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Stress in Probation Officers Enforcing Judgments in Criminal and Juvenile Cases

Abstract: Men and women practicing the profession of probation officer do not differ in the evaluation of the majority of stressors. Differences between sexes occurred only in the case of factors impeding the development and course of professional career and factors related to the lack of safety and substantive support. In both cases, the level of experienced stress observed in women employed as probation officers was significantly higher compared to men. The type of profession practiced differentiates the group of respondents only in evaluating stressors related to inconsistencies and ambiguity connected with the performance of professional duties, as well as stressors connected to supervision activities and inadequate physical working conditions. In both cases, probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal cases displayed a significantly higher level of experienced stress.

Key words: stress of probation officers, sources of stress, polish probation officers.

The theoretical context of studies

The profession of the probation officer is a stressful one (Tabor 1987). Studies on stress in the profession of the probation officer have been conducted around the world for decades and they have produced many interesting results. The two main stressors affecting probation officers are dangers related to practicing this profession and the need to draw up opinions, which affect the adjudication of imprisonment penalties (Thomas 1988). In literature, we can find relationships between stress level at work and health problems (Brown 1987).

Probation officers experiencing a high level of stress is related to the lack of satisfaction in practicing this profession and the exhibited tendency to abandon it. The high rate of staff turnover among probation officers can be translated into the cost of training and recruitment; it may also cause cases of weakening supervision and thereby contribute to recidivism (Simmons et al. 1997).

In contrast, the relationship between the professional experience of probation officers and stress has been documented in several studies. Probation officers, at the beginning of their career and approaching retirement, show lower levels of stress than probation officers who are in the middle of their professional career (Patterson 1992; Tabor 1987; Whitehead 1981). The opposite relationship between length of service and staff turnover has been found on the basis of the studies of Simmons et al. (1997). The increase in seniority correlated with the decline of the rate of the resignation from the profession. Older probation officers were more likely to exhibit greater job satisfaction and showed less occupational stress than their younger colleagues. Thus, the relationship between stress and seniority is completely explained, because we are dealing with different results of studies on this subject; some of the study results have confirmed this relationship (Patterson 1992; Tabor 1987; Whitehead 1985), while in others, such a relationship was not confirmed (Slate et al. 2003). The authors of the project from 2003 conclude that perhaps in earlier studies, stress was not defined as a physical ailment, like in their studies (Slate et al. 2003).

Married probation officers showed a lower rate of occupational stress and more satisfaction from work than unmarried people (Simmons et al. 1997; Tabor 1987). Sex is also linked to stress. Women probation officers showed higher levels of stress than male probation officers (Simmons et al. 1997). These results were also confirmed in the studies of Risdon N. Slate, Terry L. Wells and Wesley Johnson (2003).

Studies (Tabor 1987) also noted a link between the impersonal way of treating clients, and higher levels of stress in younger probation officers.

Probation officer supervisors also suffer less stress and occupational burnout than line probation officers (Thomas 1988; Whitehead 1986). According to John Whitehead (1986), professional hierarchy and job satisfaction are linked with one another. Managers have a greater impact on decision-making rather than line probation officers, they are set with more challenges, their work is more interesting and they have less contact with clients.

The most common cause of stress is the inability to devote enough time to get the job done (Thomas 1988). The source of stress is also timely reporting (Simmons et al. 1997). Also, excessive forbearance on the part of the courts is identified as a primary stressor among probation officers (Whisler 1994).

Stress-related is also responsibility for supervision over specific cases (criminals addicted to alcohol) (Tabor 1987). Probation officers, among the activities they perform, indicated work connected with filling in a huge amount of documentation

as a task that is the most time-consuming, even more than tasks connected with the client (Pettway, VanDine 2000). The flood of documentation is a stressor and source of occupational burnout for them, which has been confirmed in several studies (Brown 1987; Simmons et al. 1997; Thomas 1988; Whisler 1994).

The cause of stress can be the lack of recognition and distinctions at work (Whisler 1994), while insufficient remuneration, lack of promotions and being undervalued, aside from stress, lead to occupational burnout (Simmons et al. 1997; Whisler 1994; Whitehead 1986).

Occupational stress of probation officers increases with the increase of personal commitment to work with clients (Tabor 1987). Depending on prior professional experience, probation officers who have experience in correctional work show a higher level of satisfaction in their profession than probation officers employed previously by the police (Simmons et al. 1997). Other interesting findings of the study showed that approximately 90% of the respondent probation officers expressed antipathy towards their managers, approximately 80% said that their superiors are incompetent persons, while 50% of them have considered leaving the profession (Simmons 1997).

Participating management, i.e. the possibility of probation officers making decisions turned out to be a means for reducing stress and occupational burnout (Brown 1986; Holgate, Clegg 1991; Slate et al. 2003).

Other American studies (Lewis R., Lewis L., Garby 2012) revealed higher levels of stress and occupational burnout among probation officers working with people who use violence, recidivists, convicts who have committed crimes of a sexual nature or working with victims of violence.

Methodology of own studies

The main objective of this study was to examine the role played by gender, seniority, marital status, place of residence and type of profession, in perceiving particular categories of sources of stress by probation officers.

The following study problems were formulated:

P₁: Does sex differentiate probation officers in terms of perceiving sources of stress?

P₂: What are the differences in the scope of perceived sources of stress among probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal cases and probation officers enforcing judgments in juvenile cases?

P₃: Does marital status differentiate the group of probation officers who took part in the study in terms of perceived sources of stress?

P₄: Does the place of residence differentiate the group of probation officers who took part in the study in terms of perceived sources of stress?

P₅: What is the relationship between perceived stress and age?

P₆: What is the relationship between perceived stress and seniority?

Based on a review of studies on stress of probation officers, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: Women probation officers exhibit higher levels of stress than male probation officers.

H₂: There are no differences between probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal cases and probation officers enforcing judgments in juvenile cases in terms of perceived sources of stress.

H₃: Those who are in relationships exhibit lower levels of stress than single people.

H₄: Probation officers living in smaller towns exhibit significantly lower levels of perceived stress than probation officers from large cities.

H₅: There is a relationship between age and stress, the intensity of which increases with age.

H₆: The higher the seniority, the higher the level of perceived stress.

The following research tools were used in the studies: Inventory of Stress Sources in the Profession of the Probation Officer and questionnaire survey. The significance of differences were calculated using the U Mann-Whitney test and Chi² test. In order to determine the relationships Pearson's r ratio was used.

The author of the Inventory of Stress Sources in the Profession of the Probation Officer (ISS) is Bartłomiej Skowroński (2013). Work on constructing the Inventory of Stress Sources in the Profession of the Probation Officer was started in early 2011. The first stage of the construction was to conduct interviews with a group of 15 professional probation officers where they were asked to indicate sources of stress which they are currently experiencing, experienced in the past, and also to indicate hypothetical sources of stress that could affect the probation officer. A justification of this procedure was the fact that some probation officers may not see certain areas of stress in the context of their professional activity, but they could be aware of their existence. Thanks to this, groups of stressors affecting probation officers were determined. Therefore, in the opinion of the studied group, stress lies in the following areas: physical conditions of work, control factors, method of working, interpersonal relations, professional development, functioning within the organization, fulfilling the role of probation officer. The distinguished areas became the basis for the construction of particular positions of the tool.

The reliability of the Inventory of Stress Sources was calculated by estimating internal compliance and absolute stability. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability ratio for the entire inventory was $\alpha = 0.93$. The ratios for individual subscales distinguished when using exploratory factor analysis were: lack of agreement in the team and inappropriate atmosphere $\alpha = 0.91$; discrepancies and confusion related to the performance of official duties $\alpha = 0.88$; factors that impede career development and course $\alpha = 0.86$; lack of safety and substantive support $\alpha = 0.80$; control activities and insufficient physical conditions of work $\alpha = 0.79$;

inappropriate responses of charges $\alpha = 0.88$; lack of the possibility to speak about systemic solutions $\alpha = 0.73$. All the ratios of internal compliance prove the reliability of both the entire Inventory of Stress Sources in the Profession of the Probation Officer, as well as all seven subscales (Skowroński 2013). To estimate absolute stability of the Inventory, a group of 110 people in an interval of 3 weeks were studied. Both of the measurements are correlated with one another. Correlation ratios range from 0.56 (moderate correlation, significant dependency) to 0.92 (very high correlation, very certain dependency). Given the values of correlation ratios, it can be concluded that the Inventory of Stress Sources in the Profession of the Probation Officer is characterized by absolute stability. The content validity, theoretical validity and criterion validity of the Inventory were estimated. The content validity of the Inventory of Stress Sources was estimated by calculating the content validity ratio (CVR), proposed by Lawsh (1975). A group of 41 probation officers was presented a universe in the form of the concept of stress with Philip Zimbardo's definition understood as: "A set of specific and non-specific responses of the body to stimulus events that disrupt its balance and subject to trial or exceed its capacity to cope" (Zimbardo, Gerrig 2012, p. 524). Experts were asked to respond to each item of the inventory, about how much they represent the given universe. In the case of two positions the condition was not met which said that half the judges consider this position essential for the test, and for this reason they were removed. For the next five positions, though they met the aforementioned criteria, they obtained an unsatisfactory CVR value and were also removed. Theoretical validity was also established by using exploratory factor analysis. This analysis revealed the existence of seven factors. The cumulative percentage of variance explained by the 7 factors amounted to 71.02%. Criterion validity was also estimated. In terms of the total result of the Inventory of Stress Sources, the groups distinguished on the basis of high and low results in the scope of all individual variables measuring occupational burnout, they had statistically significant differences. On the basis of results obtained using the Inventory of Stress Sources the result in terms of occupational burnout can be predicted. The above results confirm the criterion validity (diagnostic) of the Inventory of Stress Sources (Skowroński 2013).

The questionnaire survey was constructed for the purpose of this research project. The tool included questions about variables such as: sex, age, marital status (married; divorced; widow/widower; single; conjugal relationship); seniority, type of profession (adult probation officers/family probation officers).

The group that was surveyed consisted of 300 people and they were professional probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal and juvenile cases of the District Court in Warsaw, District Court Warsaw-Praga and District Court in Włocławek, District Court in Sieradz and District Court in Bydgoszcz. The table below provides detailed data characterizing the surveyed group.

Table 1. Sex, marital status and type of profession of surveyed probation officers (N = 300)

Variables	Categories	N	%
Sex	women	223	74.3
	men	77	25.7
Marital status	married	223	74.3
	divorced	18	6
	widow/widower	12	4
	single	38	12.7
	conjugal relationship	9	3
Type of profession	adult probation officers	230	76.7
	family probation officers	70	23.3

Source: own research.

In the surveyed group, as many as 74.3% of the respondents were women, and 25.7% – men. The average age for the entire group was 40.8 years (standard deviation – 7.03). 74.3% of all respondents were married, 6% – divorced, and 4.0% – widows or widowers, 12.7% – single people and finally 3.0% of the surveyed group of people living in informal relationships. The average seniority amounted to nearly 13.4 years (standard deviation 7.5). Moreover, 76.7% of people are probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal cases, while the remainder in family and juvenile cases – 23.3%.

The surveyed group was not chosen at random; it represents approximately 6% of the entire population of professional probation officers in Poland.

Study results

In order to investigate the differences between the groups distinguished based on various criteria, in terms of individual stress sources the Inventory of Stress Sources in the Profession of the Probation Officer of own development was used (Skowroński 2013).

To determine whether sex differentiates the group of probation officers in terms of stress, the U Mann-Whitney test was applied. Details are presented in Table 2.

The study results have confirmed that men and women practicing the profession of probation officer do not differ in the evaluation of the majority of stressors. However, differences between sexes occurred in the case of factors impeding the development and course of professional career and factors related to the lack of safety and substantive support at the level $p < 0.05$. In both cases, the level of experienced stress observed in women employed as probation officers

was significantly higher compared to men. Furthermore, in the case of the lack of the possibility to speak about systemic solutions, as well as in terms of the overall result of ISS, a trend towards significance was observed. Therefore, Hypothesis H₁ was not confirmed.

Table 2. Differences between sexes in terms of individual stress sources

Variables	Sex	N	Average range	U	Z	p
Lack of agreement in the team and inappropriate atmosphere	woman	201	104.48	3893.00	-.429	n.i.
	man	99	108.67			
	total	300				
Discrepancies and confusion related to the performance of official duties	woman	201	109.62	3500.50	-1.540	n.i.
	man	99	94.64			
	total	300				
Factors that impede career development and course	woman	201	111.52	3196.50	-2.334	0.020
	man	99	88.68			
	total	300				
Lack of safety and substantive support	woman	201	111.26	3239.00	-2.226	0.026
	man	99	89.51			
	total	300				
Control activities and insufficient physical conditions of work	woman	201	108.18	3730.50	-.925	n.i.
	man	99	99.15			
	total	300				
Inappropriate responses of charges	woman	201	109.26	3559.00	-1.395	n.i.
	man	99	95.78			
	total	300				
Lack of the possibility to speak about systemic solutions	woman	201	110.19	3409.50	-1.784	0.074
	man	99	92.85			
	total	300				
Overall result (ISS)	woman	201	109.53	3414.00	-1.697	0.090
	man	99	92.94			
	total	300				

Source: own research.

In the assessment of experienced stress differences between probation officers enforcing judgments in juvenile cases and probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal cases turned out to be statistically insignificant, with two exceptions. The type of profession practiced differentiates the group of respondents in

evaluating stressors related to inconsistencies and ambiguity connected with the performance of professional duties, as well as stressors connected to supervision activities and inadequate physical working conditions. In both cases, probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal cases displayed a significantly higher level of experienced stress.

Table 3. Differences between probation officers enforcing judgments in juvenile cases and probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal cases in terms of individual sources of stress

Variables	Type of profession	N	Average range	U	z	p
Lack of agreement in the team and inappropriate atmosphere	probation officers executing judgments in criminal cases	190	106.90	4704.50	-0.472	n.i.
	probation officers executing judgments in family and juvenile cases	110	102.71			
	total	300				
Discrepancies and confusion related to the performance of official duties	probation officers executing judgments in criminal cases	190	114.33	3761.00	-2.836	0.005
	probation officers executing judgments in family and juvenile cases	110	89.23			
	total	300				
Factors that impede career development and course	probation officers executing judgments in criminal cases	190	106.38	4881.00	-0.130	n.i.
	probation officers executing judgments in family and juvenile cases	110	105.23			
	total	300				
Lack of safety and substantive support	probation officers executing judgments in criminal cases	190	103.68	4607.50	-0.788	n.i.
	probation officers executing judgments in family and juvenile cases	110	110.68			
	total	300				
Control activities and insufficient physical conditions of work	probation officers executing judgments in criminal cases	190	114.23	3775.00	-2.791	0.005
	probation officers executing judgments in family and juvenile cases	110	89.43			
	total	300				
Inappropriate responses of charges	probation officers executing judgments in criminal cases	190	102.63	4460.50	-1.156	n.i.
	probation officers executing judgments in family and juvenile cases	110	112.78			
	total	300				

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Variables	Type of profession	N	Average range	U	z	<i>p</i>
Lack of the possibility to speak about systemic solutions	probation officers executing judgments in criminal cases	190	108.84	4535.00	-0.968	n.i.
	probation officers executing judgments in family and juvenile cases	110	100.29			
	total	300				
Overall result (ISS)	probation officers executing judgments in criminal cases	190	107.70	4592.00	-0.742	n.i.
	probation officers executing judgments in family and juvenile cases	110	101.10			
	total	300				

Source: own research.

Therefore, it can be concluded that adult probation officers when compared with juvenile probation officers, significantly more frequently perceive their duties as unclear, which is identified as one of the sources of stress. A source of stress in the group of adult probation officers also includes supervision activities and inadequate working conditions. To sum up, hypothesis H_2 was mostly confirmed.

In the case of sources of stress statistically significant differences occurred only in terms of the evaluation of stressors connected with supervision activities and inadequate working conditions.

Table 4. Differences between groups of probation officers distinguished on the basis of the criterion of marital status in terms of individual sources of stress

Variables	Marital status	N	Average range	chi ²	df	<i>p</i>
Lack of agreement in the team and inappropriate atmosphere	married	194	104.32	3.513	4	n.i.
	divorced	30	120.92			
	widower/widow	21	95.11			
	single	40	115.35			
	conjugal relationship	15	73.83			
	total	300				
Discrepancies and confusion related to the performance of official duties	married	194	104.39	7.762	4	n.i.
	divorced	30	120.12			
	widower/widow	21	100.56			
	single	40	122.44			
	conjugal relationship	15	51.42			
	total	300				

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Variables	Marital status	N	Average range	chi ²	df	<i>p</i>
Factors that impede career development and course	married	194	105.09	1.672	4	n.i.
	divorced	30	111.23			
	widower/widow	21	118.39			
	single	40	110.22			
	conjugal relationship	15	80.67			
	total	300				
Lack of safety and substantive support	married	194	105.16	3.511	4	n.i.
	divorced	30	128.54			
	widower/widow	21	119.22			
	single	40	101.43			
	conjugal relationship	15	79.83			
	total	300				
Control activities and insufficient physical conditions of work	married	194	104.77	0.929	4	0.04
	divorced	30	132.58			
	widower/widow	21	62.39			
	single	40	120.78			
	conjugal relationship	15	79.42			
	total	300				
Inappropriate responses of charges	married	194	108.57	8.144	4	0.086
	divorced	30	121.04			
	widower/widow	21	61.17			
	single	40	106.57			
	conjugal relationship	15	71.17			
	total	300				
Lack of the possibility to speak about systemic solutions	married	194	106.67	2.083	4	n.i.
	divorced	30	103.88			
	widower/widow	21	118.89			
	single	40	105.87			
	conjugal relationship	15	74.42			
	total	300				

Table continued from previous page

Variables	Marital status	N	Average range	chi ²	df	p
Overall result (ISS)	married	194	105.29	4.230	4	n.i.
	divorced	30	120.38			
	widower/widow	21	92.17			
	single	40	112.91			
	conjugal relationship	15	65.42			
	total	300				

Source: own research.

In terms of supervision activities, as stressors, statistically significant differences occurred between persons who are married and widows/widowers ($\chi^2 = 4.131$, $df = 1$, $p < 0,05$). Probation officers who are married, significantly more frequently perceive supervision activities and inadequate working conditions as stressful, than probation officers who are widows/widowers. Statistically significant differences were also found between divorced people and widows/widowers ($\chi^2 = 5.786$, $df = 1$, $p < 0,05$). Probation officers, who are divorced, significantly more frequently perceive supervision activities and inadequate working conditions as stressful, than probation officers who are widows/widowers. Finally, in terms of supervision activities, as stressors, statistically significant differences occurred between single people and widows/widowers ($\chi^2 = 6.827$, $df = 1$, $p < 0,01$). Probation officers who are lonely people significantly more frequently perceive supervision activities and inadequate working conditions as stressful, than probation officers who are widows/widowers. Hypothesis H₃ was not confirmed.

In the case of variables that measure the stress experienced by probation officers, statistically significant differences were revealed between groups of probation officers distinguished in terms of place of residence, in the scope of subscales: discrepancies and ambiguity related to the performance of official duties; factors impeding career development and course; inappropriate responses of charges; lack of the possibility to speak about system solutions, and the overall result of ISS.

In terms of the variable: discrepancies and ambiguity related to the performance of official duties, statistically significant differences occurred between probation officers living in cities with a population above 500,000 inhabitants and probation officers living in cities with a population from 101,000 to 500,000 inhabitants ($\chi^2 = 14.594$, $df = 1$, $p < 0,001$). Probation officers from the largest cities showed significantly higher levels of experienced work-related stress. Furthermore, there were also differences between probation officers from cities with a population from 100,001 to 500,000 inhabitants and probation

officers from cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants. The experienced stress is significantly higher among probation officers from cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants ($\chi^2 = 5.748$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Finally, differences in terms of the variable discrepancies and ambiguity related to the performance of official duties appeared between probation officers from cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants and probation officers from cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants, who revealed higher stress levels ($\chi^2 = 6.504$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$).

In the case of the group of stressors associated with factors impeding career development and course, statistically significant differences occurred between probation officers living in cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants and probation officers living in villages ($\chi^2 = 7.182$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$). The latter revealed a significantly lower level of experienced stress than probation officers from cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants. In terms of this variable, statistically significant differences emerged between probation officers from the largest cities and probation officers from rural areas ($\chi^2 = 3.944$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Significantly higher levels was observed in probation officers from cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants.

In the case of stressors, the source of which are inappropriate responses of charges, statistically significant differences occurred between the residents of rural areas and residents of cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants ($\chi^2 = 5.376$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Inappropriate responses of charges are perceived as significantly more stressful by probation officers from rural areas.

Factors associated with the lack of the possibility to speak about systemic solutions are significantly more frequently perceived as stressful by probation officers from cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants than probation officers living in rural areas ($\chi^2 = 8.535$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$), as well as more frequently perceived by probation officers living in cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants than probation officers living in rural areas ($\chi^2 = 8.265$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.01$).

Finally, in terms of the global result of the Inventory of Stress Sources (ISS), statistically significant differences emerged between the group of probation officers from cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants and probation officers from cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants ($\chi^2 = 4.890$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Residents from cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants revealed significantly higher levels of stress than probation officers from cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants. Furthermore, in terms of overall result of the Inventory of Stress Sources, statistically significant differences emerged between probation officers living in the largest cities and probation officers from cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants ($\chi^2 = 5.405$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$) – probation officers from cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants experience higher levels of stress. To sum up, hypothesis H_4 was partly confirmed.

Table 5. Differences between groups of probation officers distinguished on the basis of the criterion of place of residence in terms of individual sources of stress

Variables	Place of residence	N	Average range	chi ²	df	<i>p</i>
Lack of agreement in the team and inappropriate atmosphere	cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants	97	113.87	4.776	4	n.i.
	cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants	62	96.45			
	cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants	31	121.95			
	cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	68	97.83			
	village	42	100.50			
	total	300				
Discrepancies and confusion related to the performance of official duties	cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants	97	125.82	18.281	4	0.001
	cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants	62	71.58			
	cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants	31	112.14			
	cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	68	101.75			
	village	42	102.12			
	total	300				
Factors that impede career development and course	cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants	97	120.74	12.917	4	0.012
	cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants	62	89.59			
	cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants	31	128.55			
	cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	68	99.01			
	village	42	83.69			
	total	300				
Lack of safety and substantive support	cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants	97	110.53			
	cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants	62	106.63			
	cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants	31	123.74			

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Variables	Place of residence	N	Average range	chi ²	df	<i>p</i>
	cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	68	98.95			
	village	42	95.81			
	total	300				
Control activities and insufficient physical conditions of work	cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants	97	118.10	6.497	4	n.i.
	cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants	62	85.64			
	cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants	31	107.76			
	cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	68	104.56			
	village	42	100.81			
	total	300				
Inappropriate responses of charges	cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants	97	92.05	9.805	4	0.044
	cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants	62	102.02			
	cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants	31	127.43			
	cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	68	107.88			
	village	42	129.62			
	total	300				
Lack of the possibility to speak about systemic solutions	cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants	97	121.01	13.296	4	0.010
	cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants	62	97.64			
	cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants	31	123.00			
	cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	68	99.83			
	village	42	73.40			
	total	300				
Overall result (ISS)	cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants	97	118,02			
	cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants	62	86,08			

Variables	Place of residence	N	Average range	chi ²	df	<i>p</i>
	cities with 50,001–100,000 inhabitants	31	129.52			
	cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants	68	98.43			
	village	42	92.81			
	total	300				

Source: own research.

Age correlates only with the lack of the possibility to speak ($r = 0.142$, $p < 0.05$), however, this correlation is weak, an almost meaningless dependency. This means that with age, stress related with the lack of the possibility to speak about system solutions slightly increases. Hypothesis H_5 was not confirmed.

Analysis of the study results revealed that seniority correlates with inappropriate responses of charges ($r = -0.144$, $p < 0.05$) and also with a lack of the possibility of speaking ($r = 0.176$, $p < 0.05$); however, the correlation in both cases is weak, the dependency is almost meaningless. The higher the seniority, the lower the stress associated with responses of charges. Furthermore, the stress indicator associated with the lack of the possibility to speak about system solutions increases as seniority increases. Hypothesis H_6 was not confirmed, because seniority does not correlate with perceived stress.

Discussion

It turned out that men and women practicing the profession of probation officer do not differ in the evaluation of the majority of stressors. Differences between sexes occurred only in the case of factors impeding the development and course of professional career and factors related to the lack of safety and substantive support. In both cases, the level of experienced stress observed in women employed as probation officers was significantly higher compared to men. Therefore, the results basically did not confirm previous study results (Slate et al. 2003), although a certain tendency can be observed. The study shows an ambiguous conclusion that women are more vulnerable to stress and, consequently, also to occupational burnout, as its effect (Büssing, Perrar 1991; Poulin, Walter 1993; Malkinson et al. 1997). The greater vulnerability of women to stress may be by traits that are more commonly attributed to them, such as: greater sentimentality and emotional sensitivity (Tucholska 2003). In the present study the differences between women and men in terms of individual indicators of stress proved to be a statistically insignificant for the most part.

There are no differences between probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal cases and probation officers enforcing judgments in juvenile cases in terms of perceived sources of stress. The type of profession practiced differentiates the group of respondents only in evaluating stressors related to inconsistencies and ambiguity connected with the performance of professional duties, as well as stressors connected to supervision activities and inadequate physical working conditions. In both cases, probation officers enforcing judgments in criminal cases displayed a significantly higher level of experienced stress. Adult probation officers when compared with juvenile probation officers, significantly more frequently perceive their duties as unclear, which is a source of stress. They are also supervision activities and inadequate working conditions. Like in the case of the phenomenon of occupational burnout, there have not been any studies in Poland so far on differences in terms of the severity of stress among probation officers. Both professions differ in the type of tasks performed, but mainly in the characteristics of clients (children vs. adults). It could have been expected that the work of family probation officers has a more emotional effect, to a greater degree exposes to stress, and consequently, to occupational burnout, for instance due to taking a child away from its family and placing it in emergency care. The results of the studies presented, with few exceptions, revealed that stress equally affects both specialties. Thus, both professions should be ensured equal supervision.

Differences between groups distinguished by the criterion of marital status occurred only in terms of the evaluation of stressors connected with supervision activities and inadequate working conditions. In this case, both single and divorced people significantly more frequently perceive supervision activities and inadequate working conditions as stressful, than probation officers from other groups. Therefore, in a sense, the results confirm previous studies (Handy 1987) which said that being married is strongly related to professional success. Undoubtedly, clarification relations of the marital status with stress needs to take into account other variables, like for example mental condition or psychosocial problems, since it is these mentioned factors that co-decide on the civil status of employees (Tucholska 2003).

In the case of variables that measure the stress experienced by probation officers, statistically significant differences were revealed between groups of probation officers distinguished in terms of place of residence, in the scope of indicators: discrepancies and ambiguity related to the performance of official duties; factors impeding career development and course; inappropriate responses of charges; lack of the possibility to speak about system solutions, and the overall result of ISS. For this criterion, although the results are also not unambiguous, a general tendency can be observed: the smaller the locality, the smaller the stress. In terms of the indicator: discrepancies and ambiguity related to the performance of official duties, statistically significant differences occurred between probation officers living in cities with a population above 500,000 inhabitants

and probation officers living in cities with a population from 101,000 to 500,000 inhabitants. Probation officers from the largest cities showed significantly higher levels of experienced work-related stress. In the case of the group of stressors associated with factors impeding career development and course, statistically significant differences occurred between probation officers living in cities with up to 100,000 inhabitants and probation officers from the largest cities, and probation officers living in rural areas, who showed significantly higher levels of experienced stress. In contrast, inappropriate responses of charges are perceived as significantly more stressful by probation officers from rural areas. Factors associated with lack of the opportunity to speak about systemic solutions are significantly more frequently perceived as stressful by probation officers from cities than by probation officers living in rural areas. In terms of the general result of the Inventory of Stress Sources (ISS), statistically significant differences were revealed between probation officers living in the largest cities and probation officers from cities with 100,001–500,000 inhabitants; probation officers from cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants experience higher levels of stress. In literature on the subject there are studies confirming the differences in terms of emotional exhaustion (which is an indicator of occupational burnout) between teachers from rural schools and schools located in large cities (Tucholska 2003, p. 139–140), but there are no studies on relationships between place of residence (size of city) and stress. Of course, one cannot speak about a direct connection of place of residence and stress, because there is no theoretical basis for doing so. Living in a large city could cause the activity of a greater number of stressors and accumulation of stress in various areas of person's functioning, not only on the professional front. Perhaps we are also dealing with another category of clients of probation officers in rural and urban areas. Working with clients living in small towns and rural areas, where there is greater social control and less anonymity may be less stressful due to the greater propensity of these people to cooperate with the probation officer, respect for the institution of the court, whose body is, after all, the probation officer. Furthermore, the lack of anonymity in small towns may cause that the person over whom supervision is exercised has more belief in the inevitability of punishment for an offense. However, these are hypotheses, and solving these problems requires further scientific exploration.

It turned out that age only correlates with the lack of the possibility to speak, but this correlation is weak, and the dependency almost meaningless. This means that with age, stress related with the lack of the possibility to speak about system solutions increases. Moreover, the analysis of the study results revealed that seniority correlates with inappropriate responses of charges and also with a lack of the possibility of speaking; however, the correlation in both cases is weak, the dependency is almost meaningless. The higher the seniority, the lower the stress associated with responses of charges. The stress indicator associated with the lack of the possibility to speak about system solutions increases as seniority increases.

The stress is therefore only to a small extent linked to seniority. The study results do not confirm dependencies of seniority and stress, which is a negation of previous study results (Thomas 1988; Patterson 1992; Tabor 1987; Whitehead 1981), in which the authors obtained results proving that probation officers at the beginning of their career and approaching retirement show a lower level of stress than probation officers who are in the middle of their professional career.

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