Abstract

This study focuses on the perception of school principals of the concept of "resilience" during the COVID-19 pandemic. School management is a complex and challenging role that includes many areas of reference and decision-making. The principal is required to function in a technological, dynamic and uncertain environment, sometimes even with resistance to his activity and constant review of his authority. When dealing with the concept of resilience at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the principal's experience from all the years of his work is relevant. The principal now faces new challenges that he has not experienced before, from all possible fronts. These challenges create significant psychological and emotional pressure on the principal, who has just been caught up in the crisis. These pressures can be accompanied by negative feelings, such as loneliness, physical exhaustion, nervousness, constant worry, and in extreme cases, depression.

It seems that in such a reality, strengthening the dimensions of resilience among principals during the COVID-19 crisis is essential and a reality. Resilience is the ability to "bounce back" (Bounce Back) to the pre-crisis state, to recover from negative situations or experiences and to overcome them to a sense of well-being and satisfaction. The study shows that principals with high resilience factors have a high ability to recover from stress and crisis situations and are more effective leaders, who demonstrate proven successes in the areas they are responsible for.

The purpose of the study, therefore, is to examine the dimensions and practices of resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions that the study tried to answer are: How do new principals perceive the concept of resilience in a crisis? What are the characteristics and types of resilience of principals during the COVID-19 pandemic? What promotes and what impedes the development of resilience among school principals in a crisis? What are the sources of resilience and the management experiences that the principal has experienced in the past, on which the resilience perception is based, and what practices do principals adopt in order to cope with the challenges of the role during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The current study is based on the qualitative methodology. Twenty-two high school principals were identified for the purpose of the study. The principals are from high schools with different demographic

characteristics from five different districts. The study used qualitative research tools: interviews and focus groups. Data collection was spread over a year in order to provide information through the interviewees on the characteristics and patterns of resilience among school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the study year, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted with about 22 principals. The in-depth interviews were held at the beginning of the year. Data analysis was carried out continuously during data collection to expose categories arising from the voices of the principals.

The findings revealed three categories of resilience-eroding factors: 1. Lack of manpower; 2. Technical difficulty and lack of equipment; 3. Time limit. Data analysis also revealed four categories of factors that increase resilience: 1. High level of resilience in coping with the complexity of the role; 2. Partners that are a source of resilience; 3. A supportive environment; 4. Perception of the crisis as an opportunity.

The importance of the study lies in the fact that it seeks to provide information on the challenges, characteristics and patterns of resilience in the practice of school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study may help to provide theoretical information on resilience that will support school leadership, provide information and influence the way school principals cope with crises of this type in the future.