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“Geestelijke Gezondheidsbevordering“

Positive Psychological affinities among Primary School Teachers

**Do Personal Values and Social Support among
Primary School Teachers moderate on the
Relationship between Job Demands and
Absenteeism?**

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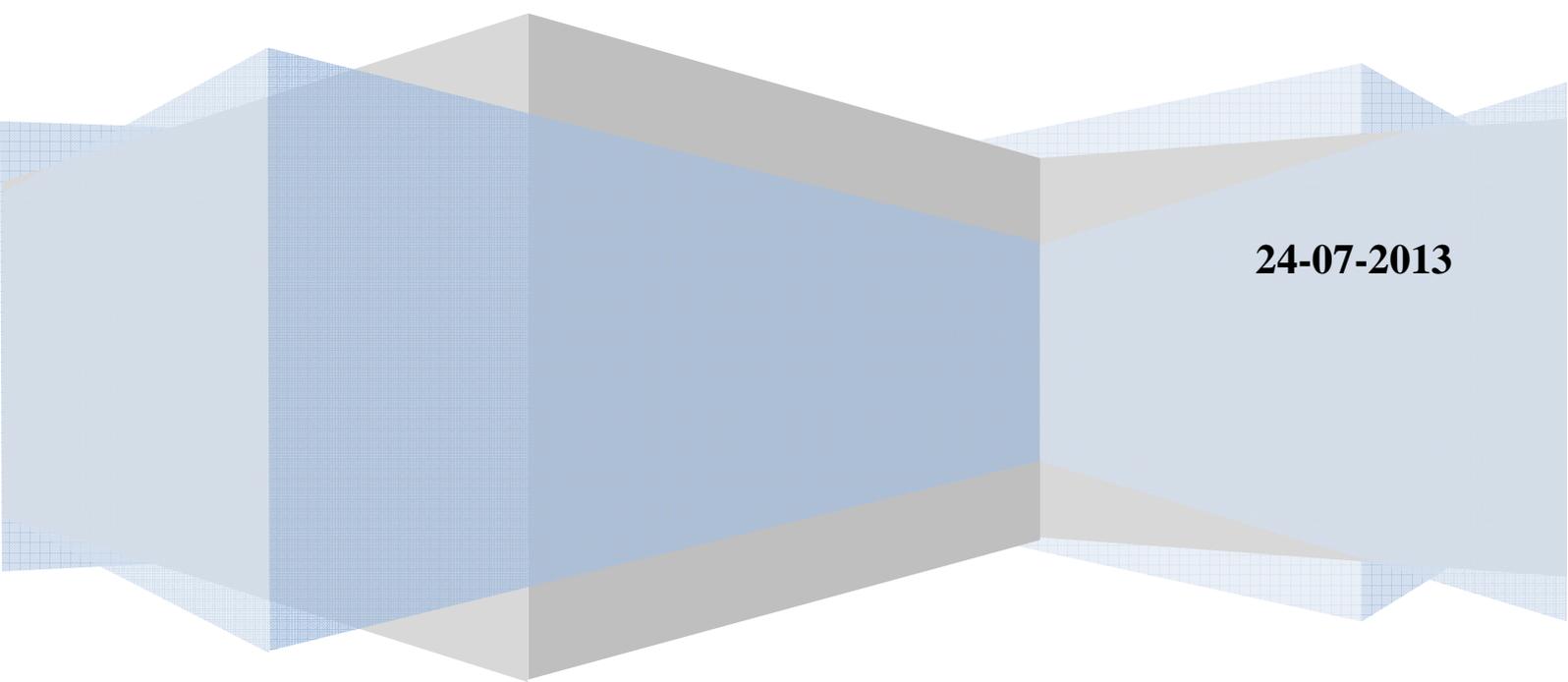


Table of Contents

1	Abstract.....	1
2	Samenvatting	2
3	Introduction	3
3.1	Workload and absenteeism at primary school teachers.....	3
3.2	Positive Psychology.....	7
3.2.1	Positive Psychological Factors.....	8
3.3	Research question and hypotheses	11
4	Methods	12
4.1	Participants	12
4.2	Procedure	13
4.2.1	Recruitment.	13
4.2.2	Measuring instruments.	14
4.2.3	Analysis.	16
5	Results	17
5.1	Explorative data.....	17
5.2	Correlations.....	19
5.3	Moderation.....	20
5.3.1	Living by personal values.	20
5.3.2	Absenteeism factor one: Absent during past 12 months.....	20
5.3.3	Social support at work.....	22
6	Discussion.....	24
6.1	Conclusion and Explanations	26
6.1.1	Explorative research question	26

6.1.2	Research question correlations.....	27
6.1.3	Research questions moderation.....	28
6.2	Strengths and limitations of this study	29
6.3	Suggestions	31
7	References	34

1 Abstract

Introduction. Because workload numbers of absenteeism, of Dutch teachers are increasing during the past years, the current study aimed to explore these two factors in a group of primary school teachers. The goal was to find positive psychological affinities that may form a buffer against them. Those studied affinities are living by personal values and social support at work. They could result in suggestions to increase well-being of primary school teachers and decrease health care costs and costs caused by absenteeism.

Methods. The study included 247 primary school teachers from the Dutch organization ‘Consent’ for primary schools. They were asked, by a letter from ‘Consent’, to fill in an online-questionnaire. The measuring instruments from this questionnaire were: a scale named ‘job demands’, measuring workload, the “Engaged Living Scale” measuring living by personal values, the subscale social support of the “Job Content Questionnaire” to measure social support at work and a scale measuring absenteeism. The analysis was accomplished with different measuring methods in SPSS.

Results. The results showed a positive correlation between social support at work and job demands. Negative correlations were found between social support at work and absenteeism and between living by personal values and absenteeism. There were no moderating effects of social support at work and living by personal values found on the relationship of job demands and absenteeism.

Discussion. The study did not find that the relationship between workload and absenteeism is dependent on living by personal values and social support at work. This conclusion can be explained by a few weaknesses of this study. Either way are living by personal values and social support at work important factors that need to be more researched and need to be promoted in practice.

2 Samenvatting

Inleiding. Werkdruk en ziekteverzuim zijn in de laatste jaren veel gestegen onder leerkrachten in Nederland. Daarom werden deze factoren in de huidige studie onderzocht in een groep van basisschool leerkrachten. Het doel was positieve psychologische trekken te vinden die een buffer tegen deze kunnen vormen. Deze trekken waren hier ‘living by personal values’ en ‘social support at work’. Uit de studie zouden aanbevelingen kunnen worden gevonden om welbevinden van leerkrachten te bevorderen en daarmee ziektekosten en kosten van ziekteverzuim te verminderen.

Methode. De studie omvat 247 basisschool leraren van de Nederlandse stichting ‘Consent’ voor basisscholen. Ze werden door ‘Consent’ gevraagd een online- enquête in te vullen. De meetinstrumenten uit deze enquête, die in deze studie gebruikt werden zijn: een schaal genaamd ‘taakeisen’, welke werkdruk meet, de “Engaged Living Scale” die ‘living by personal values’ meet, de subschaal ‘social support’ van de “Job Content Questionnaire” om ‘social support at work’ te meten en een schaal die ziekteverzuim meet. De analyse werd met verschillende meetmethoden in SPSS uitgevoerd.

Resultaten. De resultaten laten een positieve correlatie, tussen ‘social support at work’ en taakeisen zien. Negatieve correlaties zijn gevonden tussen ziekteverzuim en ‘social support at work’ en ziekteverzuim en ‘living by personal values’. Geen moderatie effecten werden gevonden voor ‘social support at work’ en ‘living by personal values’ op de relatie tussen taakeisen en ziekteverzuim

Discussie. De studie kon niet aantonen dat de relatie tussen werkdruk en ziekteverzuim afhankelijk is van ‘living by personal values’ en ‘social support at work’. Deze conclusie kan verklaard worden door enige zwaktes van de huidige studie. Toch zijn ‘living by personal values’ and ‘social support at work’ belangrijke factoren die meer onderzocht en in de praktijk bevordert moeten worden.

3 Introduction

3.1 Workload and absenteeism at primary school teachers

Due to many changes in the educational system and the whole society during the past few years, more and more is expected from teachers and therefore they experience more workload. One may also say that job demands on teachers are getting higher (van der Ploeg & Scholte, 2004). A representative study of 655 primary school teachers and 1255 secondary school teachers from “Dienst Uitvoerend Onderwijs” (2011) found that most of them experience a high workload (primary = 84%; secondary = 78%). 41% of the primary school teachers and 45% of the secondary school teachers find their workload not acceptable. This rate is substantial high, compared to other wage earners in the Netherlands. Only 14% of other wage earners find their workload not acceptable (Grinsven, Elphick, & Woud, 2012). Because workload seems to become an increasing problem in the educational sector, current research should center on eliminating factors that cause workload and find protecting factors against it. But also another problem is rising in the educational sector which should be included in current research.

Additionally absenteeism seems to be an increasing problem in the educational field of work. According to the Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (2011) teachers in the Netherlands are absent from work 4.4% of their working days, compared to 3.8% as a total of all working domains in the same study. The absenteeism number for teachers is above the average (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2011). Since 2010, the absence of primary school teachers is increasing. This is not directly noticeable in the absenteeism percentages of 2010, but one can notice a longer period of absenteeism. The “Centrum Arbeidsverhoudingen Overheidspersoneel” (CAOP) expects even more increase of absenteeism in the next few years (Jettinghoff, Hoogeveen, & Scheeren, 2012). It is noticeable throughout these different studies and numbers that workload and

absenteeism are two important factors in the educational field of work, these days. It advocates a more precisely look on these factors, its influences and its possible connections.

To look more precisely at these factors a broad look at literature is needed. Starting with the study from Van der Ploeg and Scholte (2004), they assumed that the job demands on teachers may lead to less desire in work and less work-satisfaction. Their study, containing of 1450 teachers, working in primary, secondary and special needs educational schools showed that one out of seven teachers is dissatisfied with his/her job (15%). Especially the conditions of work were specified as dissatisfying. But nonetheless, 65% of the teachers were satisfied with their work. There was no difference found between the different educational levels (primary-, secondary- and special needs school). Van der Ploeg and Scholte though said that these 15%, dissatisfied with his/her jobs, may not be neglected. They could form a risk group for absenteeism and other factors like burnout. Especially older men, with more experience, working fulltime and higher educated were more often dissatisfied. Thus, Van der Ploeg and Scholte already gave a little forecast on a possible connection between workload and absenteeism.

To get a closer view on this connection, a study from Dalton and Mesch (1991) is contemplated. This study found a relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism. They found a negative correlation between job satisfaction and total absenteeism, which means, less job satisfaction leads to higher rates of absenteeism (Dalton & Mesch, 1991). Job satisfaction therefore seems to play a role in the connection of between the two factors workload and absenteeism. That is why the precisely look on absenteeism and workload is broadened to job satisfaction and its connections with workload and absenteeism.

A study from Hupkens (2005) described a relationship between job satisfaction, and psychological factors, like burnout, at which working pressure is used as a part of job satisfaction. Hupkens found burnout to occur more often at people who perceive more working pressure, less right to disposal and less chances to unfurl. According to Otten, Smulders and Andries (2002), mental diseases are the most important factors of inability to work since years and numbers of people, who are unable to work due to these diseases, are still increasing. This reveals again, the importance of research on the factors absenteeism and workload among the educational field of work.

Therefore looking at a study of Schaufeli, Bakker en van Rhenen (2009) among managers, they demonstrated the relationship between job demands and absenteeism, and showed that it goes via burnout. On the one hand, they found that an increase in job demands and a decrease in job resources (e.g. job control, feedback, social support, and opportunities for learning) lead to an increase in burnout. On the other hand, a decrease in job demands and increase in job resources leads to an increase in work engagement. Burnout and work engagement were found to predict absenteeism duration and frequency, in this same study. Initial burnout is found to predict future duration of absenteeism and initial levels of work engagement were found to predict future frequencies of absenteeism (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Van Rhenen, 2009). Similar findings of the relationship between workload and absenteeism were found in a study from Ullerberg and Rundmo (1997).

Due to these facts, that there are constantly more job demands on teachers and therefore they experience more workload and absenteeism is also increasing among primary school teachers, it is obvious that more research in this topic is needed. Especially the domain of protecting factors against workload and therefore other psychological diseases is rarely researched. This domain could form a promising help

for teachers to be healthier and have a greater well-being. Additionally it could reduce economic costs, caused by illness and absenteeism.

To reduce health costs, Keyes and Grzywacz argued in their paper (2005) for a complete state of health which they define as: “the absence of physical and mental morbidity and the presence of physical and mental well-being.” (Keyes & Grzywacz, 2002). According to this definition, not only the absence of negative effects defines health, but also something positive is added to it. In their study (2005) they found people, completely healthy according to this definition, to report greatest productivity and lowest use of health care. These persons were compared with people with incomplete health (“either high physical health and well-being but poor mental health, or high mental health and well-being but poor physical health”) or complete ill-health (“high physical and mental morbidity and low physical and mental well-being”). This explains, why it should be important to adopt this view, in order to decrease health costs. Especially in the field of research of workload and absenteeism it could be useful to emanate from this view to find factors that support the positive side of health and increase well-being and thereby protect from the negative factors.

In accordance with the recent literature, as described above it seems considerably important and interesting to look at possible protecting factors against workload and absenteeism, as the current study of this paper does. The current study aims to get a good impression of how workload, absenteeism, living by personal values and social support at work occur among primary school teachers in the Netherlands and what the relationships between these factors are. Thereby it also intends to prove that factors of positive psychology, living by personal values and social support at work, could be protecting factors against the strong influence of workload on absenteeism. The

following paragraphs will describe the theoretical background of the positive psychology and its factors, living by values and social support at work.

3.2 Positive Psychology

Traditional psychology, especially after World War II, was mainly focused on healing diseases repairing damages and pathology. It is leaned on a disease model of human functioning. Therefore it neglected facts of fulfillment of the human being (e.g. striving, strength, virtues). Positive psychology tries to look at these resources, strengths and positive qualities of people that help them manage their lives (Seligman, 2002). Sheldon and King (2001, p. 216) defined positive psychology simply as: “nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues.”

Positive psychology includes the study of positive emotions and character traits and enabling institutions. It is not meant to replace the traditional psychological view of diseases and pathology, but more to complete this psychological view. It should include understanding of suffering and happiness and their interaction (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). According to this positive psychological view, Keyes and Grzywacz (2005) argued for a complete state of health as described above.

Another issue that arises with positive psychology is prevention. The past few years a crucial topic among psychologists was prevention of e.g. depression, schizophrenia and also schoolyard violence. It got obvious that an approach on healing diseases would not help preventing such problems. That is where positive psychology comes into play. Prevention researchers discovered that human strengths, like courage, future mindedness, work ethics and interpersonal skills, can act as a buffer against mental illnesses (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This is what the current study tries to prove for the factors, living by personal values and social support at work, for workload and absenteeism, among primary school teachers.

Positive psychological factors (human strengths) as a buffer are demonstrated in some studies. Those described in this paragraph show a relationship between different factors of positive psychology and workload and therefore probably also between those factors and absenteeism, like this from Schaufeli, Bakker and van Rhenen (2009), described in the previous paragraph. Another study found psychological Capital, which includes resilience, optimism, self-efficacy and hope, to be generally related to absenteeism. (Avey, Patera, & West, 2006). Obviously there seems to be a link between some positive psychological factors and experienced workload and also absenteeism.

To revisit the current study, positive psychology and prevention is also important in the working sector. Turner, Barling and Zacharatos (2002) advocate promotion of job related well-being, which, by virtue of Turner, Barling and Zacharatos (2002), includes promoting mental and physical well-being, in order to create a “healthy work”. This is why it is important to look at factors of positive psychology that may have a positive influence on workload and therefore on absenteeism to reduce these problems among primary school teachers, because of its increase during the past few years as specified in the first paragraphs.

3.2.1 Positive Psychological Factors.

3.2.1.1 Living by personal values.

Living by personal values could be one of those positive psychological factors that may form a buffer against workload and absenteeism.

Personal values are life-directions which are freely chosen by the person itself for leading a meaningful life. They are the most important guides in life throughout different situations (e.g. relationships or work) and give an intrinsic motivation, because one rewards her-/himself if one acts in accordance with her/his own chosen interests (values) (Schreurs, in press; Westerhof & Bohlmeijer, 2010). Personal values differ in

importance but always function as guiding principles for individuals and groups (Schreurs, in press). The difference between values and goals is that values always count. Goals are more specific to situations and are measurable (e.g. family is a value and get in contact with my family is a goal). Goals are there to be achieved. Values can never fully be achieved. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, integrated by a person, are the basic for personal values (Schreurs, in press). Living by personal values is an important guide in life, which works self-rewarding.

According to Westerhof and Bohlmeijer (2010) living by personal values, can lead to much tension because it includes big changes in a person's life. But living by personal values is also found to lead to more well-being. It is an important part of Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT), which is repeatedly found to be effective (e.g. Bach & Hayes, 2002; Dalrymple & Herbert, 2007; Twohig, Hayes, & Masuda, 2006). Thus living by personal values can be one of those human strengths, which forms a buffer against mental diseases. If one lives by personal values, she/he rewards her-/himself and increases her/his well-being and therefore living by personal values will work as a human strength. Going back to the educational field of work, this factor could help to form a buffer against workload and absenteeism.

With the Acceptance Commitment Therapy as approved background that living by personal values can help to experience more well-being and therefore may lead to more health, this factor of positive psychology, may have an influence on the relationship between workload and absenteeism.

3.2.1.2 Social support at work.

Also social support at work could be one of those positive psychological factors that maybe form a buffer for workload and absenteeism.

Many different studies found that social support has a positive influence on experienced stress and other negative effects, like partner violence or suicide (Coker et al., 2002; Handley et al., 2012; Leavy, 1983; Panayiotou & Karekla, 2013; Unger, McAvay, Bruce, Berkman, & Seeman, 1999). Therefore social support seems to be an important positive psychological factor functioning as buffer against mental diseases. However these studies focused on social support as a factor in private life. Because the current study centers the work-related topic, workload and absenteeism among primary school teachers, it should be even more interesting to look at the factor social support at work, from colleagues, managers and directors. This factor is really rarely researched to this day. The following paragraph will summarize the findings for social support at work.

A study from Vermeulen and Mustard (2000) found that low social support at work is associated with distress, no matter how high the work strain. The greatest increase in distress was found in people with high work strain and low social support at work (Vermeulen & Mustard, 2000). Also another study found low social support at work to have negative outcomes for employees. The study from Evans and Steptoe (2001) found low social support to be related to elevated heart rates. Also it led to feelings of loneliness or the feeling to be bullied at work, if one does not get any social support at her/his work. High social support is found to have a positive influence on employees identification with the organization (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001).

Although social support at work and its consequences are rarely researched yet, the available studies show promising effects of social support at work as a buffer against possible mental illnesses. That is why it is investigated in the current study.

3.3 Research question and hypotheses

To infer from the information above about workload and absenteeism, and the eventually influencing positive psychological factors, living by personal values and social support at work, the current study has three goals. At first it aims to examine all of these factors among primary school teachers. This is expressed in an explorative research question: *“How is absenteeism, social support at work, living by personal values and workload spread among primary school teachers?”*

Furthermore the current study has the goal to investigate the relationships between those different factors, by answering the correlational research question: *“What are the correlations between the factors living by personal values, social support at work, workload and absenteeism?”* Referring to this question, a negative correlation between living by personal values and workload, between social support at work and workload, between living by personal values and absenteeism and between social support at work and absenteeism is expected. A positive correlation is expected between workload and absenteeism.

Moreover, the current study wanted mainly, as third goal, to prove, that living by personal values and social support at work moderate on the relationship between workload and absenteeism among primary school teachers and therefore form a buffer against these factors just like those positive psychological buffers pictured by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). That is way the following moderating research questions should be answered in the current study: *“Is the relationship between workload and absenteeism dependent on living by personal values?”* and *“Is the relationship between workload and absenteeism dependent on social support at work?”*

The importance to answer these questions in this study is to ascribe to the merely little research on all of these factors, to this day. Answers to these questions may lead to

implications for the work of primary school teachers, which should work preventive and against increase in job demands on teachers and the consequential increase of absenteeism. This would possibly also lead to less health care costs and costs due to absenteeism.

4 Methods

4.1 Participants

The participants of this study were employees of the Dutch organization “Consent” of public primary schools. 628 employees were asked to participate in this large study. At last there were 339 employees who answered the questionnaire. This is a response rate of 53.98%. This part of the study focuses on four factors and therefore only four sub-questionnaires were used. Ten of the 339 participants did not complete the four questionnaires and were excluded and a number of 329 participants lasted. Because the current study aims to study primary school teachers, employees in other functions were also excluded. Thus, a number of 247 participants were included in the analysis. These participants were aged averaged 46.70 ($SD=11.93$). The majority were women (79.80%) and educated at “hoger beroepsonderwijs” (HBO; 93.90%). Almost everyone of them had a fixed contract (99.20%) with averaged 26.72 hours per week. The participants are working as teachers for a mean of 15.23 years. All data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Descriptive data of participants

	Frequency N	Percent %
Education		
Basic education	1	0.4
HAVO/VWO	2	0.8
MBO	10	4.0
HBO	232	93.9
WO	2	0.8
Gender		
Men	50	20.2
Women	197	79.8
Working Condition		
Employee with fixed contract (undefined time)	245	99.2
Employee with temporal contract for certain time	2	0.8
Descriptive		
	M	SD
Volume of contract (hours per week)	26,72	10.18
Years working in education system (Year and month)	18,60	10.79
Years working as teacher (Year and month)	15,23	10.61

This table shows all descriptive data of the 247 participants. Frequencies of numbers = N, percentages, means = M and SD = Standard deviation.

4.2 Procedure

4.2.1 Recruitment.

‘Consent’ is an organization for all public primary schools in the communities Enschede, Oldenzaal, Losser en Dinkelland. It includes 33 primary schools with many different offers and approaches. Their vision is to create a different education to form a stable basic in this uncertain future.

The questionnaire for the current study with positive psychological factors, of workload and of absenteeism among teachers was developed and achieved by order of 'Consent'. They wanted to get a good view on their employee's experiences of workload and absenteeism as well. So all employees of the organization got a letter from 'Consent' and were asked to fill in the online questionnaire, on www.surveymonkey.nl, which took them about 45 minutes. This survey was anonymous and 'Consent' never had access the answers of the participants. This was also mentioned in the introduction of the questionnaire. There were also two reminder letters, sent by 'Consent', to all participants.

4.2.2 Measuring instruments.

At first, several demographic information were asked, like gender, date of birth, function or years as teacher. After that, the survey contained many different questionnaires related to job demands on teachers, which can be seen as working pressure, social support at work, talents, basic needs, motivation, values, resilience, goals, personal growth, involvement, health, workload, absenteeism, working capacity and productivity. For this paper only the questionnaires for social support at work, living by values, workload and absenteeism were used.

4.2.2.1 Workload.

Workload is measured with a scale, asking for job demands on the teachers with five items containing of claims like: "*Mijn baan vereist dat ik erg snel werk*" (*My job expects me to work really fast*.) The participants needed to answer on a four-point-likert scale (1=totally disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree and 4=totally agree). This scale is new and untried. In this study it reached a Cronbach's α of *0.61* which is unacceptable.

4.2.2.2 Living by personal values.

To measure personal values the “Engaged Living Scale” (ELS) was used (Trompetter et al., in press). It is a Dutch measurement, to study one of three response styles of ACT: the engaged response style. This includes values and committed action. Therefore it also measures two factors. In this current study total scores of the whole scale were measured, which contains of 16 items, with claims like: “*Ik heb waarden die mijn leven meer betekenis geven.*” (“*I have values that make my life more meaningful.*”), which need to be answered on a five-point likert scale (1=totally disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=totally agree). It has an excellent reliability in this study (Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.92$). This is in accordance with findings of Trompetter et al. (in press), which show a Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.90$ for the whole scale.

4.2.2.1 Social support at work.

Amounts of social support at work were measured with a subscale of the “Job Content Questionnaire” (JCQ). It measures different domains, like psychological demands, decision latitude, social support, physical demands and job insecurity and is based on the demand-control model of Karasek (Karasek et al., 1998). The domain social support (at work) of the questionnaire was used in this study to measure support of the director, the management and the colleagues with claims like: “*Mijn chef helpt het werk gedaan te krijgen.*” (“*My boss helps me doing my work.*”). Those needed to be answered on a four-point-likert scale (1=totally disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree and 4=totally agree). The reliability of the subscale in this study is good with a Cronbach’s $\alpha= 0.82$.

4.2.2.2 Absenteeism.

Absenteeism was measured with five items asking at first, if the participant has been absent during the past 12 months. This could be answered with no=1 and yes=2. The other 4 items asked how long teachers have been absent due to illness during the past

year (open question) and what the main reasons for the absenteeism have been (choice out of 6).

4.2.3 Analysis.

The Analysis was accomplished with the statistic program SPSS 21. To answer the first research question: *“How is absenteeism, social support at work, living by personal values and job demands on them spread among teachers?”* descriptive statistics and frequencies were used to get an explorative overview of the variables of interest.

The second research question: *“What are the correlations between the factors living by personal values, social support at work, workload and absenteeism?”* was analyzed with bivariate correlations (Pearson).

To answer the research questions three and four: *“Is the relationship between job demands and absenteeism dependent on living by personal values?”* and *“Is the relationship between job demands and absenteeism dependent on social support at work?”* moderation analyses were performed. These moderations are pictured and shown in Figure 1.

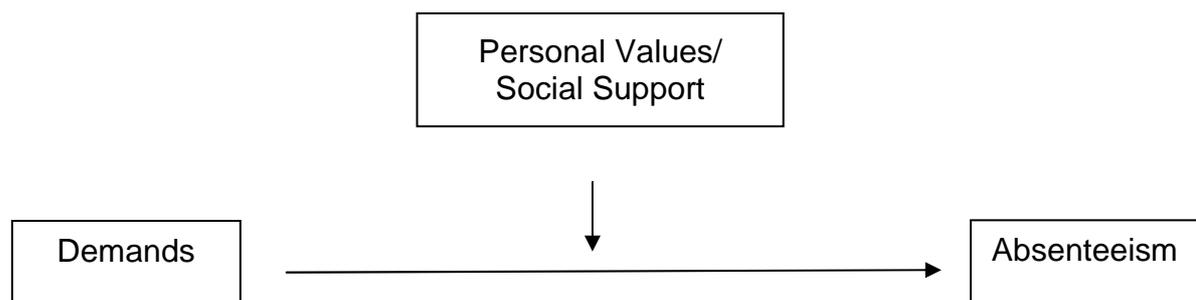


Figure 1.
Moderation.

The first one was made with a logistic regression analysis for the categorical variable, absenteeism-factor one: *“Absent during past 12 months?”*. At first standardized data were computed for job demands (Zdemands), living by personal values (ZValues) and social support at work (ZSocialSupport). ZValues is divided into two grades, high or

low, based on higher or lower than the median. Scores that are median or higher are coded with 1. All scores below the median are coded -1. ZSocialSupport is also divided into two grades, high or low, based on higher or lower than median. Scores below the median are scored with -1 and scores that are the median or higher are coded with 1. Then the logistic regression was accomplished with the absenteeism-factor one as dependent variable and with three covariates. The first time those were: ZDemand, ZValues and ZDemands*ZValues. The second time those were: ZSocialSupport and ZDemand*ZSocialSupport.

The two analyses made for absenteeism-factors two (times absent during past 12 months) and three (days absent during the past 12 months) were accomplished by an ANOVA. As dependent variable, the first time: absenteeism-factor one and the second time: absenteeism-factor two were used. As fixed factor, ZValues and ZSocialSupport were used (separated). As random factor job demands was used. All results were analyzed with a basic of a two-sided significance level of 0.05.

5 Results

This paragraph will describe the outcomes of the current study, according to the research questions.

5.1 Explorative data

Primary teachers experience averaged high social support at work with $M=25.21$ and $SD=3.10$ out of a range from 1 to 32. They also declared ordinary living by personal values with a mean of 61.16 ($SD=7.73$) out of a range from 1 to 80. 51.80% of the teachers declared that they have been absent from work during the past twelve months. The primary teachers in this study were absent at work averaged 1.72 ($SD=1.49$) times

and 7.91 ($SD=11.02$) days. Most of them sense ordinary job demands on them at work ($M=14.11$ out of a total of 20; $SD=1.92$). This data is shown in Table 2.

The primary school teachers of this study had different reasons for being absent at work. Most of them were absent because of a flu or a cold (59.4%). The second most named reason was musculoskeletal disorder (9.4%). A broader view of all reasons is shown in Table 3.

Table 2.
Descriptive data of variables and correlations

	M	SD	r(1)	r(2)	r(3)	r(4)	r(5)	r(6)
Social Support (1)	25.21	3.10	1	.09	.20**	.11	.13	-.22**
Personal Values (2)	61.16	7.73		1	.03	.10	-.27*	-.07
Job demands (3)	14.11	1.92			1	.08	-.14	-.04
Times absent past 12 months (4)	1.72	1.49				1	.29	/
Days absent during past 12 months (5)	7.91	11.02					1	/
<i>Percent %</i>								
Absent during past 12 months (6)	<i>No</i> 47.40	<i>Yes</i> 51.80						1

** . Correlations are at level 0.01 (2-sided) significant

* . Correlation is at level 0.05 (2-sided) significant

M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; r = Correlation

Table3.
Reasons for absenteeism

	Frequency N	Percent %
Flue or cold	76	59.4
Musculoskeletal disorders (neck, back, shoulders)	12	9.4
As consequence of a chronic disease	10	7.8
Psychological disorders, over-tension, burnout	10	7.8
Fatigue or concentration problems	5	3.9
Conflict at work	1	0.8

Participants, who declared to have been absent during the past 12 months, gave these reasons why they have been absent from work. Frequency numbers = N and percent.

5.2 Correlations

To answer the question, “*What are the correlations between the factors living by personal values, social support at work, workload and absenteeism?*”, Pearson correlations were made. The data of the correlations are shown in Table 3.

A significant positive correlation between social support at work and job demands was found ($r=0.20$, $p<0.01$). A significant and negative correlation was found between social support at work and absent during the past 12 months ($r=-0.22$, $p<0.01$). Another negative and significant correlation was found between living by personal values and days absent during past 12 months ($r=-0.27$, $p<0.05$). The other variables were not found to correlate significantly with each other.

Looking at the expectations they were mostly not demonstrated. No correlation was found between living by personal values and job demands, and also there was no correlation found between job demands and absenteeism. The correlation between

social support at work and job demands was found to be positive not negative as expected.

Two outcomes were in line with the expectations: There was found to be a negative correlation between living by personal values and one factor of absenteeism: days absent during past 12 month; and social support at work and one factor of absenteeism: absent during past 12 months.

5.3 Moderation

5.3.1 Living by personal values.

To answer the research question: *“Is the relationship between job demands and absenteeism dependent on living by personal values?”* different analyses were made for the three factors of absenteeism. These analyses aimed to find out, if the relationship between workload and absenteeism of primary school teachers, who highly live personal values, is weaker than this of primary school teachers, who lowly live by personal values. Therefore living by personal values was first split in high and low scores with as threshold value the median of the total score (61). This means people with a total score of 61 or higher for living by personal values belong to the group “high living by personal values”. People with total scores for living by personal values of 60 or lower belong to the group “low living by personal values” (Table 4).

5.3.2 Absenteeism factor one: Absent during past 12 months.

Looking at the logistic regression analyses the main effect of job demands was not significant $B=-0.05$, $p>0.05$. Also the main effect of living by personal values was not found to be significant $B=-0.14$, $p>0.05$. The interaction of job demands and social support at work showed a $B=-0.01$, $p>0.05$ and was therefore also not significant.

The relationship between job demands and absenteeism-factor one was not dependent on living by personal values.

5.3.2.1 Absenteeism-factor two: Times absent during past 12 months.

According to the ANOVA with the absenteeism-factor two the main effect of living by personal values was not significant, $F(1, 11.75)=0.08, p>0.05$. Also the main effect of job demands was not significant, $F(7,7)=0.85, p>0.05$. The interaction effect also showed no significant results, $F(7,31)=0.85, p>0.05$. High or low living by personal values did not differ from the reported relationship between job demands and absenteeism-factor two and was therefore not dependent on living by personal values (see Table 4 for means).

5.3.2.2 Absenteeism-factor three: Days absent during past 12 months.

Similar results were found in the ANOVA with absenteeism-factor three. The main effect of living by personal values was not significant, $F(1,10.49)=3.42, p>0.05$. Also the main effect of job demands was not significant, $F(9,9.57)=0.84, p>0.05$. The interaction effect also showed no significant results, $F(7,37)=0.91, p>0.05$. High or low living by personal values did not differ on the reported relationship between job demands and absenteeism-factor three and was therefore not dependent on living by personal values (see Table 4 for means).

The appropriate hypothesis: “*Living by personal Values do moderate on job demands and absenteeism*” can be rejected. The moderation of living by personal values was not found for all factors of absenteeism.

Table 4.
Mean and standard deviation for groups: high and low living by personal values.

	High living by personal Values		Low living by Personal Values	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Values	66.98	5.44	55.10	4.35
Job demands	13.90	1.72	14.33	2.09
Times absent during past 12 months	1.80	1.85	1.64	.95
Days absent during past 12 months	4.29	3.46	10.71	13.82
	<i>Percent %</i>		<i>Percent %</i>	
Absent during past 12 months?	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	50.80	48.40	43.80	55.40

SD = Standard deviation and M= mean

5.3.3 Social support at work.

To answer the research question: “*Is the relationship between job demands and absenteeism dependent on social support at work?*” again, different analyses were made for the three factors of absenteeism. These analyses were made to find out if the relationship between workload and absenteeism of primary school teachers who experience high social support at work is weaker than this of primary school teachers who experience low social support at work. Like living by personal values, social support at work was first split in high and low scores with as threshold value the median of the total score (24). This means people with a total score of 24 or higher for social support at work belong to the group “high social support” and people with total scores for social support at work of 60 or lower belong to the group “low living by personal values” (Table 5).

5.3.3.1 Absenteeism-factor one: Absent during past 12 months.

The logistic regression of factor one of absenteeism showed a significant main effect for social support at work, $B=-0.4$, $p<0.01$. The main effect of job demands was not found to be significant, $B=-0.70$, $p>0.05$. The results showed not significant outcome of a $B=0.06$, $p>0.05$ for the interaction effect. The relationship between job demands and absenteeism-factor one was not dependent on social support at work.

5.3.3.2 Absenteeism-factor two: Times absent during past 12 months.

The ANOVA with absenteeism-factor two indicated that the main effect of social support at work was not significant, $F(1,12.58)=0.01$, $p>0.05$. Also, the main effect of job demands was not significant, $F(7,3.15)=0.98$, $p>0.05$. The interaction effect was also not found to be significant $F(6,32)=0.53$, $p>0.05$. High or low social support at work did not differ on the measured relationship between job demands and absenteeism-factor two. Therefore this relationship was not dependent on social support at work. Means are shown in Table 5.

5.3.3.3 Absenteeism-factor three: Days absent during past 12 months.

For the ANOVA with factor three of absenteeism almost the same results were found. That the main effect of social support at work was not significant, $F(1,14.21)=2.23$, $p>0.05$. Also, the main effect of job demands was not significant, $F(9,5.45)=2.00$, $p>0.05$. The interaction effect was also not found to be significant $F(5,39)=0.31$, $p>0.05$. High or low social support at work did not differ on the measured relationship between job demands and absenteeism-factor three. Therefore this relationship was not dependent on social support at work. Means are shown in Table 5.

The appropriate hypothesis: “*Social support at work does moderate on job demands and absenteeism.*” can be rejected. The moderation of social support at work was not found for all factors of absenteeism.

Table 5.
Mean and standard deviation for groups: high and low social support at work

	High Social Support		Low Social Support	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social Support	26.36	2.50	21.84	1.42
Job demands	13.97	1.87	14.51	2.02
Times absent during past 12 months	1.77	1.73	1.63	.89
Days absent during past 12 months	8.61	10.84	6.58	11.54
	<i>Percent %</i>		<i>Percent %</i>	
Absent during past 12 months?	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	52.20	47.30	33.90	66.10

SD = Standard deviation and M= mean

6 Discussion

The current study of this paper is part of a large study, which aimed to explore absenteeism, workload, burnout and job-satisfaction among primary school teachers in the Netherlands, in order to find positive psychological affinities that may form a buffer against workload, absenteeism and burnout and lead to more job-satisfaction. The current study focused on workload and absenteeism and certain possible buffers against it.

Because the relationship between workload and absenteeism is demonstrated in different studies (Schaufeli et al., 2009) and positive psychological factors are found to

have a positive influence on workload and absenteeism (Avey et al., 2006), the current study was curious in looking at these certain positive psychological factors and their possible interfering on the relationship of workload and absenteeism. Those certain factors used, were living by personal values and social support at work.

Workload and absenteeism are rising problems in the educational field of work, nowadays (Jettinghoff et al., 2012; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2011; van der Ploeg & Scholte, 2004). Also is this whole research domain fairly new. There are just a few studies focusing on a complete health, including positive factors, like this study did. Living by personal values and social support at work are two of the least researched factors of positive psychology. For other factors, like talents or social support in private life a lot of studies can be found.(Coker et al., 2002; Handley et al., 2012; Panayiotou & Karekla, 2013; Ventegodt, Morad, & Merrick, 2004). Nevertheless there are some indications that living by personal values and social support at work can form promising factors as buffer against mental diseases, or in this current study workload and absenteeism. Living by personal values is an important factor of the effective proven Acceptance Commitment Therapy (Bach & Hayes, 2002; Dalrymple & Herbert, 2007; Twohig et al., 2006; Westerhof & Bohlmeijer, 2010). Also social support at work is already found to have influence on some physical or mental issues at employees (Evans & Steptoe, 2001; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). Especially the group of participants of this current study, as working population seems to possibly benefit from social support from colleagues or managers. That is why living by personal values and social support at work are chosen in this study.

But despite all this promising background for this current study, the results did not find that living by personal values and social support at work interfere on the

relationship between workload and absenteeism. The following paragraph will draw conclusions and give explanations.

6.1 Conclusion and Explanations

This paragraph will draw conclusions separately for each research question and give explanations to those.

6.1.1 Explorative research question

The results, to answers the explorative research question: *“How is absenteeism, social support at work, living by personal values and workload spread among primary school teachers?”* showed that only a little more than half of the participants were absent during the last year. Those who were absent, were not often absent and also not that long. They were absent about 4.08% of working days a year, based on 194 working days a year. This number is lower than numbers found in literature, which were about 4.40% (Statistiek, 2011; Vries, 2010). Also, the participants of this study did sense ordinary scores of job demands on them. Taking 15 or higher (according to the distribution) as a score for high job demands, only 40.08% of the teachers in this study labeled high job demands. The study of Grinsven et al. (2012) found a rate of 84% primary school teachers to experience high workload and therefore job demands on them. Therefore the group of primary school teachers in this current study does not seem like a high risk group for workload and absenteeism.

Concluding these results, it seems like workload is not quite a problem throughout this group of teachers. For these reasons it seems questionable if the participants were the right group of teachers to study this topic. The teachers seem to experience good working conditions. This may be ascribed to ‘Consents’ basic attitude, to make a difference and to give attention to their employees and their well-being by constantly

being interested in positive psychology. The explorative data could be seen as a compliment to the organization and its working atmosphere.

Additionally, the findings showed that the main reasons to be absent from work, in the current study, were flue or cold. Just a little number of those primary teachers, who were absent during the past twelve months, were absent because of psychological disorders, over tension or burnout. These results are not in line with the literature which states that mental diseases are the most important factors of absenteeism (Otten et al., 2002). It underlines that this group of primary school teachers seems to be in good shape, referring to their jobs and also their mental strength, as one can also see in high and ordinary scores for social support at work and living by personal values.

6.1.2 **Research question correlations**

The results for the research question: “*What are the correlations between the factors living by personal values, social support at work, workload and absenteeism?*” showed that there was no correlation between job demands on teachers and absenteeism, which was expected and was the initial point of this study, due to previous findings in literature (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Only three significant correlations were found between social support at work and job demands, between social support at work and if teachers were absent during the past twelve months and between living by personal values and days absent during past twelve months. The correlation between social support at work and job demands was positive, which is in contrast to the expectations. This means teachers in this study, who experience high social support at work, sense even more job demands on them. In total there were little correlations found.

But the correlation found between social support at work and if teachers were absent during the past twelve months is in accordance with the study of Schaufeli et al. (2009). They found a decrease in job demands and an increase in job resources, like social

support to lead to more engagement. Engagement, in turn, was found to lead to less frequencies of absenteeism. The current study found high social support at work lead to less teachers being absent. The same could have been expected for times absent during the past twelve months, in accordance with Schaufeli et al. (2009). This correlation was not found. A high score for living by personal values could also form a factor for job resources and was found to lead to fewer days absent during the past twelve months. Critically, days absent during the past twelve months could be seen as duration of absenteeism and would therefore be contradictory to the study of Schaufeli et al. (2009). Given the fact that absenteeism was not split into duration and frequency factor intended, in the current study, it is speculative to draw a real conclusion on this. Days absent during the past twelve months can also be seen as frequencies because teachers were not asked to label the days they were absent, the last time they were absent.

Possible explanations for these findings may be that absenteeism was measured by the participant's memory of their times- and days absent during the past twelve months. This could form a falsification because of incorrect memories. If you imagine, you had to tell how often and how long you have been absent from work during the past year, could you give an accurate answer? It seems rather difficult to specify this accurately. Another possible explanation lies in the explorative data, which showed that the participants experience ordinary job demands on them and the distribution of the scores is really unequal around the average. That is why it could have been difficult to find a correlation between job demands and absenteeism at all.

6.1.3 Research questions moderation

The results of the current study, referring to the main research questions: *“Is the relationship between workload and absenteeism dependent on living by personal values?”* and *“Is the relationship between workload and absenteeism dependent on*

social support at work?” showed that its expectations were not found to be true. The moderation of living by personal values and social support at work on the relationship between workload and absenteeism was not found.

To explain these finding and the conclusion, one needs to consider that there was no significant correlation found between job demands and absenteeism .This was the basic assumption of this study. If there is no correlation between those two factors at all, it is likewise impossible to find factors, moderating on this relationship. Moreover, the explorative data showed that the group of primary school teachers in this study is no group with high risk for high job demands and absenteeism and is therefore possibly not the right participant group for this research topic. Another factor that probably had an influence on the results, is that ‘Consent’ itself sent the letters to their employees, asking them to fill in the online-questionnaire. Even though anonymity was declared, probably the employees were afraid to fill in the questionnaire, about workload, social support at work, living by values and absenteeism, completely honest. They may have feared that ‘Consent’, in spite of the declaration of anonymity, had access to their data and that their statements might have consequences on their jobs.

To further discuss the study, the following paragraph gives some strengths and limitations of it.

6.2 Strengths and limitations of this study

The current study of this paper has obviously some strengths and limitations which will be discussed beneath here, starting with the strengths.

One positive fact of this study is the group of participants, including men and women of different ages, from many different primary schools. It gives a good opportunity for the study with a broad representative group of participants. Also the whole questionnaire of the large study was well chosen, because of its amplitude in measuring.

Many different factors were measured. Another advantage of the current study was that the administration of the whole questionnaire was totally anonymous, with research numbers for each participant. Lastly the perspective and potential of this study was could be seen as a strength. It could have lead to practices for teachers, to experience less workload and reduce absenteeism.

To continue with limitations of this current study, one can start with the length of the questionnaire. On the one hand it was named as a strength that it measures such a broad field. On the other hand, is the inhibition threshold much higher, to fill in the questionnaire when it takes about 45 minutes. This fact may explain the relatively low response rate (53.89%). Also the subscales for measuring workload and absenteeism may form a weakness of this study. They are rarely or completely untried and workload reached questionable reliability scores. The question remains, if the scales really measured what they should have measured. Additionally, the workload-scale was meant to measure job demands. In this study job demands were equated with workload. Possibly this equalization is not justifiable and measures something different. One last negative point in this study may be the analyses of the main research question. In previous studies, the relationship between workload and absenteeism was demonstrated (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Ulleberg & Rundmo, 1997). But those studies also showed, that this relationship is going via other factors like burnout, engagement or strains and not straight. Recognizing these findings, the moderation analysis may be better replaced or amended by a mediation analysis to see, if the relationship between workload and absenteeism may go via social support at work or living by personal values. Also seems burnout important and should get more attention in further research. Due to these findings, strength, limitations and explanations, some suggestions for further research and practice are given in the following paragraph.

6.3 Suggestions

According to all these conclusions, explanations, strength and limitations a few suggestions for further research and practice can be made. At first, disregarding the limitations and not expected results, this study focused on a research domain in its infancy. It is still a promising approach to investigate preventive factors for primary school teachers and protect them from increased workload and its consequences like psychological diseases and absenteeism. This could increase the well-being of employees and facilitate the complete state of health in people, in line with Keyes and Grzywacz (2005), in order to reduce costs of healthcare and absenteeism. Of course, this approach could be expended to any other working domain. Thus, further research is definitely approved with the following suggestions.

The study should be repeated with another group of participants who suffer more from workload and has higher numbers of absenteeism. Such risk groups are described in the literature. One study found older men with more experience, working fulltime and with higher educated to be more dissatisfied in their jobs (van der Ploeg & Scholte, 2004). Maybe with a risk group of participants, other results would have been found.

If 'Consent' would decide to repeat the study with their employees the suggestion would be to not sent and write the letters to their employees themselves, to underline the anonymity and therefore maybe get more honest answers. Also it seems clearly suggestible to expend the research and, eventually from those following interventions, on other teachers and also other working domains, which are also affected by high workload and great numbers of absenteeism.

For further research, the subscales for measuring workload and absenteeism need to be reconsidered, well studied or maybe replaced. Also should further research include both, moderation and mediation analyses, to make sure to better understand the

relationship between workload and absenteeism. A mediation analysis could show if the relationship between workload and absenteeism goes straight or via another factor as found in the literature (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Ulleberg & Rundmo, 1997).

Another suggestion is to group absenteeism in voluntary and involuntary absenteeism, like other studies already did with promising findings (Avey et al., 2006; Dalton & Mesch, 1991). Another possible classification of absenteeism that should be made in any case is to differ between duration and frequency of absenteeism. Different results on these two factors were found and may have influence on research results (Schaufeli et al., 2009). To accurately measure absenteeism it should to be reconsidered how to measure it in further research, because memory of participants may falsify the data. It would be more correct to directly make a note of absenteeism.

Lastly there are some more practical suggestions, coming from this current study. At first 'Consent' should maintain their attitude of having an eye for their employees and being interested in positive psychology and therefore prevention. It seems like they created a good working atmosphere for their primary school teachers which could be seen in the ordinary scores of them in job demands, social support at work and living by personal values. Although living by personal values and social support at work are not found as those positive psychological buffers against workload and absenteeism, in the current study, they are factors belonging by human strengths which need to be facilitated in order to prevent mental diseases. So, one last, more common advice goes to all executives in the educational field of work. Advancement of employees, giving them the chance to let them live by their personal values and give them adequate social support at work can be an reasonable way in stopping the increasing workload and increasing numbers of absenteeism in the educational field of work in the Netherlands.

This could in turn reduce costs, caused through absenteeism and health costs. Of course this advice can be broadened to all executives, also in other working domains.

The final conclusion is then: Positive psychology is an important factor in the working environment to increase well-being in employees, which can in turn lead to many positive consequences for the businesses and executives.

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