A Study of Job Stress, Psychological Burnout, Resilience, and Happiness Among Special Education Teachers Handling Persons with Disabilities

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Abstract: This study was conducted to address the difficult environmental problems experienced by special education teachers for early childhood while guiding children with disabilities, and to check the internal and external difficulties of teachers through psychological exhaustion, resilience, and happiness scales. The purpose of this study is to find out job stress, psychological burnout, resilience, and happiness according to general characteristics (age, work experience, working hours) of special education teachers for early childhood, and to establish educational support plans for field teachers. The subject of this study were 97 special education teachers at daycare centers for children with disabilities located in Gwangju and Jeollanam-do. A survey was conducted among 11 institutions selected through a wireless sampling method, and data were collected face-to-face and online. For data analysis, descriptive statistics, reliability, t-test, F-test, and Scheffe were performed using SPSS 21.0. The results of this study are as follows. First, the higher the age of the special education teachers for early childhood, the higher the job stress and the sense of happiness. Second, the higher the work experience, the higher the job stress and psychological burnout of special education teachers for early childhood. Third, special education teachers for early childhood were more psychologically burnout the longer they worked. In particular, it was found that there is a difference in general characteristics even when the subject of education taught by special education teachers for early childhood is different, and it can also vary depending on the working environment of the teacher. Therefore, it suggests that various psycho-emotional supports for early childhood special education teachers, as well as improvements to the teacher working environment and educational support, are required to prevent job stress and psychological burnout. In addition, follow-up research is necessary by adding variables such as the age of special education teachers for early childhood, marital status, type of work organization, position, and class hours.

Keywords: Special Education Teachers, Job Stress, Psychological Burnout, Resilience, Happiness

1. Introduction

1.1 Need for Research
Happiness is an individual's subjective sense of well-being and refers to maintaining a state of satisfaction and psychological peace in daily life[1]. Since the happiness of special education teachers for early childhood directly affects the education of young children, it is necessary to have enough joy and satisfaction while working as a teacher.

As of 2020, there are approximately 1,091 special education teachers for early childhood working in kindergartens in general schools in Korea[2]. The figure rises even higher when special early childhood teachers at daycare centers for people with disabilities are included.

Special education teachers for early childhood are experiencing stress and psychological burnout as they perform various roles such as providing a learning environment for teaching young children, teaching and learning practice and evaluation, office work, and parent counseling[3]. In addition, immediate practical responses to unpredictable situations caused by behavioral development of infancy and early childhood[4] and excessive demands for workload cause accumulation of job stress[5]. In particular, although there are emotional difficulties from the outside, high job stress and psychological burnout due to difficulties in human relationships[6] rather than one's own lack of teaching ability or wages, and negative emotions such as psychological anxiety or depression often occur[7].

Special education teachers for early childhood with high job stress have a negative impact not only on the teacher but also on young children[8], and teachers with high job stress have a low sense of happiness and a negative attitude toward infants[9]. In addition, when job stress is high, it is not possible to perform an efficient job, resulting in a decrease in happiness. Therefore, the job stress of special education teachers in early childhood has a negative effect on children's social and emotional development, provision of a positive learning environment, and teaching and learning activities[3][5].

Although the importance of the quality of education is emphasized, a large amount of work and working hours cause physical and mental stress, which leads to psychological burnout[10]. In a study on the psychological burnout of special education teachers for early childhood, poor work environment, problems with the training process, and low social awareness and welfare were found to be factors of teacher stress[11]. Psychological burnout refers to a state of physical, mental, and emotional burnout that results from the accumulation of situations in which teachers fail to effectively cope with job-related stress[12].

When special education teachers for early childhood experience psychological burnout as a result of accumulating situations in which they are unable to adequately cope with job stress, they are unable to provide effective care and teaching to young children and lose enthusiasm for their work[13]. Teachers who have experienced psychological burnout have difficulty in providing appropriate education to young children, which negatively affects the development of young children and downgrade the quality of educational institutions. Psychological burnout among special education teachers for early childhood reduces the quality of interaction between teachers and young children, has a negative impact on young children's learning ability and development, and leads to a decline in educational quality. If exposure to psychological burnout continues for a long time, it leads to frustration and negative beliefs, as well as psychological burnout, helplessness, anxiety, and maladjustment to the environment[14].

Because job stress of special education teachers in early childhood is a factor that reduces happiness, it is difficult to completely exclude them from the education field. Therefore, it can be said that a study on the effect of resilience in job stress situations is necessary to improve teachers' happiness. Previous studies[7][15] revealing the influence between job stress and resilience have shown that resilience acted as a psychological or social resource and became a major factor in lowering job stress.

When the resilience of early childhood special education teachers was low, psychological burnout was high[16], implying that the teacher's educational activities may affect interactions with young children in the classroom. Teachers with high resilience are not frustrated even when role conflicts arise while performing various roles, and they elicit positive thoughts and actions, which have less influence on role performance as teachers and help them overcome conflicts. In addition, it evokes positive
emotions and positively influences teaching behavior, which gives confidence in teaching and allows students to plan and implement teaching and learning in consideration of the learner's position[17].

Therefore, although many studies have been conducted on job stress, psychological exhaustion, resilience, and euphoria of early childhood special education teachers suggested in previous studies, studies using teacher variables such as age, work experience, and working hours as independent variables are insufficient. This study aims to identify the differences in each variable according to the general characteristics of special education teachers for early childhood. If this study reveals the kind of job stress, psychological exhaustion, resilience, and happiness are according to general characteristics, it is judged that the improvement of the teacher support system will lead to job satisfaction.

The level of happiness of special education teachers for early childhood not only improves the quality of education but also greatly affects the teachers themselves. If there is one-way discussion that emphasizes only the teacher's happiness in order to improve the level of happiness of infants and young children, their happiness is more likely to result in the teacher's personal problems and responsibilities. In order to improve teachers' sense of well-being, it is necessary to conduct a wide-ranging and diverse exploration of which variables can predict happiness in the personal, psychological, and environmental dimensions.

1.2 Research Questions

First, what are the differences in job stress, psychological burnout, resilience, and happiness according to the age of special education teachers for early childhood?

Second, what are the differences in job stress, psychological burnout, resilience, and happiness according to the work experience of special education teachers for early childhood?

Third, what are the differences in job stress, psychological burnout, resilience, and happiness according to the working hours of special education teachers for early childhood?

2. Research Method

2.1 Research Subject

In order to analyze the relationship between job stress, psychological burnout, resilience, and happiness of special education teachers for early childhood, this study conducted a survey targeting special education teachers for early childhood located in Gwangju and Jeonnam. The subjects are from 11 childcare centers specializing in disability in Gwangju and Jeollanam-do selected through wireless sampling method and distribute questionnaires face-to-face and non-face-to-face. Institutions with three or more special education teachers for early childhood were selected by a random sampling method. In particular, this study included special education teachers for early childhood, but not nursery teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>General Characteristics of Study Subjects (N=97)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 50's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in [Table 1], in this study, differences in gender ratios were not meaningful because differences were not investigated for each variable according to gender.

2.2 Research Tool

2.2.1 Job Stress Scale

In this study, the teacher job stress scale was reconstructed to measure the job stress of special education teachers in early childhood[18], and the number of items was adjusted and corrected and supplemented to fit this study. Although the reliability and validity of the job stress scale used in this study has been verified through previous studies, two special education doctors and two special education field experts reviewed each question to ensure that it was appropriate for special education teachers at daycare centers specializing in disabilities. A scale was produced by correcting and supplementing the items.

In this study, [18], there were 27 questions, which consisted of lack of director leadership and administrative support (11 questions), work overload (8 questions), peer relationship (5 questions), and parental relationship (3 questions). As the 8 questions corresponding to 'Director Leadership' are about the operation of a daycare center specializing in disabilities or the director rather than the items related to the teacher themselves, we accepted the opinion that it is not appropriate in the validity test, so only 3 questions of 'insufficient administrative support' were used. Each item was rated from ‘strongly
disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’ on a Likert 5-point scale, with a higher score indicating higher stress. In this study, the overall reliability of job stress (Cronbach's $\alpha$) was .873. Reliability by sub-factor was .804 for lack of administrative support, .835 for work overload, .801 for peer relationship, and .749 for parental relationship.

### 2.2.2 Psychological Burnout Scale

In this study, 22 items with 3 factors of MBI (Maslach Burnout Inventory;[19]) were used to investigate the psychological burnout of special education teachers for early childhood. The three factors of this scale are the emotional burnout scale, which measures fatigue due to energy consumption, the depersonalization scale, which is a negative and cynical attitude response that early childhood special education teachers show toward infants and young children, and a scale for reducing the sense of achievement felt as a result of self-failure in achieving goals. The psychological burnout scale used in this study has been verified for reliability and validity through previous studies, but in order to modify it appropriately for special education teachers at daycare centers specializing in disabilities, two special education doctors and two special education field experts reviewed each question. A scale was produced by correcting and supplementing the items.

In this study, the tools applied by [20] to childcare teachers were modified and supplemented to suit this study. This tool was measured using a Likert 5-point scale ranging from 'not at all' to 'strongly agree', and a high score means high psychological burnout. And the 8 items (4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, 21) in the sense of achievement reduction area are reverse-scoring items. The overall reliability of psychological burnout (Cronbach's $\alpha$) in this study was .889. For each sub-factor, the reliability was .778 for emotional exhaustion, .737 for depersonalization, and .825 for decreased sense of achievement.

### 2.2.3 Resilience Scale

In this study, to measure the resilience of special education teachers for early childhood, the scale modified by [21] with 24 items was modified and supplemented to fit this study. The reliability and validity of the resilience scale used in this study were verified through previous studies, but in order to modify it appropriately for special education teachers at daycare centers specializing in disabilities, two special education doctors and two special education field experts reviewed each question. A scale was produced by correcting and supplementing the items.

The resilience scale in this study consists of 24 items, including confidence (8 items), interpersonal relationships (7 items), optimism (7 items), and anger control ability (2 items) with 4 sub-factors. The scale composition was a 5-point Likert scale, from 'not at all' to 'strongly agree', and all questions were reverse-scored and scored. Higher scores indicate the higher resilience of teachers. The overall reliability of resilience (Cronbach's $\alpha$) in this study was .954. Reliability by sub-factor was .900 confidence, .895 interpersonal relationships, .882 optimism, and .797 anger control ability.

### 2.2.4 Happiness Scale

In this study, to measure the happiness of special education teachers in early childhood, the tool used by [22] of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire was modified and supplemented to fit this study. Although the reliability and validity of the happiness scale used in this study have been verified through previous studies, the items were reviewed by two special education doctors and two special education field experts in order to modify them appropriately for special education teachers at daycare centers specializing in disabilities. was corrected and supplemented to produce a scale.

The happiness scale in this study was measured using a Likert 5-point scale ranging from 'not at all' to 'strongly agree', and a higher score is interpreted as a higher level of happiness. The euphoria questionnaire consists of 29 items, including the frequency and intensity of positive emotions, 17 items
of positive happiness meaning high life satisfaction, and 12 items of negative happiness meaning depression and instability for negative emotions. Among the items, 12 items of negative happiness (No. 1, 5, 6, 10, 13, 14, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29) are scored as inverse scoring items. In addition, the overall happiness score is the average score of the sum of positive happiness and negatively scored negative happiness. The overall reliability of happiness (Cronbach’s α) in this study was .937. For each sub-factor, the reliability was .932 for positive happiness and .822 for negative happiness.

2.3 Research Procedure

This study examined previous studies to determine the relationship between job stress, psychological burnout, resilience, and happiness of special education teachers for early childhood. The study period is from September 2020 to October 2021. Based on the results of previous studies, measurement tools related to job stress, psychological exhaustion, resilience, and happiness were selected, and questionnaires were composed, distributed and collected.

After making an appointment with the head of a daycare center in order to distribute and collect the questionnaires, the contents of the questionnaire including participation in the survey by visitation, online, or mail were explained. Research institutes received a ‘research approval letter from the host institution’, and teachers who wished to participate received a ‘research subject explanation and consent form’. In addition, IRB approval (1041478-2021-HR-008) was obtained from the Bioethics Committee of Nambu University, and questionnaires were distributed and collected.

2.4 Data Analysis

The SPSS 21.0 program was used to verify this research problem, and it was analyzed as follows.

First, to find out the general background of the subjects who participated in the study, the frequency and percentage were calculated using descriptive statistical analysis, and Cronbach's α coefficient was performed to check the reliability of the measurement tool.

Second, multivariate analysis was performed including skewness and kurtosis to confirm the multivariate normal distribution.

Third, t-test, F-test, and Scheffe post hoc analysis were performed to examine the differences between the study variables.

3. Results

3.1 Differences in Job Stress, Psychological Burnout, Resilience, and Happiness according to Age of Special Education Teachers for Early Childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>20s a</th>
<th>30s b</th>
<th>40s c</th>
<th>50s d</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Scheffe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burnout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a result of examining the differences according to the age of special education teachers in early childhood in [Table 2], significant differences were found in job stress (F=3.78, p<.05) and happiness (F=3.14, p<.05). That is, teachers in their 20s (M=2.39) had lower job stress than teachers in their 30s (M=2.82), and teachers in their 30s (M=3.05) had a lower sense of happiness than teachers in their 50s (M=3.22).

3.2 Differences in Job Stress, Psychological Burnout, Resilience, and Happiness according to the Work Experience of Special Education Teachers for Early Childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Less than 2 years a</th>
<th>Less than 5 years b</th>
<th>Less than 10 years c</th>
<th>More than 10 years d</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Scheffe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological burnout</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of examining the differences according to the work experience of special education teachers in early childhood in [Table 3], there were significant differences in job stress (F=6.24, p<.01) and psychological burnout (F=3.06, p<.05). Teachers with less than 2 years of work experience (M=2.33) had less stress than teachers with less than 10 years of service (M=2.89) and teachers with more than 10 years of work experience (M=2.73), and teachers with less than 5 years of service (M=2.50). It was found that there was less stress among teachers who worked for more than 10 years (M=2.73). In addition, teachers with less than 2 years of service (M=2.57) showed less psychological burnout than teachers with less than 10 years of service (M=2.86).

3.3 Differences in Job Stress, Psychological Burnout, Resilience, and Happiness according to Working Hours of Special Education Teachers for Early Childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Less than 8 hours a</th>
<th>More than 8 hours and less than 9 hours b</th>
<th>More than 9 hours and less than 10 hours c</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Scheffe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological burnout</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happiness</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of examining the difference according to the working hours of special education teachers for early childhood in [Table 4], there was a significant difference in psychological burnout (F=3.29,
p<.05). In other words, teachers who worked less than 8 hours a day (M=2.57) showed less psychological burnout than teachers who worked 9 or more and less than 10 hours (M=2.87).

Therefore, the higher the age and the more work experience, the higher the job stress, and the more work experience and daily working hours, the higher the psychological burnout. However, the higher the age and educational level, the higher the level of happiness.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between job stress, psychological burnout, resilience, and feelings of happiness according to general characteristics (age, work experience, working hours) of special education teachers for early childhood. The conclusions obtained through the discussion of this study are as follows.

First, as the age of the special education teacher in early childhood increased, the job stress and the sense of happiness becomes higher. In this study, early childhood special education teachers in their 30s experience greater job stress than early childhood special education teachers in their 20s. In the study of [23], it was found that special education teachers in their 20s and 30s experience more job stress than special education teachers in their 40s[24]. Moreover, teachers in their 50s had a higher sense of happiness than teachers in their 30s. These results showed that the happiness of special education teachers in their 30s and older was higher than those in their 30s in [25], but there was no difference by age in the studies of special education teachers in [26].

Second, the higher the work experience, the higher the job stress and psychological burnout of special education teachers for early childhood. In this study, special education teachers for early childhood who worked for more than 10 years had higher job stress than teachers who worked for less than 2 years. In addition, it can be said that it partially coincides with the result of [27] that the higher the educational experience, the higher the stress of the compensation system. In this study, teachers with more than 1 year and less than 5 years reported higher job stress than teachers with less than 1 year. In the study of [27][28], teachers with more than 4 years of teaching experience had more reward-related job stress than teachers with less than 1 year of teaching experience. In these previous studies, it was found that teachers with more than 3 years of teaching experience had higher job stress than teachers with less than 3 years of teaching experience. Therefore, it means that teachers with more than 10 years of work experience have lower psychological burnout compared to teachers with less experience than teachers with less experience. It can be said that there are more experiences of various various failures and experiences such as low expectations, relationships with parents, and promotions. In other words, it is interpreted that early childhood special education teachers with a lot of experience feel more exhausted due to emotional burnout, impersonal experiences, and a reduced sense of achievement.

Third, special education teachers for early childhood were more psychologically exhausted the longer they worked. Early childhood special education teachers who worked 9 to 10 hours a day had more psychological burnout than early childhood special education teachers who worked less than 8 hours a day. These results can be said to be partially consistent with the report in [29] that nursery school teachers who work more than 10 hours a day have more psychological burnout than teachers who work 8 hours or more and less than 9 hours a day in the study of [29].

Special education teachers and nursery teachers working at daycare centers specializing in disabilities are responsible for not only providing classes for young children, but also taking care of children, providing meals, snacks, administrative work, and parental counseling[30]. In addition, they are facing the problem of a circular structure with a low sense of happiness due to a lot of work stress brought by longer working hours. Therefore, it can be inferred that teachers with long working hours have more psychological burnout than teachers with short working hours. Therefore, it can be seen that teachers with long working hours have more psychological burnout than teachers with short working hours.
view of these results, it is necessary to take measures to reduce working hours per day, and it is necessary to prepare guidelines for completing work within working hours. Therefore, it can be said that there is a need for program support such as recharge training and re-education for teachers who have a lot of experience and have a lot of working hours.

5. Acknowledgments

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