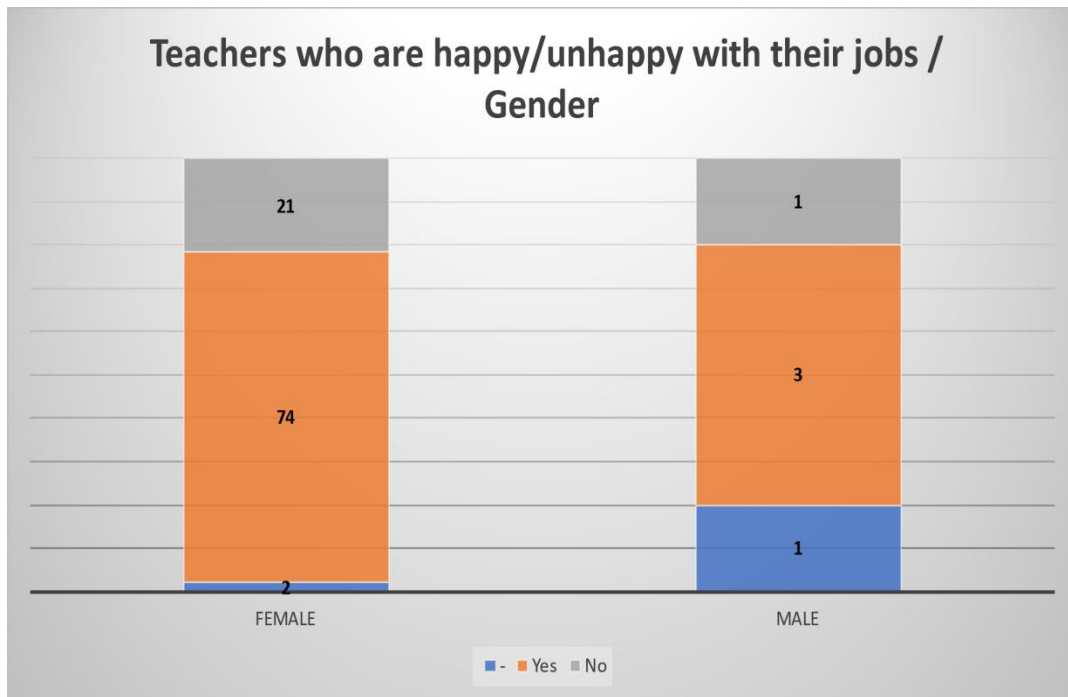


Figure 7. Teachers Who Are Happy/ Unhappy With Their Jobs

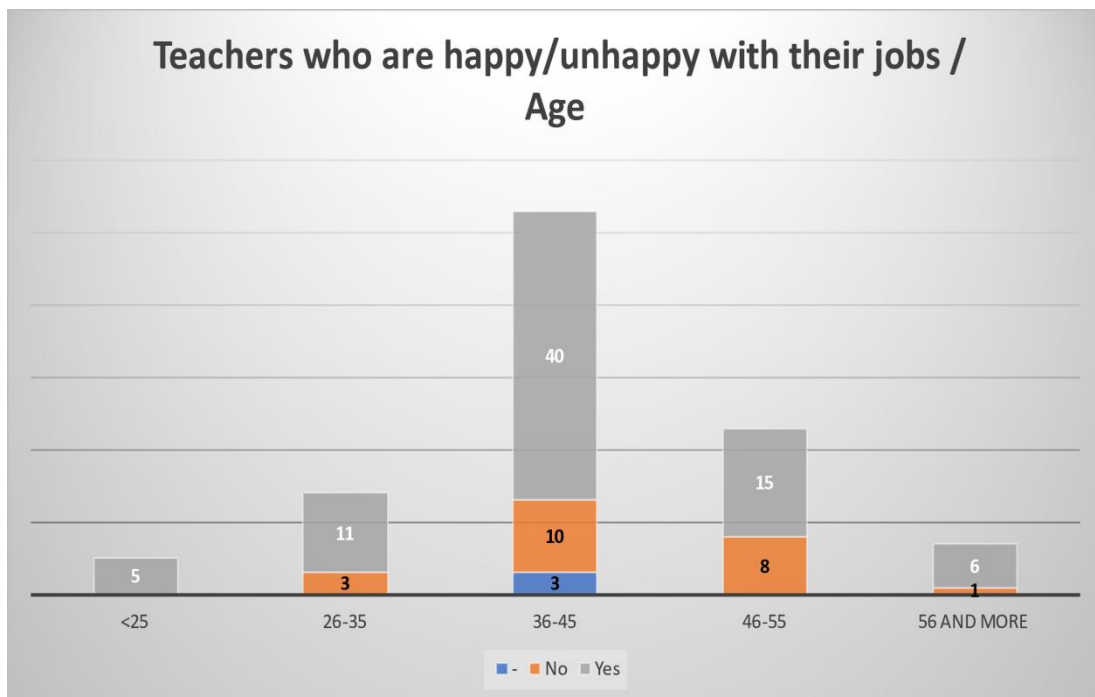


Figure 8. Teachers Who Are Happy/ Unhappy With Their Jobs

48% of the interviewed teachers admitted to taking part in trainings concerning self-

development, mindfulness, and/or breathing techniques, while 46% did not take part in any workshops. Among those teachers who educate themselves, 29% took part in trainings concerning self-development. What is interesting is that such answers were given by women only; most of them (64%) were between 36 and 45 years old. 48% of the respondents (again, only women; 53% work in towns with less than 50 thousand inhabitants) took part in trainings concerning dealing with stress. The respondents also took part in workshops and trainings devoted to breathing techniques (19%), mindfulness (19%), and professional burnout (2%). Within the group of teachers taking part in self-education, 50% said that they had to pay for the courses individually, whereas the remaining 50% had their courses financed by the institutions in which they work. 38% of those who pay individually live in cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants and 25% in towns with less than 50 thousand inhabitants. Trainings are organised mostly by the Centres for Teachers' Education (46%) and private institutions (56%).

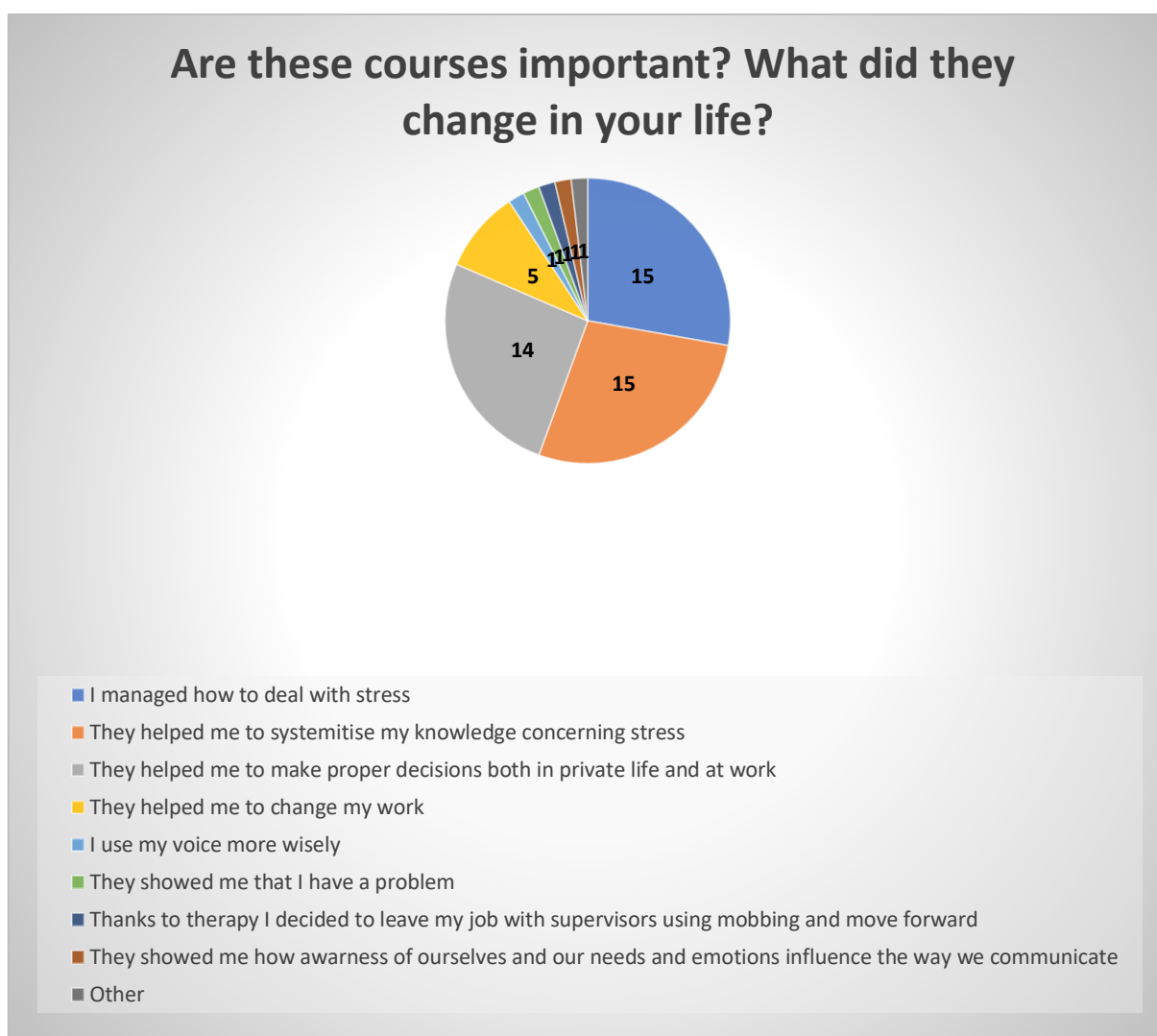


Figure 9. What Did Training Change In Teachers' Lives?

77% of teachers who pay for their further education individually spend on it less than 500 PLN in a year, 11% spend between 500 and 1000 PLN, 9% between 1000 and 2000 PLN, and 3% spend more than 2000 PLN. Those teachers who take part in trainings believe that they are necessary and useful (88%). They claim that thanks to such courses, they learned how to deal with stress and emotions (28%), systematised their knowledge in the field of self-development and stress reduction (28%), made proper decisions concerning their work as well as their private lives (26%), and even made decisions concerning a change of work (9%). Some of the respondents

indicated that they learned how to use their voice properly (2%); some learned how to calm down and realise that they have a problem not only with their work but also with their emotions (2%).

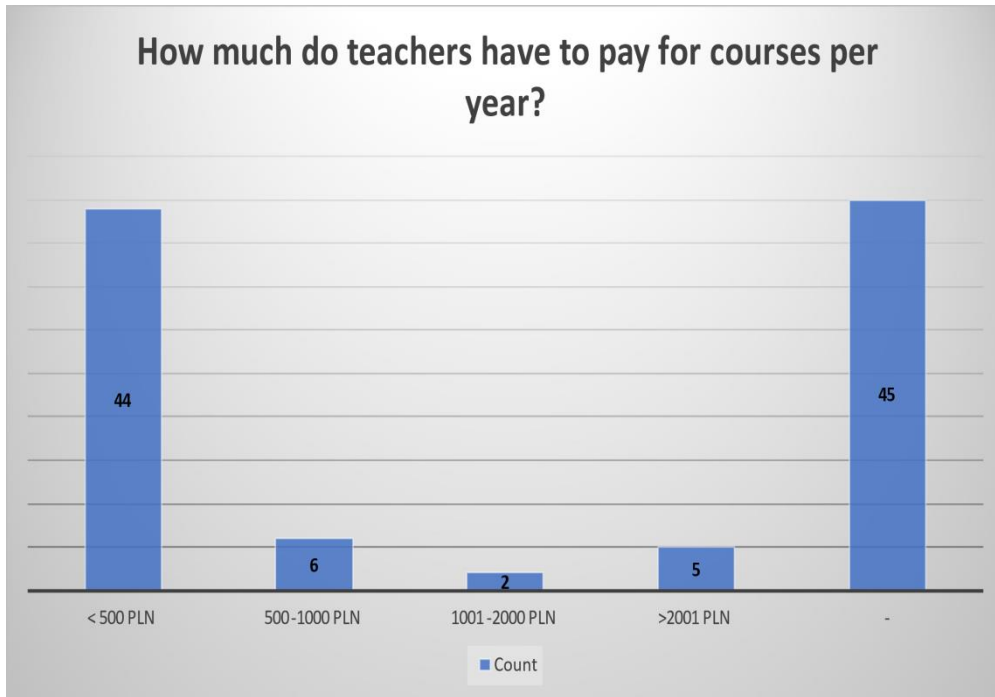


Figure 10. Amount Of Money That Teachers Have To Pay For Their Courses

87% of them admitted that the courses mentioned above are necessary, and 98% stated that they needed psychological support, especially due to the fact that 85% of them claimed they experienced frustration and stress because of work. Among those who are stressed, 41% live in towns with fewer than 50 thousand inhabitants, whereas 38% live in towns and cities with more than 50 thousand inhabitants, and the rest (13%) live in villages. Most of the teachers who feel stressed work in kindergartens and primary schools (56%); the other respondents (33%) work in secondary schools.

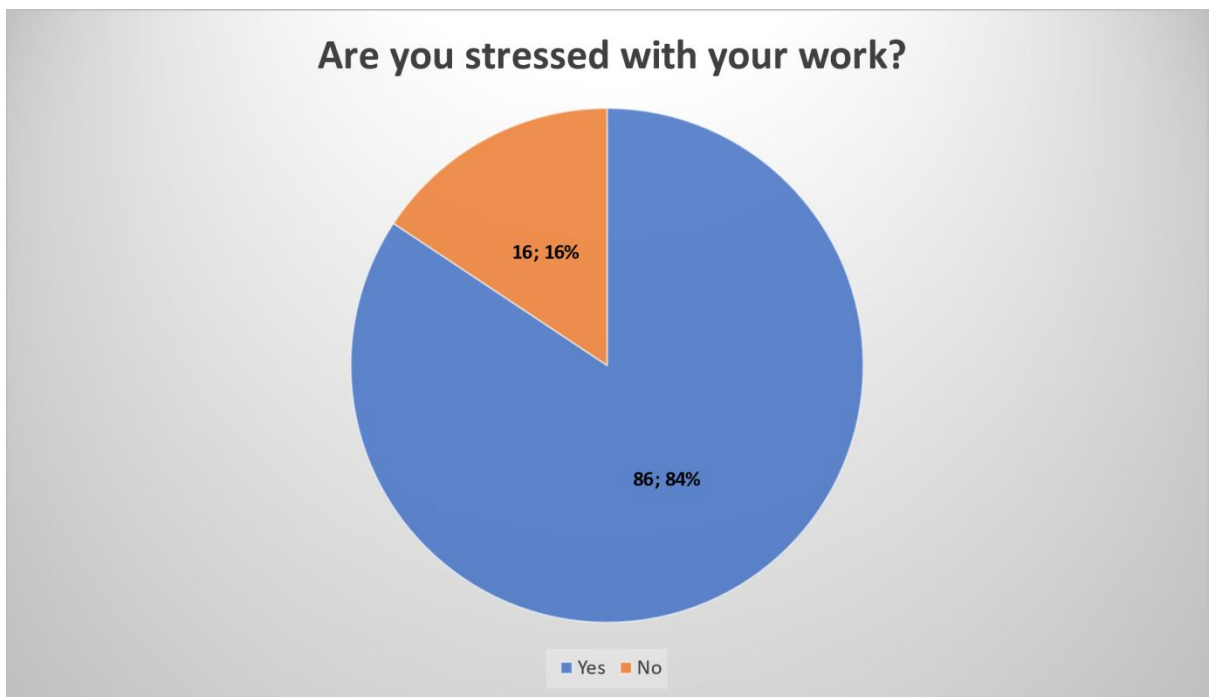


Figure 11. Stress at work

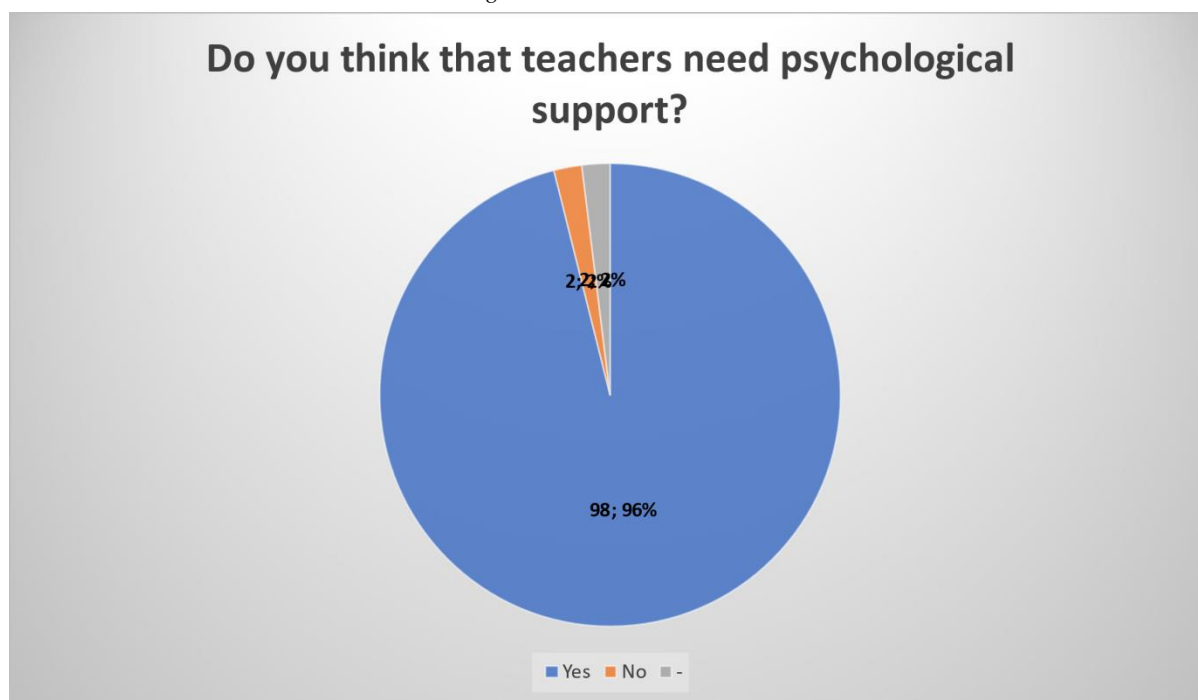


Figure 12. Need For Psychological Support

In most cases, the condition of anxiety and stress results in the performance of too many duties and expectations from the headmasters or students' parents (72%); the other reasons specified by the respondents are: low payment (56%), lack of support from the institution as well as students' parents (47%), lack of psychological support for teachers (37%), noise at schools (36%), problems with students' behaviour during lessons (28%), unfriendly atmosphere at work, bad relations with co-workers (21%), lack of access to self-development trainings paid by schools (11%), working in difficult conditions (1%), commuting (1%), and commuting (1%).

When the respondents were asked whether they were able to not think about work in their free time, most of them (85%) answered positively. In order to relax, they meet friends and/or spend their spare time with family (55%), read books (54%), take up sport (31%), visit different places (28%), use nature to fill up their leisure time (1%), sing (1%), listen to music (1%), watch movies on streaming platforms (2%), or perform their hobbies (5%). Unfortunately, there are a few who admit that they do not have any time to relax (1%) and those who cannot find appropriate ways of relaxing.

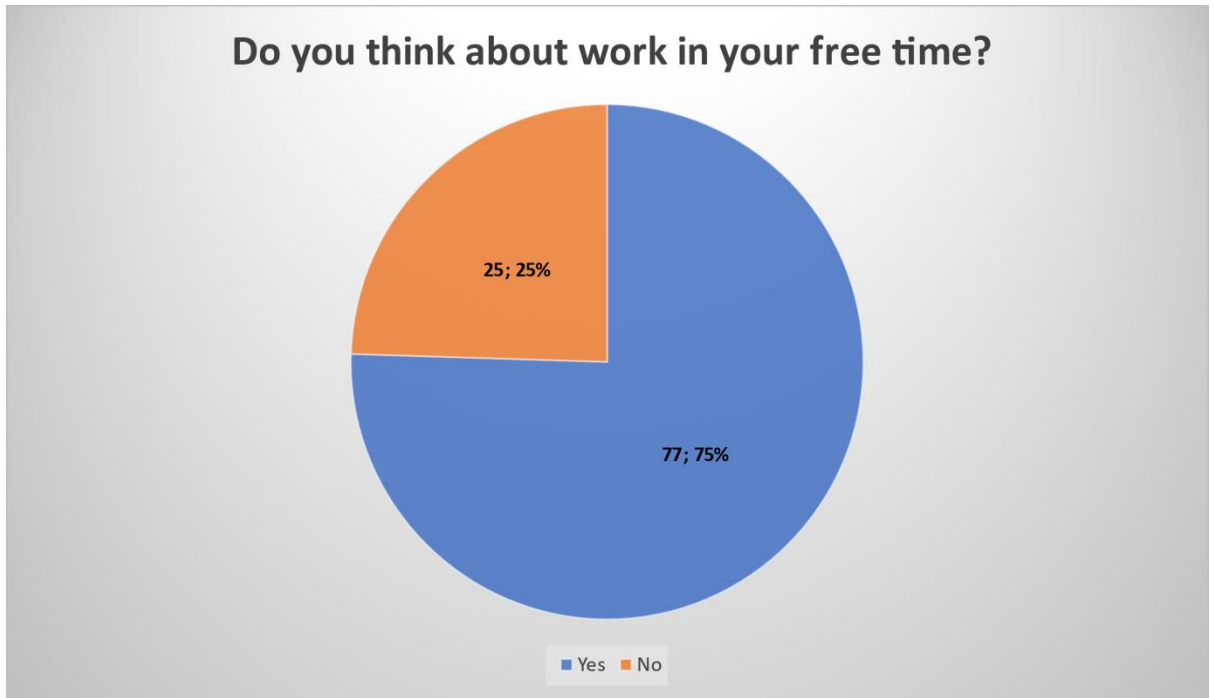


Figure 13. Free Time Vs Work

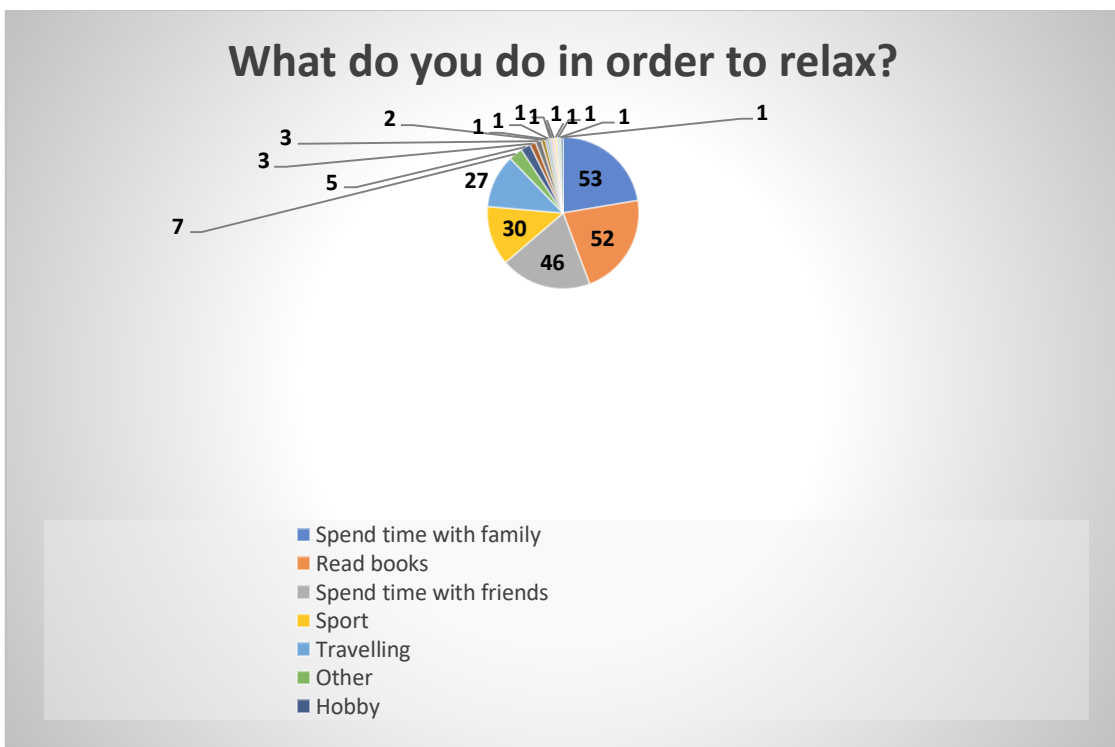


Figure 14. Activities In Free Time

Finally, I asked the teachers about the necessity of training concerning mindfulness, and/or other stress-reducing methods for the students they work with. Most of them agreed that such courses are necessary (99%) and that there are courses dealing with concentration, stress reduction in 21% of schools. 53% of such courses are covered by schools, or institutions supervising schools. Children with special needs have access to various classes within their curriculum.

According to 80% of teachers, such classes help students to concentrate on what is difficult and poses problems to them, help them to see their strengths (67%), help them to call and control

their emotions (65%), and teach them creativity (33%).

Teachers who took part in the survey mostly like their jobs (78%) and their answers to questions concerning this issue of "job liking" are really important. Although the respondents do not earn much money (75% complain about this problem), work in incessant noise, with too many students; and have to deal with various problems that may affect their own mental health, they still like their jobs. However, as pointed out earlier, 65% complain about the excess of requirements and duties at schools, bad relations at work; as well as various problems with students or their parents, which in consequence may influence their well-being and result in the growth of stress, various forms of professional burnout; psychological problems; and even depression (Kordziński, 2022).

Discussion and Conclusions

The teachers want to develop themselves, improve their skills; they declare they want to learn new things (how to use their voice, how to breathe properly, how to implement inclusive education, how to maintain optimal classroom settings, etc.). Many teachers argue that training helps them to take proper decisions (concerning both their private life and work); to keep life-work balance, and to become more aware of themselves and/or their emotions, which is really important according to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021). A small number of teachers (2%) said that although their work was financially stable and there were not many students in the classes where they taught, the headmasters, principals and/ or school owners used various types of mobbing; they were stressed and mentally exhausted, unable to leave their work. Many of them admitted they had to take part in therapy, thanks to which they were finally able to move forward and find different jobs. 46% of teachers agreed that thanks to such trainings they learned various techniques, such as how to deal with chronic stress, how to function in difficult situations, and how to cope with the various behaviours of students, parents, and/or other co-workers.

On the basis of the answers of the respondents, it is clear that the state of well-being among teachers is crucial to the whole process of education. Those teachers who take part in training, have access to various workshops concerning their self-development and/ or different mindfulness-shaping techniques, who develop themselves, spend time on taking up sports, meeting with friends and family, travelling, keep life-work balance are happier and more able to separate their working conditions from their personal life. Thanks to various creative things that they do after work, such as reading, singing, walking in the forest, being close to nature, listening to music, and watching films, they are able to relax, collect their thoughts, maintain a relatively objective state, and deal with the everyday problems that they have to face at work. When they eat healthy food, perform physical activity, and sleep well, they are more efficient, have more energy, have a sense of purpose in their lives, and feel happier and healthier because their immune system works better (Coyle, 2017). What they still need at work, no matter whether they work in cities, towns, or villages, is psychological support, understanding, and help from their supervisors and co-workers. They also need cooperation with the students' parents, work in conditions that do not expose them to so much noise, smaller numbers of students in groups, or division of the students into groups with less noise, fewer students in groups, or division into groups, especially during language classes. They also need life-work balance conditions in order to take care of their mental health and well-being.

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