

ACTORS' PERSONAL ABILITIES FOR DEALING WITH PROFESSIONAL STRESSORS IN AN EXISTENTIAL-ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. Nowadays scientific studies in field of counseling psychology describe the actor's profession as extremely high-pressured and demanding throughout all stages of this career. Researchers are concerned about the wellbeing of people in the acting industry and note the influence of a wide range of factors that put pressure on their physical and mental health and well-being. The present study investigates from an existential-analytical point of view the question: what can help people who have chosen this career path to deal with the specific stressors "behind the scenes"? Its aim is to examine the impact of personal abilities for existential fulfilment: self-distance, self-transcendence, freedom, and responsibility, measured by the Existence Scale (ES), on the level of perceived acting-related stress, measured by the Acting-Related Stress Questionnaire (ARS). 144 (86 female and 58 male) professional Bulgarian actors aged 18 to 85 (average age 33,7 years) participated in the research. The personal abilities impact has been assessed by regression analysis in two groups: working professional actors N=111 and acting students N=33. A statistically significant negative relationship was deduced between the indicators for existential fulfilment and the level of perceived acting-related stress. The study reveals the existential fulfilment parameters have a more manifested impact in the acting students' group. As for the professional actors, the results reveal a medium in strength and negative in direction statistically significant predictive impact. For both groups, the results show that the personal existential abilities' development (in the sense of Längle' Existential Analysis theory) can predict lower levels of perceived acting-related stress. The study's outcome can be used in individual counseling and socio-psychological training.

Keywords: Existential analysis; Existence Scale (ES); Alfred Längle; Performance psychology; Acting-related stress.

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INTRODUCTION

The present research is a part of a dissertation study exploring the full human functioning in the paradigm of existential-humanistic psychology. Previous steps in the dissertation work are shown more comprehensively in publications described in Table 1.

Our research outlook is a part of the scientific field of counseling psychology and contemporary trends with an emphasis on the healthy human functioning and effectiveness in the context of their lives and existential perspective. The research subjects are a specific group of people in the acting profession. It is provoked by several “Red flags” regarding the actors’ mental health and well-being which the scientific research brings to the attention of counseling psychologists. They mark the influence of professional-specific stressors. On the other hand, we consider that the acting profession is intertwined with essential aspects of the actors’ personality. Their work is tied in a special way to the basic behavioural patterns and their individualisation, bringing out their inner potential and self-actualisation, full functioning and well-being, the “sense of meaning” and an existential concept of the person’s world in this profession. An impor-

tant part of these aspects remains insufficiently studied by psychological science, which is mainly engaged in studying the actor’s personality, but not paying sufficient attention to their overall life situation.

The study’s theoretical framework is the modern existential analysis developed by the Viennese professor and psychotherapist Alfred Längle and the method he proposed- “**The Search for Existential Meaning** (SEM) (Längle, 1988). The method describes four successive steps in which a person’s existential realisation takes place. It is the basis for the development of a psychometric instrument- the “**Existence Scale**” (ES), specifically designed to assess noetic dimensions (Längle et al., 2000, Langle et al., 2003). The questionnaire examines the personal abilities necessary to achieve an existentially fulfilled life: self-distancing, self-transcendence, freedom and responsibility. They are considered the anthropological basis and a processual prerequisite for the realisation of a meaningful “Life Project” in Frankl’s sense. The “Existence Scale” (ESk) has a wide application, both for assistance in therapeutic practice, as well as in scientific research on human coping-competencies in various fields of scientific knowledge.

Table 1
Publications presenting previous studies related to our research questions

Previous studies	Purpose of the studies
The Third Viennese School in Psychotherapy and its Development, Dobрева-Hristova D., Georgieva R. 2020	A <i>Theoretical study</i> of the methodological potential of the existential approach in psychology and psychotherapy, their development, and their specific emphasis.
Initial adaptation of the “Existence Scale” (ESk - Exsistenzscala) in Bulgarian context, Dobрева-Hristova D., 2021	A <i>Pilot study</i> with the aim to adapt the “Existence Scale” (Esk - Exsistenzscala) for the Bulgarian population, the first psychometric instrument based on existential analysis and logotherapy. The analysis’ results of the reliability, the general and internal consistency for the Bulgarian version of the questionnaire (N=314) are presented.
The Impact of the Personal Existential abilities for an Existentially Fulfilled Life on the Psychological Well-Being in Professional Actors, Dobрева-Hristova D., 2022	The article discusses the results of an <i>Exploratory study</i> which presents the relationships between the personal abilities of existential fulfilment - self-distancing, self-transcendence, freedom, and responsibility, conceptualized in the theoretical framework of Alfred Längle’s modern Existential analysis and psychological well-being (in the interpretation of positive psychology) in a sample group of professional Bulgarian actors (N=144).

In the present study, we attempt to answer the question: what is the personal existential abilities' influence on the perception of workload connected to profession-related stressors, to which the actors in the studied sample are exposed?

SETTING THE SCENE

Nowadays, actors work in a high-pressure environment with uniquely demanding processes that have a major impact on the individual's well-being. (Kumar, 2019). They are driven by a wide range of environmental and occupational factors that put pressure on the actors' physical and mental health and well-being and place them in situations of difficult choices regarding their lives and their profession, as well. Their impact is associated with mental health problems and the capacity to function fully. These factors position the profession amongst the highly stressful ones. Researchers also report a higher risk for actors' mental health such as symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other in comparison to the general population. (Geer, 1993; Burgoyne et al., 1999; Seton, 2010; Maxwell et al., 2015). Actors are put at risk of emotional burnout (Maxwell et al., 2015) and blurring the boundaries between the subject (the actor) and their character in the life-stage-life cycle (Burgoyne et al., 1999; Seton, 2010; Thomson & Jaque, 2011).

The strain and pressure on the actors' health and well-being stem not only from the workload in the acting process itself, but also from external demands and factors. Although an integral part in the context of their lives, these factors are not clearly visible to the laypeople, often remain "behind the scenes" and the variety of occupational risks related to the actors' well-being is not so carefully explored (Chen & Jaktiani, 2021). Contributing to their exposure and further shedding light on the matter is the first-of-its-kind study- "The Australian Actors' Wellbeing Study", conducted in 2015 by Ian Maxwell, Mark Seton and Marianna Szabó. It provides a contemporary empirical perspective to the understanding of the actors' lives and outlines a number of con-

nections between the learning and workplace experiences and their health and well-being. (Maxwell et al., 2015) Researchers consider the influence of occupation-specific environmental factors that often provoke experiences of uncertainty and vagueness. These are: working conditions, the short-term nature of employment, financial uncertainty, lack of professional, rehearsal conditions, intensively sustained workload, social isolation and isolation from loved ones, high level of criticism, complex interpersonal relationships, health risks such as lack of sleep, poor eating habits, excessive use of caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and various substances (Brandfonbrener, 1992; Seton, 2010; Robb & Due, 2017). A recommendation to consider the influence of these factors has been made by the Australian researcher Alison Robb. As part of her dissertation research, she developed a "Clinician's guide to assessing actors' psychological well-being" (Robb, 2017:273-276) for the needs of counselors working with such a group of people. Along with the acting-specific stressors, 4 more areas, which psychologists should pay attention to in their work with actors, are outlined- anxiety and depression, eating disorders and perfectionism, trauma, positive functioning and resources.

On this basis, scholars rarely address the question: What does it take to survive in a creative industry and turn art into a profession? (Bille & Jensen, 2018). On the other hand, actors rarely seek psychological support. Caring for their mental health and well-being is not a clearly recognized topic for the creative industry (Prior and al., 2017), and the factors influencing their full human functioning are difficult to track and analyse (Seton, 2009). The specificities outlined in this underrepresented professional group justify the counseling psychologists' appeal to think about how to apply their services to people with specific needs. As well as to find a method to reach them in a meaningful way (Alison Robb, 2017) and set the stage for broader scientific inquiries with a different methodological basis.

An opportunity to expand the scientific understanding in this direction is provided by a closer look at the acting's professional

content aspects. It is uniquely bound to essential personality aspects, the basic behavioural patterns, and their individualisation; by bringing out and developing their inner potential. Atanas Atanasov, a Bulgarian actor and professor at the Bulgarian Theater Academy (NAFTA), notes that the actor's profession *"takes upon itself the burden of two subjects at the same time - their own and the subject of their character"* (Atanasov, 2009:14). It can be argued for the person in it that *"they do not practise the acting profession, but are the profession itself"* (Atanasov, 2009:19). According to Atanasov, the actor's profession is strongly linked to the "sense of meaning". And on the other hand, in *"their existential concept of the world that excite them, that they consider significant and within whose boundaries they want to exist without restrictions"* lies the key to the building of an Subjective acting approach (Atanasov, 2009). The actor works through their human nature and the experiences of personal growth, self-acceptance, self-determination and personal authority, the meaning and realisation of one's own talents. These directly reflect on their ability to deal effectively with the challenges of life and the profession, while at the same time they are also strongly influenced by their creative identity. In this complex relationship between the personal and the professional, their psychological well-being is both a condition and an indicator for successfully dealing with difficulties and professional-inherent loads. On the contrary, it is determined not only by the life situation, but also by the person's attitude towards it and how they evaluate their Being in the world. In this regard, researchers Chen and Jaktiani point out that the impact on acting, connected to anxiety related to irregular employment, vulnerability to adverse working conditions and identity conflict, combined with the effect of economic insecurity, is not accidental. (Chen & Jaktiani, 2021). This can be explained, bearing in mind that the actualisation of a person takes place in two aspects of their existence - the regard that a person has towards themselves and the one towards their real-life situation. Among

the many factors that determine these processes, the least researched are those rooted in the "value-meaning" dimension.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Such a "meaning perspective" of studying the processes of self-actualisation and noetic resources provides the existential paradigm in psychology and more specifically the theoretical framework of the modern existential analysis (EA), developed by the Viennese professor and psychotherapist Alfred Längle. In the perspective of his theoretical model, psychological well-being is concretised in the concept of "existential fulfilment", understood as the fulfilled realisation of one's intentions and actions in accordance with one's identity and values.

Searching for an answer to the question what helps a person realise their existence through their personal strengths, Längle directs his attention to the point where a person meets the givens of his Being in reality. He directs his search to the noetic resources necessary for the full unfolding of one's existence, understood as "the ability to freely decide and take responsibility for the meaning and value choices in one's life" (Längle et al., 2000:19). According to his theoretical model, this ability requires a special attitude towards one's self and the world, which allows a person to "discover" the value embedded in specific situations and, connecting with it, to fulfil (realise) their "Life project", experiencing it as true and meaningful, regardless of the difficulties. The method he describes in "Search for Existential Meaning – SEM" (Längle, 1988), offers an active approach in which the philosophical thinking about the Being is extended with an existential-analytic understanding of the process of a "personal bringing of one's self into the world". The SEM Method is a processual operationalisation of Viktor Frankl's values and the meaning of life theory, in which Längle derives the constructs of the personal existential abilities for achieving an existentially fulfilled life, namely: 1) self-distancing, 2) self-transcendence, 3) freedom and 4) responsibility. This processual model became

the foundation for the development of the first psychometric instrument based on the existential analysis and logotherapy theory- the "Existence Scale" (ESk) (Längle et al., 2000 Lengle et al., 2003).

In accordance with their existential scope's processual description, they allow a person to realistically perceive the "field of possibilities", to take a position in relation to them, and to resonate with their own intentions and values, so that they can make a decision, which they can stand up for and be carried out as a reality in own life .

Considered as individual steps towards existential self-realisation, the existential competencies underpin processes that occur at the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral levels. They allow individuals to connect and position themselves in relation to the givens of the Being on one hand, and on the other to "understand themselves in the broad life horizon and live with an understanding of the context" (Lengle, 2017) i.e., to find meaning.

In Lengle's theoretical conception, the personal abilities for the realisation of an existentially fulfilled life lie in the noetic dimension, beyond the level of "states" and "traits". This includes the process of dealing with both situational influences and personal predispositions. (Längle et al., 2000). Their use allows the discovery and understanding of the personal meaning and value of what the individual chooses to engage with, the construction and the finding of a "personal relation" and to take up an existential position regarding the given. In this sense, their development contributes to dealing with situations and states where the meaning is lost or where the search for meaning is failing, or after a significant loss or a transition. (Längle, 2003b). Thus, their development contributes both to finding meaning in situations that are stressful, as well as increasing the level of the mental well-being and higher professional efficiency and satisfaction. (Tshelskaya, 2020). In our opinion, this applies with a particular force to situations that professional actors face in their lives, behind the scenes, related to transition from one professional stage to another; inability

to fully realise their potential; meeting the limitations imposed by the work; lack of commitment to personal values and intentions; hard choices, etc. According to the existential-analytical approach, the existential fulfilment experience helps coping with the emotional burden and levels out the existential conflicts arising in these crisis zones. It increases the individual's ability to deal with "oneself and one's world in a meaningful way ". (Lengle, 2003a).

Their influence on the full functioning of a person has been brought out in studies conducted within the existential paradigm framework. Researchers report statistically significant relationships between the personal existential abilities and meaningful life orientations, the level of subjective control, the subjective and psychological well-being (Likhacheva et al., 2015; Grishina, 2016), emotional resilience; the emotional-volitional qualities of the personality; courage and readiness to act in new situations (Lengle et al., 2003). The personal competences' predictive power and the general level of existential fulfilment in relation to the psychological well-being was also confirmed in a previous study of ours (Dobrova-Hristova, 2022). The data show a strong influence of the personal abilities "Self-transcendence" and "Freedom" on the dimensions of the psychological well-being- "coping with the environment" and "self-acceptance." Significant correlations with personality characteristics have been reported in research related to emotional burnout as a symptom of blocking the process of building an existential position. (Längle, 1997). The relationship between the emotional burnout and the existential self-realisation, satisfaction and meaning in life has been outlined in other studies, conducted in various professional groups (doctors, teachers, psychologists, social workers, pilots, etc.) (Efimova, 2011; Ermakova, 2008; Nindl, 2001). Researchers also report a strong relationship between the personal existential abilities "Freedom", "Responsibility" and "Self-transcendence" in combination with various personal factors and the mental health, as well as the relationship between the level of "Self-distancing" and, in

most cases, “Self-transcendence” ‘ with behavioral control. (Kundi et al., 2003).

In this context, there is an untapped potential regarding the study of the noetic resources that support the full functioning of people in the acting profession and help them cope with the specifically related workloads from the perspective of the existential-analytical approach. Expanding the research in this direction can enrich and deepen the understanding of what it is to be Human in this profession, as well as support the practice of psychological counseling sensitive to the creative identity (creative sensitive treatment). The aforementioned researches and theoretical framework give us a reason to assume that the personal existential abilities are a noetic resource, the development and use of which affects the overall human functioning and dealing with stressful pressures related to the acting profession.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study’s purpose is to examine the extent to which the personal existential abilities for existential fulfilment are a predictor of resilience to acting-related stress in two groups: the professional actors’ group and the acting students’ one. Lenge’s “Existence Scale” and the “Acting-Related Stress” questionnaire were used. Regression analysis was applied.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

We expect that the development of personal abilities for existentially fulfilled life have an influence on the level of perceived acting-related stress in both groups: professional actors and acting students. We also expect that the existential fulfilment parameters have a more manifested impact in the acting students’ group.

RESPONDENTS

The empirical research was conducted in the period August 2021 - April 2022. It involved 144 professional actors and acting students (86 female and 58 male), ranging from 18 to

85 years and with an average age of 33.7 years and a standard deviation of $SD = 13.338$. In order to follow differences in perceived acting-related stress according to professional experience in the sample, it is split into two groups - acting students $N=33$ and working professional actors $N=111$.

PROCEDURE

The study was conducted as an anonymous, self-administered, on-line research and was promoted through the publication from recognized acting training institutions in Bulgaria and by social media groups to professional actors and acting students. All research ethics requirements were considered when planning and conducting the study. The objectives and limits of confidentiality were explained as an invitation was sent with informed consent, and the participants had to give their consent in order to take part. Inclusion criteria were as follows: age over 18 years, work as an actor in a theater troupe, film or television productions and on the independent scenes; acting students who are undertaking vocational training in recognized training institutions in Bulgaria.

Methods:

The following methods were used for the research’s purposes:

1) Existence Scale - CE (ESk - Exsistenzscala), developed by Dr. Alfried Längle and Dr.

Christine Orgler. (Längle A. et al., 2003). The questionnaire examines the degree of the personal abilities’ development for existential self-realisation (existential fulfilment). It assesses a person’s competence to deal constructively with themselves and their own world, considering the peculiarities of their personality and life circumstances. It has a wide application both for assistance in therapeutic practice and in scientific research on human coping-competencies in various fields of scientific knowledge. In our study, the Bulgarian adaptation of the “Existence Scale” questionnaire was used, which was evaluated for test and re-test reliability and internal consistency

(Dobрева-Hristova, 2021). The questionnaire consists of 46 statements that the respondents relate to themselves using a 6-point Likert-type scale (from 1 – true to 6 – false). The statements are divided into four subscales and two factors are formed by them respectively: “Self-distancing” (SD), “Self-transcendence” (ST), “Freedom” (F) and “Responsibility” (R), “Person” factor (P)- a combination between subscales ST and SD and “Existence” factor (E), which is formed by subscales S and F. The existential fulfilment’s general index is formed by summing the two factors’ results. The measured Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient for the entire scale in the present sample was 0.91. The sub-scales values ranged from 0.71 to 0.89, indicating reasonable acceptance criteria which is ≥ 0.70 .

2) The author’s adaptation of the ‘Acting-related stress Questionnaire’ (Robb, Al. El., 2017).

The original questionnaire was compiled by the Australian researcher Dr. Alison Robb and explores the perception of stressors deriving from job-related workload. It is a part of Robb’s “Clinician’s guide to assessing actors’ psychological well-being” (Robb, 2017: 273-276). The author draws attention to the need for the guide’s application in counseling and the assessment of the mental well-being of people in the acting profession, with a focus on the specific areas she has identified- where it is a good idea to orient psychological counseling towards and the influence on individuals’ overall functioning. As an empirically derived methodological tool, the guide aims to support counselors in assessing the mental well-being of individuals in the acting profession and to increase their understanding of the impact of profession-specific areas of stress on actors’ overall functioning. According to Robb, a more pronounced subjective experience of pressure from occupation-related stressors is indicative of difficulties in coping with occupational and life challenges and is associated with lower individual resilience.

The present study applied our author’s adaptation of the Acting-related stressors Questionnaire (ARS), which was used to deter-

mine how different situations affect feelings and how people perceive specific stress. A Bulgarian translation of the original version by Alison Robb was made for the quantitative research’s needs. The areas of specific stress pressures in it were preserved entirely and a five-point self-rating scale was added. In accordance with the approach proposed in the Clinician’s guide by the methodology’s author, two forms of the ARS questionnaire were used in our research- Form A for the professional actors, containing 14 items, along with three additional ones that are analysed separately from the scale and Form B - for the acting students, containing 14 items. The observed domains of perceived stress were identical for both forms. Their specific content depends on the stage of entering into the profession such as “Repeated criticism (e.g.: from mentors, critics, peers, directors, employers)” and “Multi-repeated criticism (e.g.: from teachers, peers, guest artists)”. The questionnaire helps in determining how the participants perceive these workloads and what the specific occupational stress is for them. Higher scores indicate higher levels of acting-related perceived stress. Respondents rate how often they experience strain in the domains covered in each item using a five-point self-report scale from (1) - never to (5) - always. The total ARS score is calculated as the sum of all items. The areas with the highest values delineate the areas of increased occupational “stress pressure” for the sample. In our adaptation, according to the author’s theoretical justification, higher indicators on the Questionnaire are associated with higher levels of perceived workload and lower resistance to profession-related stressors. The measured Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient for the present sample was 0.84 for the ARS/Form A and 0.83 for the ARS/ Form B.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the first stage of the statistical processing of the results, the reliability of the internal consistency of the used questionnaires and their subscales in the studied sample $N=144$

was analyzed. The values of the reliability coefficients examined by Cronbach's alpha have a reasonable acceptability criterion- ≥ 0.70 .

The data from the subjective experience of stress pressure was analysed in accordance with the main domains of acting-related stress covered by the ARS questionnaire. After examining the answers, based on the obtained empirical average values, it can be summarized that for the studied sample there are data on specific professional stress in different degrees and in different spheres, depending on the stage of entering into the profession.

At the next stage, a regression analysis was applied, using the Pearson's coefficient (r). It showed a high degree of multicollinearity, which made the usage of a multiple regression analysis unsuitable. A decision was made to apply a linear regression analysis independently for each predictor. The chosen research approach is also supported by the study's theoretical framework in which the noetic resources for realising an existentially fulfilled life are procedurally operationalised. Examining their independent influence would allow the detection of areas with potential for development, which would justify the focus of possible advisory interventions.

At the third stage of the study, a linear regression analysis was performed for the acting students' group- $N=33$, and for the working professionals- $N=111$. In both groups the level of perceived stress' general indicator was pointed as a dependent variable and as an independent one (separately for each indicator) the following indicators were presented- Existential fulfilment, "Person" factor, "Existence" factor, personal abilities: "Self-dis-

tancing", "Self-transcendence", "Freedom" and "Responsibility".

Regarding the acting students' group, the obtained results show a statistically significant negative relationship between the variables. This means that an increase in the level of existential fulfilment will lead to a decrease in the level of perceived stress from acting-related workloads. **Table 2** presents the statistically significant results of the regression analysis.

As seen from the Beta coefficient values, the level of significance $p < 0.001$ and the Adjusted R^2 coefficient values, the overall level of existential fulfilment can statistically significantly predict the perception of acting-related stress among students. On its own, the general indicator of developing one's competence to deal constructively with oneself and one's own world can explain 46.9% of the variation in the perceived stress in this group. The independent influence of the "Person" and "Existence" factors was also deduced. The obtained results show that each of them has an independent and statistically significant influence on the perception of specific stress. The percentages of the explained variation for the two factors are respectively 42.9% for the 'Person' factor and 40,2% for the "Existence" factor. The analysis also confirmed two personal existential abilities as independent predictors- Self-transcendence (ST), 34.8% of the perception of acting-related stress of which can be explained, and the existential ability Freedom (F), which demonstrates 41 % of the variation in the dependent variable.

Regarding the working professional actors' group, the obtained results also reveal an

Table 2
Regression analysis: Existential fulfilment, personal existential factors and abilities as predictors for perceived Acting-related stress in acting students' group ($N=33$)

Predictors	Beta	p	Adjusted R^2
Existential fulfilment (General ES)	-0.697	0,000	0,469
Factor Person (P)	-0,668	0,000	0,429
Self-transcendence (ST)	-0.607	0,000	0,348
Factor Existence (E)	-0,648	0,000	0,402
Freedom (F)	-0,655	0,000	0,410

Table 3

Regression analysis: Existential fulfilment, personal existential factors, and abilities as predictors for perceived Acting-related stress in professional actors' group (N=111)

Predictors	Beta	p	Adjusted R ²
Existential fulfilment (General ES)	-0,466	0,000	0,210
Factor Person (P)	-0,364	0,000	0,124
Self-transcendence (ST)	-0,355	0,000	0,118
Factor Existence (E)	-0,481	0,000	0,224
Freedom (F)	-0,385	0,000	0,141
Responsibility (V)	-0,522	0,000	0,266

average in impact and a negative in direction statistically significant relationship between the studied variables. **Table 3** presents the statistically significant results of the performed regression analysis for this group.

As seen from the standard regression Beta coefficient values, significance level $p < 0.001$ and Adjusted R^2 coefficient values, the overall level of existential fulfilment experience can statistically significantly predict a lower level of perceived acting-related stress in the professional actors. The overall measure of existential fulfilment alone could explain 21% of the variation in the dependent variable in this group. The independent statistically significant influence of the "Person" and "Existence" factors was also derived. The percentages of explained variation in the level of perceived stress are, respectively, for the "Person" factor- 12.4%, and for the "Existence" one - 22.4%. When deepening the analysis and shining a spotlight on the independent effect of personal abilities, the predictive power of the existential abilities was confirmed- "Self-transcendence", which explains 11.8% of the dependent variable, the personal ability "Freedom" with a percentage of explained variation of 14,1% and "Responsibility" with a percentage of explained variation- 26.6%.

At both professional stages (training and acting work) the results reveal that the general level of development of noetic resources, as a whole (Existential fulfilment ES general) and as individual dimensions of capacity to address and fulfill meaning in life, can predict lower levels of acting-related stress per-

ception. When analysing the results for both groups, it is noticeable that in the students' group the personal abilities have a stronger determining effect, evident from the percentage of explained variation. Using the values of the regression coefficients for both groups, we schematically presented the observed effects in Figure 1. below.

Looking at the data for the acting' students group the independent predictive influence of the personal abilities Self-transcendence (ST) and Freedom (F) was prominent. From the existential-analytical perspective, these results emphasize the role of personal abilities in the development of the individual capacity to deal with oneself and with the challenges they encounter in the world. In this first stage of professional development, these abilities allow the discovery and understanding of the personal meaning and value of what the individual chooses to engage with in situations of transition from one professional stage to another. These personal abilities contribute to the finding of a "personal relation" with the acting profession and make a decision in complicated life and training situations. In this context, we can assume that the application of consultative psychological support (training or individual) aimed at developing basic existential abilities would contribute to increasing the capacity of young actors (students) to deal with professional challenges more consciously and would reduce the level of perceived professional stress.

For the professional actors, the determining effect of personal abilities was also de-

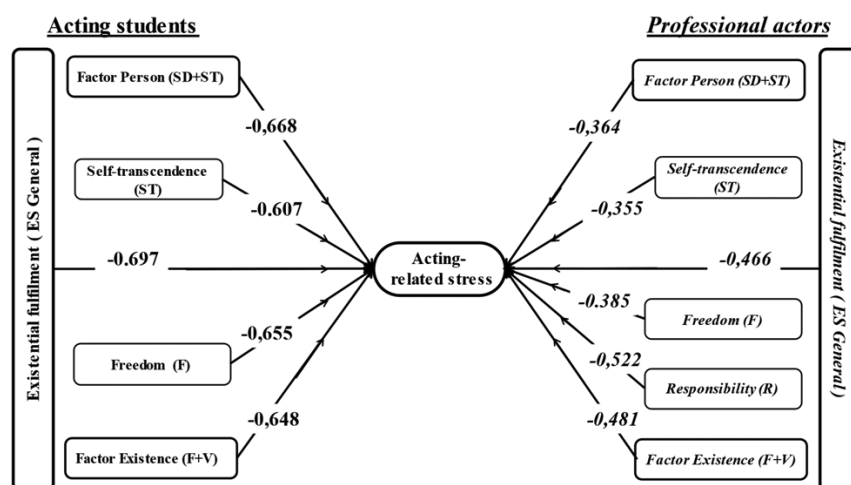


Figure 1. Impact of Existential fulfillment, personal existential factors, and personal abilities on the Perceived acting-related stress in both groups: acting students (N33) and professional actors (N111).

duced but with less weight. On one side, this can be explained by the natural processes of maturation and adaptation, the development of resilience and personal strategies for coping with specific stressors, professional mastery and affirmation in the working professionals. Another difference emerged in the comparison between the two groups. In the case of the professional actors, the influence of the “Responsibility” was differentiated, which according to the theoretical model of the ES questionnaire is included in the “Existence” factor. This specificity has an explanation from the point of view of the change in the intensity of workloads in the process of professional development. In their existential situations, working actors encounter much more intense and varied stress loads than students. Coping with these pressures requires the development of the individual’s ability to implement decisions made in accordance with personal values. Responsibility is associated with the inner experience of commitment to oneself. Its development allows the individual to take concrete actions, to realise their choices in life with a sense of inner duty to themselves or to something or someone else. “Level of responsibility” as an existential competence reflects the extent to

which an individual can follow through with decisions based on personal values and make existentially informed decisions. Experienced responsibility in the process of realising opportunities is the basis for the formation of a stable self-esteem. It stimulates persistence and the ability to withstand difficulties and loads. In these cases, the feeling of inner confidence in one’s own choice allows the person to withstand the burdens, difficulties, and setbacks in the process of implementing one’s own plans (Lengle et al., 2000).

The obtained results confirm our research hypothesis and support the impact of existential personal abilities in dealing with stressors, both in the professional and in the wider life context, reported by other researchers. Moreover, they cast light upon the importance of awareness in meeting the givens of life. The inevitable encounter of the person in the acting profession with the specific professional stress factors requires them to consciously experience their own personal, “existential position” constantly relating to the restrictions of the presented life situations. The study also has its limitations which should be taken into account: the characteristics of the sample, the specificity of the instruments used and the absence of additional empirical verification of the influence of

the psychological well-being on the resilience parameters. The obtained data can be used in individual counseling and in trainings.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the focus of every counseling interaction sharing the principles of the humanistic paradigm is the fully functioning person and the ways for unfolding their potential. Despite all the complexity of positioning the existential paradigm, research from recent years has shown that it has an increasing presence in psychotherapy and counseling practices (Correia et al., 2014). Against this background, there are still few studies of existential phenomenology. The present research contributes to the integration of existential approaches in an academic research context. For the first time, the personal abilities for existential fulfilment were examined as determinants for coping with professional stressors in professional actors. The findings of this study revealed that the development of personal existential abilities for existential fulfilment could be important in predicting lower levels of perceived stress from specific occupational loads in people in the acting profession (students and working actors). However, further studies are required to explain the role of personal existential abilities as noetic resources more comprehensively, both for dealing with life's difficulties and for the overall human functioning.

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