

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Exploring personality traits and well-being among pre-school and primary school teachers in Croatia

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BACKGROUND

Pre-school and primary school teachers are directly involved in the education of children. In addition to teachers' competences, the quality of their work is significantly influenced by their psychological well-being. It is therefore important to focus on their well-being as well as on personality traits they have. The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between life satisfaction, happiness, optimism and personality traits of pre-school and primary school teachers in Croatia.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The study was conducted on a sample of 103 pre-school teachers and 117 primary school teachers who completed self-evaluated scales on personality traits, life satisfaction, happiness and optimism.

RESULTS

The results demonstrated high levels of all personality traits in both samples. High levels of life satisfaction

were positively associated with happiness and optimism. Personality traits were also positively associated with life satisfaction, happiness and optimism. There were no differences in life satisfaction, happiness, optimism or personality traits between pre-school and primary school teachers, except for openness to experience being higher in pre-school teachers. Emotional stability was a significant predictor of teachers' well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

The results have significant implications for improvement of teaching practice at primary school and pre-school levels. The findings highlight the importance of teachers' personality traits and their well-being for the quality of their work with children.

KEY WORDS

well-being; personality traits; pre-school and primary school teachers; Croatia

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BACKGROUND

Professional and personal characteristics of pre-school and primary school teachers are expressed in their work with children. When adopting a holistic perspective (e.g., taking into account not only teachers' competences but also teachers' personal characteristics that influence the process of learning and teaching) in the work of pre-school and primary school teachers, it is very important to analyse their personality traits (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2012). This is relevant because teachers' personal properties can determine the course of the learning and teaching process and influence child learning outcomes (Vizek-Vidović, Vlahović-Štetić, Rijavec, & Miljković, 2014). Empirical findings clearly demonstrated that personality traits have a prominent role within the framework of implicit cognition and implicit pedagogy (Jančec, Tatalović Vorkapić, & Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2015). This is the process where the individual becomes sensitive to some rules in the environment but with no intention to actually learn. Teachers' implicit pedagogy is significantly related to their teaching competence (Čepić, Tatalović Vorkapić, Lončarić, Anđić, & Skočić Mihić, 2015). Additionally, teachers' well-being strongly influences group climate in the class (Tatalović Vorkapić & Jelić Puhalo, 2016), the same as it is greatly influenced by their personality traits (Tatalović Vorkapić & Lončarić, 2013). Hence, this study examines psychological well-being and personality traits of pre-school and primary teachers. The nature of teacher work requires a great deal of emotional engagement, since the teaching process creates relationships between teachers and children. Therefore, it is important to establish how satisfied teachers are with their life, how happy they are and how these aspects relate to their personality. These issues are particularly relevant for teachers in Croatia, where this study was carried out. For example, job requirements of pre-school and primary school teachers in Croatia are determined by different working methods and evaluation of students' progress. Pre-school teachers work in groups and in pairs, and therefore are mutually responsible for the achievements of their student groups. Thus, all responsibility for the students is on the primary school teacher, who is the only one leading the process of learning and teaching in the class. Due to different determinants of conditions and work methods among the pre-school and primary school teachers (NOK, 2014), we examined the influence of personality traits on teachers' well-being as well as potential differences between pre-school and primary school teachers.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND WELL-BEING AMONG PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

In the last few years there has been a significant number of studies on subjective well-being in terms

of life satisfaction, happiness and optimism (Rijavec & Miljković, 2006). These studies have demonstrated that individuals who are satisfied with their lives have more successful marriages, have better social interaction and social relationships, are more immune to stress, and are more efficient in their workplace (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Hills & Argyle, 2001; Lyubomirsky, 2001). Generally, subjective well-being can be best evaluated in conjunction with the individual's personality, which is one of the most reliable predictors of subjective well-being. Individual differences in personality and subjective well-being appear very early in life, are stable and have moderate to strong genetic determination. For example, extraversion and neuroticism correlate most with subjective well-being, whereas extraversion is moderately associated with positive emotions, and neuroticism with negative emotions (Diener & Lucas, 1999). Personality better explains happiness, life satisfaction and positive emotions than negative emotions, as shown by a meta-analysis of 137 different personality traits (DeNeve & Copper, 1998). Moreover, all big five dimensions are connected with happiness, but at different levels. Hills and Argyle (2001) determined that extraverted persons and those with minor neuroticism are happier. On one hand, personality dimensions, i.e., conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience, have a relatively low positive correlation with subjective well-being (Diener & Lucas, 1999). On the other hand, previous Croatian research among pre-school teachers showed significant positive correlations between extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and optimism, hope and life satisfaction, and a negative correlation between neuroticism and mentioned well-being variables (Tatalović Vorkapić & Jelić Puhalo, 2016). The five-factor model shows that those factors which improve intra-human relationships and successes in goalsetting are important for subjective well-being. Conscientiousness has the strongest connection with life satisfaction, since conscious people set their goals higher and want to achieve more. Positive emotions are evoked by maintaining good relations with people, so they are significantly associated with extraversion and agreeableness. While the emotional component of long-term subjective well-being is more connected with the personality itself, short-term subjective well-being is more connected with the situational factors than with the personality traits.

Personality traits have a key role in the degree of professional competency, considering the fact that pre-school and primary teachers participate in the work of raising and educating children (Tatalović & Vorkapić, 2012, 2015; Tatalović Vorkapić, Vujičić, & Čepić, 2014). In teacher samples, personality has been most commonly explored within the Five-Factor personality model. This model indicates that the individual's personality can be explained and understood by five basic personality traits: extraversion, neuroticism, con-

scientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience (Goldberg, 1990). So far, high levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience, and low levels of neuroticism have been determined among the pre-school and primary school teachers within Croatian studies (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2015). In addition, Tatalović Vorkapić and Lončarić (2013) have found a significant correlation between extraversion, neuroticism, life satisfaction and burnout. Thus, extraversion is positively associated with life satisfaction and negatively with emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, neuroticism has a negative effect on life satisfaction, in a way that increases emotional exhaustion and perception of decreased personal achievement. Openness and conscientiousness through decreasing feelings of diminished personal achievements have direct positive effects on life satisfaction.

In conclusion, teachers play a relevant role in motivating growth and development of the child (Fullan, 2013). They prepare the youngest members of society, in the so-called new pedagogy that is based on the partnership between teachers and children in the process of learning and teaching, which implicitly involves their individual characteristics. Therefore, teachers' well-being and their personality traits are relevant to be explored in the context of this relevant group. In addition, since the relationship of age and work experience with personality and well-being will be explored here, it is important to mention that previous research results showed a negative correlation between teachers' personality traits and well-being with age and work experience (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2012; Tatalović Vorkapić & Jelić Puhalo, 2016).

RESEARCH AIM AND HYPOTHESES

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between life satisfaction, happiness, optimism and personality traits of pre-school and primary school teachers in Croatia. This is a small country in South-Eastern Europe with a population of about four million people. The important contribution of this research is the fact that there are no similar studies in Croatia or abroad. Also, the novelty and significant implications of this study could contribute to the development of better teaching practice. Therefore we aimed to examine a) levels of life satisfaction, happiness, optimism and personality traits among the pre-school and primary school teachers; b) the relation between personality traits, life satisfaction, happiness, optimism and socio-demographic variables (age and working experience) of pre-school and primary school teachers; c) differences in life satisfaction, happiness, optimism and personality traits between pre-school and primary school teachers; and d) the influence of personality traits on life satisfaction, happiness and optimism among pre-school and primary school teachers.

Considering previous empirical findings, the following hypotheses are postulated: a) high levels of life satisfaction, happiness, optimism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience and emotional stability among pre-school and primary school teachers; b) significant positive association of life satisfaction, happiness and optimism with personality traits and not with socio-demographic variables; regarding personality traits, a negative correlation with age and working experience is expected due to previous findings (Tatalović Vorkapić & Jelić Puhalo, 2016); c) no differences between pre-school and primary teachers in their life satisfaction, optimism or personality traits; d) all personality traits will be significant predictors of overall well-being, especially extraversion and emotional stability.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

This study was conducted on a convenient sample of 220 pre-school teachers (in the range from 24 to 64 years of age, $M = 40.04$, $SD = 12.34$) and primary school teachers (in the range from 25 to 59 years of age, $M = 40.10$, $SD = 9.21$). Average working experience of pre-school teachers was $M = 18.27$, $SD = 12.28$, in the range from 0 to 43 years of age, and of primary school teachers was $M = 17.86$, $SD = 10.62$, in the range from 1 to 36 years of age. Considering the cities, pre-school and primary school teachers are from the city Kastav, Opatija and Rijeka. Twenty-six pre-school teachers work in nursery schools, 61 of them in pre-school groups mixed by age, and thirteen of them in pre-school groups homogeneous by age.

Data were collected in pre-school institutions and elementary schools of the Primorsko-Goranska County as part of a master thesis (Peloza, 2015). The research concerned 9 pre-school institutions and 11 elementary schools in 3 cities previously described. Prior to data collection, a formal invitation for collaboration was sent to all the principals of the pre-school and primary school institutions by the Faculty of Teacher Education. During data collection, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants were guaranteed. All measures have been personally distributed in the pre-school and primary school institutions by the first author. Out of 250 distributed surveys, 220 were returned and data collection lasted for two months.

MEASURES

In this study, four questionnaires were applied to measure personality traits, life satisfaction, happiness and optimism.

The personality traits were measured with the shortened Croatian version of the *Ten Item Personality Inventory* (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann,

2003; Tatalović Vorkapić, 2016), which consists of 10 items. A sample item is: *I see myself as a person who is self-confident and self-disciplined*. Subjects self-estimated themselves using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – *strongly disagree* to 7 – *strongly agree*). Cronbach’s α coefficient of this scale for the pre-school teachers’ subsample is $\alpha = .63$, and for the primary school teachers’ subsample $\alpha = .72$, which is similar to the validation research (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2016).

Life satisfaction was measured by the Croatian version of the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Rijavec, Miljković, & Brdar, 2008). It consisted of 5 items, such as *If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing*. Subjects self-estimated themselves using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – *strongly disagree* to 5 – *strongly agree*). Cronbach’s α coefficient of this scale for the pre-school teachers’ subsample is $\alpha = .87$, and for the primary school teachers’ subsample $\alpha = .82$.

Happiness was measured with the *Subjective Happiness Scale* (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), adapted in Croatia by Rijavec and colleagues (2008). The scale asked participants to globally examine how lucky they are using four items such as *In general, I consider myself: from 1 – not a very happy person to 5 – a very happy person*. Cronbach’s α coefficient of this scale for the pre-school teachers’ subsample is $\alpha = .70$, and for the primary school teachers’ subsample $\alpha = .58$.

Optimism was measured with the Croatian version of the *Revised Life Orientation Test* (LOT-R; Rijavec et al., 2008; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). This scale measures optimism with six items such as: *I hardly ever expect things to go my way*. Subjects self-estimated themselves using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – *strongly disagree* to 5 – *strongly agree*). Cronbach’s α coefficient of this scale for the pre-school teachers’ subsample is $\alpha = .68$, and for the primary school teachers’ subsample $\alpha = .69$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyses were conducted in the following steps. First, we addressed the first research question by using descriptive analysis. Second, correlation analysis was applied, supplemented by the Mann-Whitney test. Finally, hierarchical regression analysis was performed to address the fourth research question.

LIFE SATISFACTION, HAPPINESS, OPTIMISM AND PERSONALITY TRAITS OF PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

In relation to the first research question (e.g., the examination of teachers’ levels of personality traits and well-being variables), we present basic descriptive analyses in Table 1. As can be seen, Table 1 shows means and standard deviations for life satisfaction, happiness, optimism and personality traits, separately for pre-school and primary school teachers. Taking into consideration life satisfaction, happiness and optimism, there were high levels with the pre-school and primary teachers in relation to the possible range of results (1-5). In relation to personality traits, we can also see high levels of all personality traits in both samples in consideration of the possible range of results (1-7).

As to personality traits, hope, optimism and life satisfaction among pre-school teachers (Tatalović Vorkapić & Jelić Puhalo, 2016), the average result on the life satisfaction scale was $M = 3.59$. Sabol (2005) has explored personality traits and psychological needs as predictors of life satisfaction and determined an average level of life satisfaction $M = 4.48$, but that sample was rather different regarding age and gender. Other authors (Costa & McCrae, 1985; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1994) also showed that with age, extraversion decreases, which is directly linked with experiencing positive emotions

Table 1
Sample descriptives

	Pre-school teachers					Primary school teachers				
	M	SD	Range	Ske	Kur	M	SD	Range	Ske	Kur
Life satisfaction	3.77	0.75	1-5	-0.80	0.80	3.75	0.71	1-5	-0.31	-0.94
Happiness	3.95	0.84	1-5	-1.05	1.56	3.79	0.83	1-5	-0.89	0.76
Optimism	3.92	0.61	1-5	-0.86	2.04	3.95	0.64	1-5	-0.70	0.68
Extraversion	4.97	1.32	1-7	-0.15	-0.53	4.84	1.29	1-7	-0.42	0.05
Agreeableness	5.49	1.04	1-7	-0.51	0.24	5.49	1.02	1-7	-0.35	-0.84
Conscientiousness	6.06	0.98	1-7	-1.45	1.87	5.96	1.10	1-7	-1.09	0.10
Emotional stability	5.45	1.23	1-7	-0.66	-0.22	5.25	1.25	1-7	-0.58	-0.13
Openness to experience	6.02	0.99	1-7	-1.92	5.70	5.64	1.09	1-7	-0.60	-0.31

Note. Range – range of results, Ske – skewness, Kur – kurtosis.

and greater life satisfaction. Similarly, Brkić and Rijavec (2011) examined stress sources, stress coping and life satisfaction of primary teachers, and reported levels of life satisfaction ($M = 3.70$) almost completely coinciding with the result obtained in this research on teachers ($M = 3.75$). Similar are the findings of life satisfaction levels established in other studies, with pre-school teachers (Tatalović Vorkapić & Lončarić, 2013) as well a general population sample (Lučev & Tadinac, 2010). Finally, in the research of pre-school teacher's optimism (Tatalović Vorkapić & Jelić Puhalo, 2016), a higher mean was established than the one obtained in our study ($M = 4.51$). Reasons may be various socio-demographic characteristics of these two samples of pre-school teachers. Regarding personality traits, the findings showed moderate to high levels of all personality traits within the possible range of results. All these findings confirmed prior work on similar samples in Croatia (Tatalović Vorkapić & Jelić Puhalo, 2016; Tatalović Vorkapić, Čepić, & Šekulja, 2016).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS, WELL-BEING VARIABLES, AGE AND WORKING EXPERIENCE

In relation to research question two (e.g., the relation between personality traits, life satisfaction, hap-

piness, optimism and socio-demographic variables (age and working experience) of the pre-school and primary school teachers), Spearman's correlation coefficients were conducted. Table 2 shows correlations and significance levels of life satisfaction, happiness, optimism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience, age and working experience.

The results from correlation analysis for pre-school teachers are presented above the diagonal, and for primary school teachers under the diagonal. Overall, high levels of life satisfaction for both samples were positively associated with happiness and optimism. All teachers' personality traits were positively associated with life satisfaction, happiness and optimism. However, not all of these relations are significant in both subsamples. The results showed a negative correlation of happiness and optimism with teachers' age and work experience only among primary school teachers. Even though these relations were not significant, it is interesting to observe that extraversion was negatively correlated with age and work experience in the case of primary school teachers, while in the case of pre-school teachers these variables correlated positively. There were no differences in life satisfaction, happiness, optimism and personality traits among pre-school and primary school teachers, except in the case of openness to experience, whose lev-

Table 2
Associations among study variables

	LS	HAP	OPT	EX	AG	CO	ES	OPE	Age	TE
LS	1	.482** .000	.460** .000	-.010 .919	.132 .191	.268** .007	.352** .000	.054 .594	-.128 .302	-.058 .578
HAP	.502** .000	1	.297** .004	.237* .020	.031 .761	.026 .802	.244* .016	.168 .102	.074 .556	.107 .308
OPT	.463** .000	.362** .000	1	.199* .053	.149 .150	.129 .212	.317** .002	.407** .000	.033 .793	-.079 .457
EX	.178 .064	.233* .014	.256** .007	1	-.099 .332	.010 .922	.102 .311	.367** .000	.092 .464	.062 .556
AG	.246** .010	.227* .016	.313** .001	.109 .263	1	.262** .009	.441** .000	.361** .000	-.277* .024	-.223* .032
CO	.288** .002	.219* .019	.392** .000	.064 .503	.493** .000	1	.328** .001	.149 .140	.131 .293	.019 .857
ES	.283** .002	.338** .000	.537** .000	.323** .001	.457** .000	.387** .000	1	.325** .001	.053 .671	-.079 .450
OPE	.269** .004	.189* .042	.366** .000	.412** .000	.332** .000	.378** .000	.391** .000	1	.008 .952	-.083 .428
Age	-.123 .282	-.191 .094	-.303** .008	-.115 .325	-.261* .023	-.203 .074	-.296** .009	-.168 .139	1	.924** .000
TE	-.089 .357	-.218* .023	-.231* .017	-.009 .930	-.239** .014	-.237** .014	-.303** .001	-.226* .018	.955** .000	1

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. LS – Life satisfaction, HAP – Happiness, OPT – Optimism, EX – Extraversion, AG – Agreeableness, CO – Conscientiousness, ES – Emotional stability, OPE – Openness to experience, TE – Teaching experience.

el is increased in pre-school teachers. Regarding the connection between life satisfaction and optimism, it has been established that life satisfaction positively and significantly correlated with happiness and optimism within both subsamples. These results were expected and indicated that pre-school and primary school teachers who are highly optimistic are also happier and more satisfied with life. These findings have confirmed results from previous studies (Brkljačić & Kaliterna Lipovčan, 2010; Družić, Popović, & Haneš, 2012; Jovanović, 2010).

The pre-school and primary school teachers who are devoted to their work set goals that are achievable and could be fulfilled by various strategies and methods. Considering the fact that the educational process is unstable and full of unexpected new situations, it is important that these educational workers retain high optimism. The present research has confirmed this and agrees with the results of previous studies. Within the group of pre-school teachers, life satisfaction positively correlates with personality traits of conscientiousness and emotional stability. Similar to this finding is the one established in the research of Tatalović Vorkapić and Jelić Puhalo (2016) where a positive correlation was found between life satisfaction and all five personality traits. In addition, it is interesting that in the subsample of primary school teachers, a positive correlation between life satisfaction and personality traits was noted for all personality traits except for extraversion. This result was expected if we compare it with the results of previous research (Hayes & Joseph, 2002; Hřebičkova, Blatny, & Jelinek, 2010). The significant positive correlation between openness to experience and life satisfaction only in the subsample of primary school teachers is interesting, and it should be thoroughly explored in future studies with a bigger sample and a more reliable personality measure.

In contrast to life satisfaction, which does not correlate significantly with extraversion, a significant positive correlation between happiness and extraversion could be observed in both subsamples. Happiness correlated positively with all other personality traits in the group of primary school teachers, and negatively with working experience. As to the group of pre-school teachers, happiness correlated positively with emotional stability. In a research study by Lučev and Tadinac (2010) about the relationship between personality traits and life satisfaction, it was established that all personality traits positively correlated with life satisfaction, except neuroticism. Furthermore, Joshanloo and Afshari (2011), exploring personality traits and self-evaluations as predictors of the students' life satisfaction, obtained results which demonstrated significant correlations between all the personality traits and life satisfaction. As with life satisfaction and happiness, optimism correlated positively with emotional stability and openness to

experience among pre-school teachers. In the group of primary school teachers, our results have shown that optimism significantly correlates with all personality traits. It is interesting that only in the case of primary school teachers did optimism correlate negatively with age. Previous studies (Penezić, 1996, 1999; Lance, Mallard, & Michalos, 1995) have shown that age and life satisfaction were not significantly related. The same was confirmed by the research of Raboteg-Šarić, Merkaš, and Majić (2011) in which the adolescents' hope and optimism in relation to their parents' educational style were examined. Considering the intercorrelation between personality traits, the findings from this study have confirmed prior results (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2012).

Furthermore, we found that working experience correlated negatively with agreeableness in the group of pre-school teachers and with the agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience in the group of primary school teachers. It is interesting that in other studies, working experience and age (Tatalović Vorkapić & Gović, 2016; Tatalović Vorkapić & Jelić Puhalo, 2016) correlated negatively with extraversion, which was not the case in the present study. Also, age correlated negatively with agreeableness in both groups. It is interesting that in both groups age was not significantly connected with extraversion and emotional stability, as also shown in the previous studies (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2012). Regarding the group of primary school teachers, age correlated negatively with conscientiousness, emotional stability and optimism. These different correlation paths could be explained by various working conditions of pre-school and primary school teachers. The main implication of these findings could be associated with creating specific life-long learning programs or programs for professional development that would enable educators to retain optimal levels of their personality traits and optimism at work.

DIFFERENCE ANALYSIS OF PERSONALITY TRAITS AND WELL-BEING AMONG PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

In relation to the third research question (e.g., differences in well-being and personality traits between pre-school and primary school teachers), Table 3 presents the results of the Mann-Whitney test. There were no significant differences in life satisfaction, happiness and optimism between pre-school and primary school teachers. Considering the similarity between the professions of pre-school and primary school teachers and their work conditions, these results are expected. In the research conducted by Lučić (2007), pre-school and primary school teachers shared an equal opinion of their professions. This perception

Table 3
Group comparisons

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M-W test (p)</i>
Life satisfaction	Pre-school teachers	3.77	0.75	.652
	Primary school teachers	3.75	0.71	
Happiness	Pre-school teachers	3.95	0.84	.108
	Primary school teachers	3.79	0.83	
Optimism	Pre-school teachers	3.92	0.61	.748
	Primary school teachers	3.95	0.64	
Extraversion	Pre-school teachers	4.97	1.32	.594
	Primary school teachers	4.84	1.29	
Agreeableness	Pre-school teachers	5.49	1.04	.986
	Primary school teachers	5.49	1.02	
Conscientiousness	Pre-school teachers	6.06	0.98	.886
	Primary school teachers	5.96	1.10	
Emotional stability	Pre-school teachers	5.45	1.23	.212
	Primary school teachers	5.25	1.25	
Openness to experience	Pre-school teachers	6.02	0.99	.008
	Primary school teachers	5.64	1.09	

of their profession can partially serve as an explanation for similar findings on the examined well-being variables. Agreeableness was established as one of the most significant personality traits, and academic self-image in prediction of the variance of examined motivation aspects for the career choice of a teacher. Therefore, personality traits have a strong role when choosing an appropriate profession, besides life satisfaction as a consequence of a proper choice. These findings have been confirmed by the study of Tatalović Vorkapić et al. (2016) with a student sample. Although this particular research was performed on students, it can be compared with the present study, because the participants were students whose future professions are pre-school and primary school teachers. Therefore, in the analysis of testing differences between pre-school and primary school teachers in their personality traits, only one significant difference was established in the trait openness to experience (see Table 3), where the pre-school teachers showed significantly higher results. A possible explanation for this result lies in the different study programs and work method in the pre-school institutions and primary schools. An early and preschool curriculum is structured to enhance and motivate pre-school teachers' openness to new experiences, flexibility, creativity and innovativeness – all personality properties that are not supported within the primary school curriculum and primary school system in Croatia.

TEACHERS' PERSONALITY TRAITS AS POSSIBLE PREDICTORS OF LIFE SATISFACTION, HAPPINESS AND OPTIMISM

Finally, we aimed at exploring predictors of life satisfaction, happiness and optimism among pre-school and primary school teachers by means of 3×2 hierarchical regression analyses. The results for primary school teachers are presented in Table 4. As it can be seen, emotional stability is the only significant predictor of two well-being variables: life satisfaction and optimism. These results are expected due to correlation coefficients previously calculated. The more primary school teachers are emotionally stable, the more they are optimistic and satisfied with life. Emotional stability explains 18% of total life satisfaction variance and even more, i.e., 46% of total variance of optimism. Therefore, it could be concluded that this personality trait is very important within the personality profile of primary school teachers and has predictive power regarding the teachers' optimism. Further analyses in the second step showed that happiness explains 31% of life satisfaction variance, and vice versa, life satisfaction explains 19% of happiness variance. Age and working experience demonstrated no significant predictive power regarding well-being variables. The results from the hierarchical regression analyses for pre-school teachers can be seen in Table 5.

Table 4
Testing predictors in primary school teachers' sample

Primary school teachers	Life satisfaction			Happiness			Optimism		
Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
	2.89**	0.72		2.64**	0.88		1.68**	0.49	
Extraversion	0.07	0.08	.12	0.05	0.10	.08	0.02	0.05	.04
Agreeableness	-0.21	0.12	-.27	-0.09	0.14	-.10	-0.01	0.08	-.02
Conscientiousness	0.05	0.11	.06	0.24	0.13	.29	0.06	0.07	.10
Emotional stability	0.16*	0.08	.30	0.06	0.10	.11	0.23**	0.05	.52
Openness to experience	0.11	0.10	.15	-0.06	0.12	-.07	0.12	0.07	.20
Life satisfaction				0.39*	0.16	.34	0.17	0.09	.21
Happiness	0.25*	0.10	.29				0.02	0.08	.02
Optimism	0.35	0.18	.29	0.05	0.24	.04			
Age	-0.02	0.03	-.27	0.04	0.04	.37	-0.01	0.02	-.18
Teaching experience	0.03	0.03	.36	-0.03	0.04	-.29	-0.00	0.02	-.02
Model									
1	$R = .43^*$	$R^2 = .18^*$		$R = .30$	$R^2 = .09$		$R = .68^{**}$	$R^2 = .46^{**}$	
	$F_{(5, 58)} = 2.58^*$			$F_{(5, 58)} = 1.13$			$F_{(5, 58)} = 10.02^{**}$		
2	$R = .56^{**}$	$R^2 = .31^{**}$		$R = .43^*$	$R^2 = .19^*$		$R = .71$	$R^2 = .50$	
	$F_{(2, 56)} = 5.42^{**}$			$F_{(2, 56)} = 3.42^*$			$F_{(2, 56)} = 2.19$		
3	$R = .57$	$R^2 = .33$		$R = .45$	$R^2 = .20$		$R = .73$	$R^2 = .53$	
	$F_{(2, 54)} = 0.59$			$F_{(2, 54)} = 0.52$			$F_{(2, 54)} = 1.86$		

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Considering personality traits as well-being predictors, it was found that emotional stability was a significant predictor only for optimism. However, more significant predictive power in explaining optimism among pre-school teachers is observed for openness to experience. Both of them explain 43% of optimism variance. Furthermore, as expected, personality traits were not significant predictors for life satisfaction, contrary to extraversion for happiness. Regarding the interrelationship between well-being variables, life satisfaction was a significant predictor for both happiness and optimism, and vice versa, happiness and optimism are significant predictors for life satisfaction of pre-school teachers. Brkljačić and Kaliterna Lipovčan (2010) have determined that satisfaction with individual aspects of life defined 52% of happiness variances. As in the sample of primary school teachers, age and teaching experience showed no significant predictive power for well-being among pre-school teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between life satisfaction, happiness, optimism and personality traits of pre-school teachers and primary

school teachers in Croatia. High levels of life satisfaction, happiness and optimism were established in both teachers' samples. Similarly, high levels of all personality traits were determined with regards to extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience for both groups. These results were expected considering previous studies. One significant difference within the personality traits was for the trait openness to experience, which was significantly higher among pre-school teachers than for primary school teachers. High levels of life satisfaction among pre-school and primary school teachers are positively associated with their happiness and optimism. All personality traits were positively connected with life satisfaction, happiness and optimism, except in the case of the pre-school teachers, where extraversion correlated negatively with life satisfaction. Overall, personality traits showed a higher and stronger correlation with well-being variables among primary school teachers than among pre-school teachers. These two subsamples showed different correlation paths between personality traits and socio-demographic variables, i.e., age and work experience. Finally, emotional stability was found to be the most significant and consistent predictor of well-being. The main contribution of this

Table 5
Testing predictors in pre-school teachers' sample

Pre-school teachers	Life satisfaction			Happiness			Optimism		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
	1.26	0.88		3.08**	1.20		1.20*	0.61	
Extraversion	-0.03	0.08	-.05	0.23*	0.12	.31	-0.01	0.06	-.03
Agreeableness	0.03	0.12	.05	-0.11	0.16	-.12	-0.04	0.08	-.06
Conscientiousness	0.16	0.11	.21	0.00	0.15	.00	0.06	0.08	.09
Emotional stability	0.14	0.09	.24	0.10	0.13	.13	0.17*	0.07	.33
Openness to experience	0.11	0.12	.15	-0.06	0.17	-.06	0.29**	0.08	.47
Life satisfaction				0.45*	0.20	.34	0.23*	0.10	.27
Happiness	0.22*	0.10	.28				0.01	0.08	.01
Optimism	0.42*	0.19	.35	0.02	0.29	.01			
Age	-0.02	0.02	-.26	0.02	0.02	.30	0.00	0.01	.08
Teaching experience	0.01	0.01	.09	-0.02	0.02	-.19	0.00	0.01	.01
Model									
1	$R = .43$	$R^2 = .18$		$R = .33$	$R^2 = .11$		$R = .65^{**}$	$R^2 = .43^{**}$	
	$F_{(5, 48)} = 2.14$			$F_{(5, 48)} = 1.19$			$F_{(5, 48)} = 7.18^{**}$		
2	$R = .58^{**}$	$R^2 = .34^{**}$		$R = .46$	$R^2 = .21$		$R = .70$	$R^2 = .49$	
	$F_{(2, 46)} = 5.56^{**}$			$F_{(2, 46)} = 2.82$			$F_{(2, 46)} = 2.81$		
3	$R = .61$	$R^2 = .37$		$R = .48$	$R^2 = .23$		$R = .71$	$R^2 = .50$	
	$F_{(2, 54)} = 1.06$			$F_{(2, 54)} = 0.67$			$F_{(2, 54)} = 0.29$		

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

research is in the fact that similar work is lacking in Croatia, which is relevant since personality traits and teachers' well-being strongly influence class climate and educational outcomes in kindergarten and primary school. Therefore, it is important to investigate the field of various psychological characteristics of educators in Croatia, and worldwide. However, the sample was not representative, since it included pre-school and primary school teachers just from one Croatian county. In future research, a much bigger sample should be used. Furthermore, the TIPI (Ten Item Personality Inventory) showed relatively low levels of reliability, which suggests the need for caution in the use of personality measures in future.

Despite these limitations, we can conclude that pre-school and primary teachers are of crucial importance for the quality of early education and this study has shown the importance and need for further research in the area of their personality and well-being. Analysing these teachers' personal characteristics, a significant improvement could be assured within their educational work. Their professional development can be successfully developed through various formal and informal training that could directly influence the quality of their work with pre-school and school-aged children (NOK, 2014). More satisfied, optimis-

tic and happy pre-school and primary school teachers with enhanced extraversion, emotional stability, openness to new experiences, conscientiousness and agreeableness are able to create a better and higher quality learning environment for children than those with a lower level of well-being and lower levels of mentioned personality traits. Therefore, self-work within study programs and professional development for both pre-school and primary school teachers are greatly needed, based on these research findings.

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