

Teachers' attachment, sickness absence and presenteeism.

Association between teachers' attachment and sickness absence and presenteeism in elementary schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find the association between teachers' adult attachment styles and employee sickness absence and presenteeism. Research data was collected via an online questionnaire. The SPSS program was used. The research was conducted in elementary schools and 779 Slovenian teachers were included. In order to measure teachers' attachment, we used the ECR-RT and an insecure attachment was found in the sample. We did not find any correlations between sickness absence and presenteeism and the attachment among participants. A methodological tool for the Slovenian setting has been developed and can be used to measure attachment with an add-on for the measurement of sickness absence and presenteeism. The research assignment presents results of our investigation into the connection between teachers' attachment and sickness absence and presenteeism, and at the same time calls for similar research to be done in other countries.

Lo scopo di questo studio era quello di trovare una correlazione tra gli stili di attaccamento adulto degli insegnanti, l'assenza per malattia e il presenzialismo. I dati della ricerca sono stati raccolti utilizzando un questionario online. Per questo è stato utilizzato il programma SPSS. La ricerca è stata condotta nelle scuole elementari e ha riguardato 779 insegnanti sloveni. Per misurare il loro attaccamento, abbiamo utilizzato l'ECR-RT e abbiamo scoperto nel campione un tipo di attaccamento insicuro. Non abbiamo trovato correlazioni tra il congedo per malattia, il presenzialismo e l'attaccamento tra i partecipanti. È stato sviluppato uno strumento metodologico per l'ambiente sloveno che può essere utilizzato per misurare l'attaccamento con un'aggiunta per la misurazione del congedo per malattia e del presenzialismo. L'incarico di questa ricerca presenta i risultati della correlazione tra l'attaccamento degli insegnanti, il congedo per malattia e il presenzialismo e, allo stesso tempo, richiede che si facciano ricerche simili in altri paesi.

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1. Introduction

Research of the attachment concept is a relatively new field in education. Rose et al. (2018), Bergin and Bergin (2009) believe that a secure attachment style is optimal for establishing quality relationships and has a strong impact on teacher well-being and health (Cozolino, 2013). On the other hand, anxiety and avoidance attachment is more often associated with dissatisfaction, stress, burnout (Gentry et al., 2007; Malach Pines, 2007), sickness absence (Krpalek et al., 2014; Harms, 2011) and similar personal problems as it is much more stressful for the organism (Tronick, 2007; Schore, 2004). Some studies also show that the consequences of insecure attachment (anxiety, avoidance) can be manifested in the form of sickness absence, presenteeism, stress and health, job burnout and negatively correlated with job performance etc. (Virga et al., 2019; Yip et al., 2018; Lopez & Ramos, 2016; Dahling & Librizzi, 2015; Krpalek et al., 2014; Harms, 2011; Maunder et al., 2011; Richards & Schat, 2011). The purpose of this article is to present the association between teachers' adult attachment styles and teachers' sickness absence and presenteeism. The focus on researching the connection between teachers' adult attachment and sickness absence and presenteeism stems from the fact that the rate of sickness absence and the rate of presenteeism have been constantly increasing in the education sector in Slovenia. At the same time, there is practically no scientific research in this area for teachers. The main objective of this article is to present findings regarding whether there is a link between teachers' adult attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance) and teachers' sickness absence and presenteeism in elementary schools.

2. Theory and hypothesis development

Attachment theory, based on the work of John Bowlby (1982), postulates that all individuals are born with an innate desire to seek proximity to others in times of need or distress in order to enhance their survival prospects. When these efforts of gaining proximity are successful, individuals develop a sense of security. This sense of security (or lack thereof) then becomes the basis of their own individual attachment style which then remains relatively fixed over the lifespan of the individual. (Harms, 2011). Later in the 20th century, authors also started to research the types of attachment in adults (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). Research findings have shown that approximately 60% of individuals described themselves as generally engaging in securely attached relationships, whereas others were describing their relationships as more similar to insecure types of attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). It has been demonstrated that secure individuals possess a greater capacity to regulate emotions than both avoidantly and anxiously attached individuals (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998). Attachment anxiety and avoidance are more often connected to specific personal traits which are less healthy for the body. Findings have also shown that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance are both positively related to workplace deviance behaviour and that they both indirectly predict organizational deviance behaviour through organization-based self-esteem (Ye et al., 2022). All of this is important in the context of our article as we present the significance of adult attachment of teachers in terms of sickness absence and presenteeism.

2.1 *Sickness absence*

Sickness absence is a complex phenomenon, influenced by various interrelated factors (Nguyen et al., 2013; Elshout et al., 2013) and its definitions vary (Buzeti et al., 2020; Schmid et al., 2017; Forte, 2017; Nielsen & Daniels, 2016; Fitzgerald et al., 2016; Schouten, 2016; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Løkke, Eskildsen & Jensen, 2007). In our article, sickness absence is treated as all those cases where teachers are absent from work due to personal illness or injury or to care for family members, their absence is treated as temporary from a temporal point of view (Buzeti et al., 2016). Lokke et al. (2007) explain that research shows that sickness absence among employees is higher for women compared to men even if they perform the same job. Additionally, Ones et al. (2003) explain that there is a relationship between those who are conscientious (caring) and sickness absence. Evans and Palmer (2000) believe that emotionally unstable and anxious people are more likely to be temporarily absent from work than those who are emotionally stable and introverted. Abu Sheikha and Younis (2006) in their article explain that Zabin in his research found that all those who were married had a higher rate of sickness absence compared to those who were not married.

Teaching is a highly stressful job (Friedman, 2006; Johnson et al., 2005; Kyriacou, 2001; Piekarska, 2000; Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis & Parker, 2000; Base, 1982; in Riley, 2013) and the consequences could be reflected in the form of sickness absence. Research analysing the sickness absence of teachers shows that the percentage of sickness absence ranges between 5% and 21% (Alcazar et al., 2006; Das, Dercon, Habyarimana, & Krishnan, 2005; Cueto & Alcazar, 2004). Based on NIJZ (National Institute of Public Health) data (2014-2020), we found that the greatest percentage of lost calendar days in the education sector in Slovenia due to sickness absence was recorded in 2019 at 4.7%, and the lowest percentage in 2014 at 3.5%. The number has been constantly increasing.

2.2 *Presenteeism*

Presenteeism refers to the phenomenon of employees presenting to work or still coming to work despite medical problems or mental illness that should prompt absence from work (Kinman & Wray, 2018; Jonathon et al., 2014; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Johns, 2010; Bungum et al., 2003; Aronsson et al., 2000; Eurofound, 2017). Presenteeism is a behaviour where an employee is physically present at work with reduced performance due to illness or other reasons (Lui et al., 2018). Presenteeism can be defined as a phenomenon where people, despite complaints and ill-health that should prompt them to rest and take sick leave, go to work regardless (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005). The reasons influencing presenteeism according to Aboagya et al. (2019) are diverse, e.g. employees having a sense of irreplaceability, feeling a strong connection with the organization and work, being afraid of work building up while absent or being afraid of the employer or losing their job (Aronsson et al., 2000). Kinman & Wray (2018) state that presenteeism is considerably more frequent than sickness absence and almost twice as costly. Moreover, presenteeism has been considered an early indicator of future sickness absence and disability pensions (Gustafsson et al., 2019). Presenteeism has been found to be associated with poor mental well-being (Collins et al., 2018, Aboagya et al, 2019) and additional research by Miraglia and Johns (2016) shows that coming to work while ill can be detrimental to employees' work performance.

The presenteeism is a global phenomenon and it occurs in all professions (Cooper and Lu, 2018). This is confirmed by the latest survey entitled Sixth European Working Conditions Survey (2017) with 44,000 respondents from 35 European countries. Employees working in France, Malta, Slovenia, Sweden, Denmark, Malta and some other countries stand out as more than 55% of them report presenteeism. Previous research shows that presenteeism is very widespread in Slovenia; more than 55% of employees who participated in the survey have engaged in the behaviour (Ludvik Marolt, 2020; Škerjanc & Dodič Fikfak, 2020; Eurofound, 2017; Mlakar, 2013, Buzeti, 2015). One of the highest proportions of presenteeism was found in the education sector (Dudenhöffer et al., 2017).

Presenteeism and its implications among teachers are particularly problematic because presenteeism could be a risk for the teachers' own health and for their future sickness absence. Presenteeism may also affect teachers' performance at work, increasing the risks to children, etc. Arosson et al. (2003) investigated the relation between teachers' skills to unwind and to recover from work stress and presenteeism and found that teachers of the non-recuperated group showed more frequent presenteeism over the preceding 12 months. In the research of Dudenhöffer et al. (2017) more than half of the teachers reported presenteeism, and significantly higher proportions of presenteeism were established for teachers with a poor relationship with supervisors (less support, less cooperation, more conflicts) and colleagues (less support, less cooperation). Moreover, a higher proportion of presenteeism was identified for teachers reporting an imbalance between workload and working time as well as between working time and leisure time, and for teachers with an inappropriate administrative workload and with an inconvenient schedule of working. A higher rate of presenteeism was indicated by teachers reporting less respect and support of parents, inappropriate recognition of performance, and inappropriate job autonomy. Presenteeism was also tied to exhaustion/fatigue or poor health (Dudenhoffer et al., 2017).

Ferreira and Martinez (2012) found that results of elementary school teachers from private and public institutions revealed that personal and contextual characteristics as well as presenteeism were predictive of teacher burnout. They also found that public school teachers exhibited higher levels of presenteeism and that teachers who tend to better complete their work (e.g., with higher levels of 'Completing Work') suffered from higher levels of emotional exhaustion. Consequently, there is an apparent cost – which is emotional exhaustion – to finishing work tasks while suffering from any kind of health condition that may lead to presenteeism.

All those symptoms of sickness absence and presenteeism are often connected with insecure attachment styles and that is why we wanted to proceed with the survey by searching for direct links between teachers' adult attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance) and teachers' sickness absence and presenteeism. For instance, insecure attachment tends to endorse low self-esteem (Gamble & Roberts, 2005). Fearful style has a high impact on mental health in both men and women (Gittleman, et al., 1998). Besides facilitating a relatively secure childhood, attachment to caregivers fosters the development of critical social competencies that help maintain supportive relationships in adulthood (Mallinckrodt, 2000). Insecure childhood attachment leads to attachment avoidance or anxiety in adults and to deficits in social competencies. Therefore, not only do adults with attachment insecurities tend to lack social support and coping resources, the relationship they do experience often serve as sources of stress in themselves (Mallinckrodt, 2005).

There are few studies which focus on the connection between teachers' adult attachment styles (secure, insecure) and teachers' sickness absence (Maunder et al., 2011) and there have been no investigations into the

associations between adult attachment patterns and presenteeism and sickness absence (Krpalek et al., 2014). Yip et al. (2018) explain that the relationship between employees' attachment styles and work-related outcomes is a widely established application of attachment theory to the workplace. However, the research of Krpalek et al. (2014) shows that insecure attachment is positively associated with sickness absence and that attachment anxiety is not significantly associated with sickness absence. Maunder et al. (2011) detected a positive relationship between attachment anxiety and sickness absence. Jovinov's study (2012) shows that attachment security was not associated with absenteeism; it appeared to buffer against reports of reduced productivity while at work (presenteeism). Results also revealed that workers with high levels of attachment avoidance reported increased absenteeism rates. Krpalek et al. (2014) also show that insecure attachment patterns are positively associated with presenteeism through the mediating effects of negative emotions, external affect regulator use, and continuous strain. Attachment anxiety was positively associated with presenteeism.

Our research thus represents a new understanding of the importance of a teacher's attachment in connection with certain phenomena that occur as a result of the teacher facing and experiencing certain situations at their work. Based on the literature of adult attachment, sickness absence and presenteeism, we proposed the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: There is an association between teachers' adult attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance) and teachers' sickness absence in elementary schools.
- Hypothesis 2: There is an association between teachers' adult attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance) and teachers' presenteeism in elementary schools.

3. Methods

3.1 Procedure and Participants

Research data was collected with an online questionnaire. We included teachers of elementary schools and carried out research in Slovenian elementary schools in September 2019. In our research, we gathered answers/data from 779 respondents, which represents a 3.73% share of the entire population. The sample in our research included 78.7% respondents with a university degree or higher education and 20.0% of respondents with other types of education. Only 1.3% declared having upper secondary education. Most of them were married (65.1%) or living in a partnership (30.4%), all other options represent the remaining 4.5%. The majority were female (90.6%), 9.4% were males. The median age was 44 years (from 38 in the 1st quartile to 52 in the 3rd quartile). 48.9% respondents worked in rural areas and 51.1% in urban areas (from all statistical regions of Slovenia). Years of service in the current organization ranged from 9.5 in the 1st quartile to 25 in the 3rd quartile with 17 as median.

3.2 Materials

A questionnaire was designed for the empirical portion of the survey, and consisted of several sets of questions. The questionnaire featured the following content groups:

- *The first set of questions* included six short, open- and closed-type questions pertaining to the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics.

- *The second set of questions* addressed teachers’ sickness absence. There are three short questions of open and closed type, which investigate the occurrence of sickness absences from work in the past 12 months, reasons for the same, and the frequency of sickness absences in the past 12 months expressed as the number of days and the number of sets of absences (“how many times”). We used the methodology used by Ybema et al. (2010) and Buzeti et al. (2016).
- *The third set of questions* addressed teachers’ presenteeism. The questions here are of the closed type (“Yes” or “No”). “Yes” in relation to a question means “Yes, I have performed my work tasks despite being ill or injured in the last 12 months.” “No” means “No, I have not performed my work tasks due to being ill or injured in the last 12 months.”
- In *the fourth set of questions*, the instrument called Experiences in Close Relationship-Revised, (Fraley et. al., 2000), revised for teachers by Riley (2013), was used. We translated the questionnaire into Slovene so that we had both language combinations and we reconciled the items in collaboration with a group of experts. It addresses the adult attachment styles on two orthogonal subscales: Anxiety and Avoidance.

4. Results

The descriptive analysis of the results of our research presented in Table 1 shows that the arithmetic mean value for anxiety among respondent elementary school teachers is $M=43.3$ ($SD=17.3$) and the arithmetic mean value for avoidance is $M=51.4$ ($SD=16.8$).

	Anxiety	Avoidance	1	2	3	4	5	6
N	779	779	779	779	779	779	779	779
Mean	43.3	51.4	2.92	1.46	8.09	2.73	1.75	0.815
Standard deviation	17.3	16.8	9.07	7.60	28.0	10.8	10.8	8.60
Minimum	18	18	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	99	103	200	200	365	151	200	200
Skewness	0.656	0.364	14.0	23.1	8.55	10.5	12.6	19.7
25th percentile	29.0	39.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
50th percentile	40.0	51.0	0.00	0.00	2.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
75th percentile	55.0	62.0	3.00	2.00	5.00	2.00	0.00	0.00

N – number of answers; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation; 1 – How many days have you been absent due to sickness in the last 12 months for the purpose of caring for a family member (children, grandparents, etc.); 2 – Frequency of sickness absence in the last 12 months for the purpose of caring for a family member (children, grandparents, etc.); 3 – How many days have you been absent due to sickness in the last 12 months due to your own illness or injury; 4 – Frequency of sickness absence in the last 12 months due to own illness or injury; 5 – How many days have you been absent due to sickness in the last 12 months due to various pressures and stress in the work environment; 6 – Frequency of sickness absence in the last 12 months due to various pressures and stress in the work environment.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the teachers’ adult attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance) and sickness absence

If we compare the mean values by gender, the results show that the anxiety in men is $M = 46.3$ ($SD = 16.1$) and the mean value for women is $M = 43$ ($SD = 17.4$). The differences between the sexes are not statistically significant in view of the t-test calculation. The differences between the sexes in terms of avoidance are similarly expressed, i.e., $M = 54.8$ ($SD = 16.2$) for men while it is $M = 51.1$ ($SD = 16.8$) for women. The differences calculated by the t-test are not statistically significant for avoidance. However, teachers in our study are more prone to avoidance than to anxiety.

We also examined the differences between the level of anxiety and avoidance depending on whether the teaching job is done in the city (51.1% respondents) or the countryside (48.9%). The anxiety of teachers in the countryside was expressed with an arithmetic mean of $M=44.6$ ($SD=17.9$) and those from the city with $M=42.1$ ($SD=16.6$). T-test shows statistically significant differences in anxiety ($p=0.041$) and no statistically significant difference in avoidance ($p=0.062$).

The results of the descriptive analysis (Table 1) for sickness absence show that teachers in the last 12 months were on average (8.09 days) on sickness absence mostly due to their own illness or injury. On average, they were absent from work 2.92 days for the purpose of caring for a family member. If we compare the results of our sample with the nationwide results for Slovenia, we find that our respondents were on average (12.76 days) less absent due to sickness relative to the average rate in Slovenia in 2019 (17.7 days per employee) and on average less absent (17.2 days) than respondents in the education sector in 2019.

Our survey was also concerned with whether teachers were absent from work in the last 12 months, despite being physically able to perform their work. The results of the survey (Table 2) show that 5.9% of teachers answered that they could perform their job normally, but they still preferred to be absent from work, while 94.1% of teachers answered that they were not absent from work if they thought that they were indeed able to do the work. The results of the analysis also show that among those 5.9% of teachers who were absent, most were subject teachers (58.7%), while 39.1% were class teachers and the least were after-school class teachers (2.2%). Comparing the marital status, there were no significant differences. Among those who were absent despite being able to do the work, 58.7% work in cities and 41.3% in rural areas.

The results show that 82% of teachers answered that – in the last 12 months – they came to work despite an illness, which would have warranted them being absent from work, due to a sense of responsibility and duty. The analysis shows that among those 82% of teachers, most were subject teachers (49.3%), 42.9% were class teachers and the fewest were after-school class teachers (7.8%). If we compare the marital status of those who worked despite an illness, we find no significant differences.

We also made an analysis according to the teachers' place of work (city, countryside) and found that among those who went to work or worked despite the fact that they could have been temporarily absent, 50.4% worked in rural areas and 49.6% in cities. The results of the analysis show that among those who did not work and stayed at home, 57.9% worked in elementary schools in cities and 42.1% in rural areas. Based on our research results, such a result can be understood as follows: teachers who teach in rural elementary schools are statistically significantly more anxious than teachers who teach in cities.

In the study, we examined how teachers' anxiety and avoidance were associated with sickness absence and presenteeism in elementary schools. Both hypotheses of the article are also related to this, and we therefore present the results of the bivariate analysis below.

	Anxiety	Avoidance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Anxiety	—									
Avoidance	0.493***	—								
1	0.000	-0.061	—							
2	-0.013	-0.048	0.863***	—						
3	0.063	0.018	0.059	-0.012	—					
4	0.012	-0.034	0.031	0.034	0.266***	—				
5	0.072*	0.006	0.035	-0.008	0.386***	0.212***	—			
6	0.033	0.031	0.027	-0.005	0.327***	0.233***	0.816***	—		
7	0.273**	0.120	0.222**	0.157*	0.452***	0.421***	0.641***	0.631***	—	
8	0.095	0.100	-0.183	-0.163	-0.204***	0.217***	-0.085***	-0.090***	0.037	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

1 – How many days have you been absent due to sickness in the last 12 months for the purpose of caring for a family member (children, grandparents, etc.); 2 – Frequency of sickness absence in the last 12 months for the purpose of caring for a family member (children, grandparents, etc.); 3 – How many days have you absent due to sickness the last 12 months due to your own illness or injury; 4 – Frequency of sickness absence in the last 12 months due to own illness or injury; 5 – How many days have you been absent due to sickness in the last 12 months due to various pressures and stress in the work environment; 6 – Frequency of sickness absence in the last 12 months due to various pressures and stress in the work environment; 7 – Sickness absence of teachers in the last 12 months despite being physically able to perform the work; 8 – Presence of teachers in the workplace in the last 12 months despite illness (they could have been on sick leave) due to a sense of responsibility and duty (presenteeism).

Table 2: Zero-Order Bivariate Correlations

The results in Table 2 show that the anxious and avoidant style of adult attachment among the surveyed teachers are associated. When checking the association of other variables, which we compared with one another and in connection with the variables of anxiety and avoidance, we found significant association in the “number of days of absence due to various pressures and stress in the work environment of teachers” variable, but low correlation. The results for the “sickness absence of teachers despite being able to do the job” variable show that there is a weak, moderate correlation with the anxiety of teachers.

We find that hypothesis 1 “There is an association between teachers’ adult attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance) and teachers’ sickness absence in elementary schools” is not confirmed. We can also not confirm hypothesis 2 “There is an association between teachers’ adult attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance) and teachers presenteeism in elementary schools”.

5. Discussion

Teachers in elementary schools perform pedagogical activities in a work environment that can be secure or insecure, and this could highlight their way of functioning in relationships, which could be reflected in the forms of presenteeism or sickness absence. Various experts note (Cozolino, 2013; Bowlby, 1967) that the inability to connect, belong, cooperate, is reflected in anxiety, depression, and alienation, which could be a factor for sickness absence. Considering the above, we believe that teachers require support in understanding and resolving distress so that they do not become more prone to avoidance, but rather learn an emotionally and socially more mature way of living and behaving in relationships through positive experiences of cooperation. This would be reflected in a reduction in the level of avoidance and an increase in cooperation and a sense of security. Both

Cozolino (2013) and Porges (2017) state that institutions neglect the role of security despite it being very important.

Our aim in the study was to determine the association between teachers' adult attachment styles and teachers' sickness absence and presenteeism in elementary schools. In order to obtain quality data, we used the ECR-RT methodological tool to determine the style of teachers' attachment. Unfortunately, we have not found any other studies in the scientific databases that used the ECR-RT questionnaire. We found some research conducted on samples of teachers using the ECR or ECR-R, but the results are statistically not comparable. Given the lack of research using the ECR-R questionnaire on samples of teachers, we decided to use the methodological tool that was used by Riley and which was developed to measure attachment in teachers. Our postulations of a lack of research in this area are also confirmed by Krpalek et al. (2014) and Maunder et al. (2011).

The results indicate that there is no association between teachers' adult attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance) and sickness absence. Our findings cannot be compared with similar research among teachers because there is none, but we will compare the results with the research performed among other employees (Krpalek et al., 2014). We cannot clearly compare different professional groups, but this provides at least a partial insight into what a similar study in this area shows. The results of the study by Krpalek et al. (2014) namely show that insecure attachment patterns are positively associated with sickness absence, and attachment anxiety was not significantly associated with sickness absence. The results are partially similar to our results as there is no association between anxiety and sickness absence. The results of the Jovinov (2012) show that workers with high levels of avoidance reported increased absenteeism rates. The result is different compared to our study but was not done among teachers.

If we compare the results for sickness absence from our study with the nationwide results for Slovenia, we find that the surveyed teachers in elementary schools in Slovenia were on average less absent due to sickness than the average rate in Slovenia in 2019. Such results could be explained by arguing that teachers are inclined to being absent from work as little as possible due to the nature of their work and their human-teacher posture, which would be gratifying; however, on the other hand result could speak of the behaviour caused by anxiety or avoidant attachment. According to research which finds that people with an avoidant attachment style use evasive defences (Berant et al., 2001, in Cassidy and Shaver; Mikulincer, 1998; in Cassidy and Shaver, 2008) and are characterized by a high level of anxiety this means that they are unable to not focus on themselves when faced with the stress of another person and help that other person (Marvin & Britner, 1999). This could be related to teachers also avoiding unnecessary conflicts, because avoidant people are afraid of expressing negative emotions as this would put them at risk of rejection, and they are also afraid of being exposed to conflict and dissatisfaction (Birtchnell, 1988).

As regards the result that 94.1% of the respondent teachers answered that they were not absent from work if they found that they were able to work, we can be satisfied because the result establishes a positive teacher attitude towards work and are highly ethical and moral.

Our research also does not confirm the association between teachers' adult attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance) and teachers' presenteeism in elementary schools. The result also cannot be compared with previous research among teachers. However, if we compare our results with the results on other professionals (Krpalek et al., 2014), we can find that they determined that insecure attachment patterns are positively associated with

presenteeism. However, our research has led us to the finding that 82% of teachers answered that, in the last 12 months, they came to work despite an illness, because of a sense of responsibility and duty. It is interesting to note that 57.9% of those who took advantage of the sick leave and stayed at home when they were sick worked in cities, while only 42.1% remained at home in rural areas. This result can be worrying, as it points to presenteeism among teachers in elementary schools in Slovenia, as according to Lui et al. (2018) presenteeism is a behaviour in which an employee is physically present at work with reduced performance (Lui et al., 2018). In this regard, we also found that there is a statistically significant difference between rural and urban teachers, with rural being more anxious. The phenomenon of presenteeism among rural teachers could be associated with a statistically significant higher anxiety in them. The result can be explained by arguing that the probable reasons for such a high percentage of attendance at work lie in their inner anxiety, which can result in high personal responsibility, duty to their profession and the work which they perform as well as them taking their profession very seriously.

6. Conclusion

Attachment style can result in different behaviours which are reflected in the presenteeism or absenteeism of employees.

6.1 Theoretical implications

The contributions of our study are varied. The theoretical applicability of the study is primarily manifested as the translation of the ECR-RT methodological tool into Slovene its first application to a large Slovene sample, which means that all other Slovene researchers will be able to use it from now on. The results show that no association was found between sickness absence and presenteeism and between attachment styles.

6.2 Practical implications

The results of this study have several implications in practice. Firstly, a methodological tool for the Slovenian territory has been developed, which can be used to measure teachers' attachment along with an additional questionnaire for measuring sickness absence and presenteeism. Secondly, the results of our study indicate that Slovenian teachers on average display an insecure attachment style. Similar results were found by Riley (2013) in Australian teachers, where teachers were on average insecurely attached. This could be concerning as Cozolino (2013) points out, because insecurely attached teachers do not have sufficiently developed emotional capacities to regulate their own feelings and indirectly also the students' feelings. It would make sense in practice to offer appropriate support programmes for teachers to improve recognition (Elliott, 1988) and awareness as well as regulation of emotions and supervision, all of which would allow them to mature towards secure attachment. Thirdly, the finding about averagely insecure attachment in teachers also provides insight into the current situation, which clearly shows the need to learn such skills at secondary school level and, most importantly, at university level. This could be useful information for decision-makers who prepare policies and programmes for secondary and tertiary levels of teacher education.

6.3 Limitations

We did not collect data for secondary school teachers in Slovenia, but it might be interesting and valuable to explore this as well. It would also be interesting to carry out a qualitative study to find deeper and broader aspects of the research issue. Additionally, it would be useful to undertake a study in connection with Bowlby's idea of the importance of secondary attachment figures – people with whom children develop a close attachment relationship, well-known by their primary attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969), e. g. teachers, caregivers and therapists, etc. In some ways these figures become essential in the development of secure attachment in their students (Lynch, M., & Cicchetti, D. (1992). It is not yet known how strongly teachers are aware of this important role. As Kennedy and Kennedy (2004) say, teachers need to be helped to recognize the impact of their negative emotions on classroom behaviour and the benefits of a positive relationship. It would be important to teach them strategies for self-awareness, emotional regulation, etc. This could improve their competence to provide a secure base and a secure heaven for children and students.

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