RUC Roskilde Universitet

The psychosocial work environment among Icelandic preschool teachers

Work stress and burn-out on the rise

Ingibjörg Jónasdóttir
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Abstract

Over the years the problems around stress and burnout have received a lot of attention. Despite raising awareness on work related stress and burnout it turns out it is just getting worse not better, and more people are on a sick leave due to workload strain. Jobs that involve the caring for the needs and well-being of others, such as teachers, are considered highly stressful. This study investigated causes of work stress and burnout among preschool teachers in Iceland. A qualitative research was adopted, using a semi-structured interview and to see if the theories and life experiences match. The data was analysed using Agervold, Lazarus and Rosa's theories. Agervold and Lazarus gave insight into how the teachers feel they cannot cope with the work demands and how to handle stressful situations. Rosa supplied an understanding of how their coping mechanisms were challenged by the boundaryless work life, which enhanced this feeling of not having time enough, having to work at a very fast pace yet not being able to live up to the demands of society and their professional pride, which again caused the teachers to work in leisure time to meet expectations. Causes of stress of burnout among Icelandic preschool teachers are multiple and diverse. In order to alleviate stress amongst workers in the future, one option is to increase employee resilience as it does not seem that the world will slow down nor that demands will decrease.

Abstrakt

I årenes løb har problemerne omkring stress og udbrændthed fået stor opmærksomhed. På trods af at bevidstheden om arbejdsrelateret stress og udbrændthed øges, viser det sig, at det bare bliver værre, ikke bedre, og flere medarbejder er sygemeldt på grund af belastning af arbejdsbyrden. Denne undersøgelse undersøgte årsager til arbejdsstress og udbrændthed blandt pædagoger på Island. Der blev vedtaget en kvalitativ forskning ved hjælp af et semistruktureret interview og for at se, om teorierne og livserfaringerne stemmer overens. Data blev analyseret ved hjælp af Agervold, Lazarus og Rosas teorier. Agervold og Lazarus gav indsigt i, hvordan lærerne føler, at de ikke kan klare arbejdskravene, og hvordan man håndterer stressede situationer. Rosa leverede en forståelse af, hvordan deres håndteringsmekanismer blev udfordret af det grænseløse arbejdsliv, hvilket forstærkede denne følelse af ikke at have tid nok, skulle arbejde i et meget hurtigt tempo, men alligevel ikke være i stand til at leve op til samfundets krav og deres professionelle stolthed, hvilket igen fik lærerne til at arbejde i fritiden for at imødekomme forventningerne. Årsager til stress af udbrændthed blandt islandske pædagoger er mange og forskellige. For at mindske stress blandt ansætte i fremtiden er en mulighed at øge medarbejdernes robusthed, da det ikke ser ud til, at verden bremser ned, eller at kravene falder.

1. Introduction

Over the years there has been an increasing interest in work and health psychology. In particular, the problems around stress, and burnout have received a lot of attention. Stress management programs and stress coaches are being implemented at workplaces, and more and more are using mindfulness and other techniques to reduce stress. Nonetheless, too many people are stressed and burning out. The Health and Safety Executive reported that just over half a million employees in Great Britain suffer from work-related stress causing depression or anxiety, leading to a loss of 12.5 million working days per year (Bate & Rasmussen, 2018). Routine work-process, lack of self-management, and long work-hours have traditionally been the main topics of discussion within the occupational stress literature, constituting the primary factors that make people breakdown and burn out (Pedersen, 2009). An exploration of this is complex but at the same time a common problem for research to this present day.

In 2012 the question, "What is stress" was on the top 10 list of the most Googled questions in Denmark, and there is generally a bias in understanding, preventing and treating stress. People have always experienced health problems in their working lives, nevertheless, it seems that something new has happened when an increasing amount of people experience stress these years (Andersen & Brinkman, 2013). According to the Danish Stress Management Society, approximately 35.000 Danes are off work every day due to stress. Furthermore, about 10-12% of the population have symptoms of severe stress every day. Unhealthy work organizations can create enormous human costs as well as financial ones. It is reported that stress costs Denmark 14 billion DKK per year in sick leaves, early death and health care expenses (Stressforeningen, 2016).

Stress among preschool teachers

Jobs that involve caring for the needs and well-being of others, such as teachers, are considered highly stressful. Furthermore, when looking at the development of stress among public employees in recent years, teachers is the subject group where stress has increased the most (Arbejderbevægelsens Erhversråd, 2018). A teacher's work is diverse, the role is expanding and the job can be demanding in many ways. For instance, teachers within the preschool profession may experience stress from dealing with children's challenging behaviours and widely varying support needs (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010). However, despite the pressure, working with children can also be positively challenging and inspiring. Following the progress of children's development and learning may be rewarding and satisfying. Regardless, the facts are striking: Every fourth teacher in Denmark, 26

percent, have symptoms of stress according to the National Research Center for the Work Environment. Generally, the proportion of people with stress symptoms has increased among public employees by 20 percent from 2012 to 2016. However, the increase is almost 50% for educators in the same period (Arbejderbevægelsens Erhversråd, 2018). Preschool workers are experiencing increased pressure at the workplace and the child-staff ratio is exceeding its limits. According to the government, the minimum ratio is 1 adult to 3 children in nurseries, and 1 adult to 6 children in kindergartens; a concept termed "minimumsnormering" in Danish (BUPL, 2020).

The National Association of Child and Youth Pedagogues recently conducted a research among its members. Among almost 14,000 participants, 7 out of 10 pedagogues claim they have gone to work sick during the past year. Furthermore 84% have shown up to work sick to help things run more smoothly for their colleagues. According to the study, 66% of the teachers have experienced being alone with children, meaning that they had to take care of the group of children all by themselves. Meanwhile, 64% of educators say they are barely managing to take care of the children as coworkers are regularly absent from work due to sick leave. Moreover, a total of 81% of educators have found that there were too few employees in relation to the work tasks (Bergmann, 2018).

Burnout currently affecting the workplace in Iceland
Another country, with the same challenge, is Iceland. Here burnout is on the rise among young people - more particularly, young women, are experiencing higher levels of burnout. Leaders of the Icelandic Trades unions VR and BHM say the situation has become very serious (Ruv.is, 2018)

> "We have advisers for university-educated workers and there is a steady stream of people seeking their services, and the demand is not slowing down. What has perhaps surprised us is how much demand for occupational therapists has increased in recent years, because we thought that when the economy is on the way up, then demand would drop", says BHM director Þórunn Sveinbjarnardóttir (Ruv.is, 2018). „This tells us that something is seriously wrong in our community when it comes to pressure and burnout at work, and the anxiety and related illnesses that are making the situation so bad", adds director of the VR union, Ragnar Þór Ingólfsson (Ruv.is, 2018)

Workplace burnout is becoming such a big issue that the president of Iceland, Guðni Th. Jóhannesson even mentioned it in his new year's address 2019, saying: "Burnout and anxiety, tension and stress: too many people's lives are impaired by such evils" (Forseti.is, 2019). It is vital to respond to the

situation. "Anyone can be overwhelmed," says Eygló Guðmundsdóttir, a Ph.D. in public health: "there is no shame in admitting the problem. It is no longer seen as the ultimate virtue in Iceland to work all hours and "be a good provider." "We need to rest," says psychiatrist Ólafur Þór Ævarsson: "We need a change of mindset about priorities and values in life." (Forseti.is, 2019). Even though the problems of burnout have been gaining more attention, it appears there are no Icelandic studies on burnout done by public organizations, though various organizations conduct research on other aspects of the Icelandic community. Since burnout is affecting many and can have serious consequences for society, it is interesting to note that such organizations have not investigated burnout in more detail.

Iceland´s Vocational Rehabilitation Fund (VIRK) is a private foundation comprising all the major unions and employers in the labour market. The word "VIRK" means "Active" and their job is to fulfill the need for work rehabilitation in Iceland. (Virk.is, 2020). The fund has been set up since the financial crisis in Iceland in 2008 (Virk.is, 2018). Linda Bára Lýðsdóttir, a psychologist at VIRK, argues that anxiety and depression are on the rise, even as employment conditions are largely positive for a good portion of the nation. This increase used to be particularly prevalent among workers over the age of 40, but recent studies show that it is now becoming more common among younger people (Icelandreview.com, 2019). According to VIRK (2018), teachers are the largest singular group of specialists who use their rehabilitation programmes, and preschool teachers are more likely than all other teachers to apply.

The problem teachers are facing is to be seen in the media both in Iceland and Denmark on a regular basis. Teachers state they are getting sick and tired of working for starvation salaries with increasing stress and in difficult conditions. In Iceland, this has been more evident since the financial crisis 2008 where the whole Icelandic economy system was struggling. Today the country is flourishing financially but this is not evident for preschool teachers (Virk.is, 2018). The situation is so dissatisfactory that strike actions took place among Efling Union's 1,800 members working for the City of Reykjavík in 2020, where a three-week long strike ran from January 21st till March 10th. The impact of the strike was felt most strongly in pre-schools, whose teachers represent 1000 of the 1,800 Efling members. Many parents were forced to stay home with their kids.

Stress and burnout characteristics of modern life?

In recent decades, there have been tremendous changes in people's lives where modern technology and globalization has had a profound effect on people, and work has moved far away from the traditional industrial job characteristics. It takes time to adapt to these changes, which are developing fast, and it becomes increasingly harder to get used to this enormous flow of information that is taking place around us. It can also be difficult for employees to adapt to the flexibility offered to them today and the pressure to perform is always on. Overall, in modern society, there is a movement toward more boundaryless working conditions where rhythms are more increasingly dominated by self-regulation of time. These changes of rhythms require employees to be adaptive, flexible and in more control at work, which can be done almost anywhere, instantly and without limits of how with the help of today's technology (Hvid, Lund & Holt 2013). Teachers are no exception, leaving them to feel that they have to work faster with no chance to actually catch up (Dýrfjörð, 2019). The teachers are facing more demands than ever both centrally as well from the society. There is an increased focus on academic and administrative work than previously, and expectations to teachers have grown. Use of IT - including communication with parents and colleagues - is widely used and the profession has overall evolved towards more boundaryless work (Hvid, Lund & Holt, 2009).

Modern day society is driven by so much technology and people can be online, contactable, and search for information 24/7 — for the human body and its sensory system, this can be overwhelming and lead to stress and anxiety. This busyness is expressed by the fact that people today try to do everything faster and more efficiently by speeding up various processes such as working life (Brinkmann, 2014). Hartmut Rosa, who is known for his elaborate study on high-speed modern social life has termed this phenomenon social acceleration. According to him stress and burnout are both symptoms of the speeding up of social life or social acceleration. He believes speed is a condition in late modern society, and the working life with "deadline" as a keyword, is no exception. Likewise, it is a technological phenomenon. This is seen by the fact that people live in high-speed societies, where high technology enables one to streamline and gain time using smarter and faster production methods. At the same time as one is saving time because of technological advances, many people are experiencing that they have too little time at their disposal because they have to achieve so much. He compares this to being stuck in a hamster wheel. The expectation of success lies within the individual, and society is permeated by competition and a demand for growth, and this puts a lot of pressure on the individual, which is a significant source of stress and long-term alienation according to Rosa (2014).

Based on the development in stress and burnout mentioned above, the focus of this project is to gain more knowledge of the causes of work stress and burnout among preschool teachers in Iceland with focus on working conditions, psychosocial work environment and a personal life story of a burnout. The reason is that I find it interesting that after Iceland suffered from the economic crisis around millennium, and has since bounced back, the conditions for the preschool teachers have not improved and the problems of work stress are on the rise. The method of qualitative research was adopted in this study consisting of interviewing three icelandic preschool teachers. The aim was to get insight to the first person perspective of the informant's life and experiences, and the psychosocial factors they encounter in their workplace. To be able to analyse the empirical part of the thesis and to understand and explain causes of stress, as well investigate if their core values match the informants' life experiences, the cognitive stress theories of Mogens Agervold and Richard S. Lazarus will be used, as well Hartmund Rosa's theory on social acceleration. In the following chapters, the thesis research problem and structure will be presented along with an outline of justifications and the delimitations of this research.

1.1 Research problem

The aim of this study is to investigate causes of work stress and burnout among preschool teachers in Iceland - do theories and life experiences match? In order to answer this aim this paper will look at:

- Definitions of stress and burnout
- Different central causes of stress and burnout according to the literature and theories
- Overview of work conditions for Icelandic preschool teachers
- Interviews and my investigation

1.2 Reading this paper

In this paper, the terms pedagogue and preschool teacher - or simply educator - is used as an umbrella term for people who work with children aged 0–5 years: In Denmark, the term preschool is "kindergarten" (børnehave), in Iceland "playschool" (leikskóli). Besides preschool teachers are primary education teachers, or elementary teachers. They are all simply named teachers in this study where the focus is on early childhood education. Iceland is part of the Nordic early childhood education system, as well as Denmark and the other Nordic countries and therefore well comparable in that matter.

1.3 Justifications

The reason for using Iceland as a catchment area for data collection in this study relates to my heritage and social network. Iceland and Denmark are both part of the Nordic welfare model, which is often called the Nordic model or the social democratic model. While the Icelandic society and education in many ways represent a blend of both European and North American values, the country maintains a Nordic social welfare system that provides universal health care and tertiary education for its citizens.

It is of great importance to raise awareness of teacher's exposure to stress, as well the growing problem of burnout among the occupation. Furthermore, it is important to inform policies that improve a teacher's professional well-being and ultimately improve the quality of education. With

this research I hope to make an important contribution to the literature on workplace stress and burnout among preschool teachers.

That being said, the main focus of this project is to gain knowledge from the personal narratives of three Icelandic preschool teachers, where one has been dealing with prolonged work related stress that resulted in burnout and absence in the form of sick leave from work. Another focus is to review research/literature based on previous knowledge in the literature of the psychosocial work environment with special focus on stress and burnout among preschool teachers and compare it to the experience of the informants. I believe the combination of review of research and qualitative interviews provides rich data on the problems of work stress and burnout among preschool teachers.

2. Literature review

In addition to the qualitative research in this study a literature review was adopted, with the aim to produce an overview of what has already been researched, and to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon: **Causes of work stress & burnout among preschool teachers in Iceland as well as investigate if the theories and life experiences match**. The objective was to gather, recognize, evaluate, choose and combine noteworthy evidence related to the research question in order to ensure that the right theories are identified and discussed. The literature review chapter is organized as follows: Introduction and assessment of the psychosocial work environment, definitions of different types of stress and burnout, and how to assess burnout; Last but not least, account of key stress related problems teachers face in their profession.

Inspiration and guidance on how to conduct the literature review stems mainly from Susan Imel (2011). Multiple strategies were applied in the search, including database searching, personal contact and web searching. As a part of the process for selecting potential journal sources, two reference librarians were consulted. For quality databases and search features, EBSCO host was mainly used with its intuitive research platform used by thousands of institutions and millions of users worldwide.

To retrieve accurate results key key concepts of the search question were used, for example: psychosocial work environment, work stress, burnout, preschool teachers, psychological strain, organizational theories and occupational psychology. The main focus was on research from this millennium.

Imel op. cit. argues that when the system for tracking sources is in place, the next task is to develop a systematic mean for analyzing each source. To accomplish this, a literature review matrix was applied and completed. This is a tablet where views, ideas, or data according to thematic categories corresponding to the research project were presented. This gave a clearer view of how different sources were related, and recognised patterns that may not have been immediately visible before (Imel, 2011).

As mentioned before the literature review is classified into different themes. It starts by demonstrating how the research within occupational psychology has changed over time by indicating historical background as well explaining recent developments. It clarifies areas of controversy and agreements between experts in the area as well as identify dominant views.

2.1 The psychosocial work environment

The concept psychosocial work environment is better known within Scandinavia, and especially Denmark as "psykisk arbejdsmiljø" (Agervold, 2003). The concept and its definition has been a topic for discussion since 1970. The first English-language research article using the term: "psychosocial work environment" in the title was published in 1982. It is an analysis of the male Swedish working force (Alfredsson, Karasek, & Theorell, 1982). In the following years, the term was mainly used in articles by Swedish/US author groups. In 1991, a book on the matter was developed by 21 researchers, most of them from Sweden and the US, titled: The Psychosocial Work Environment: Work Organization, Democratization and Health (Fielding, 1992). Till this day there is still a lack of clear definition of psychosocial work environment as to what constitutes it (Agervold, 2003; Rugulies, 2019).

The psychosocial work environment relates to interpersonal and social interactions that affect workplace behavior and development (Jacobs, Hellman, Markowitz, & Wuest, 2013). It includes factors that can affect the work environment both positively and negatively, such as the relationship with the manager, colleagues, customers, clients or others, etc. There may also be issues regarding the organization of work, for instance the balance between resources and requirements, between effort and reward, whether the distribution of task is done with equity as well as social capital (Stressforeningen, 2016).

Work demands form a major part of the psychosocial work environment and when there is a mismatch between the demands of the job and the resources and capabilities of the individual worker to meet those demands work-related stress occurs (Alfredsson et al., 1982; Hvid, 2009). Other factors such as lack of managerial support and work-related violence, harassment and bullying can also form a psychosocial work environment. One such, namely low levels of support and control at work, has shown to increase rates of sickness absence (Jacobs et al., 2013). A psychosocial work environment does not only affect physical and mental health, but also organizational outcomes such as effectiveness and performance (Murugan, 2019).

2.2 Assessment of the psychosocial work environment

Within the work environment field, experts have an enthusiasm for estimating an expansive scope of psychosocial factors, both at the work environmental level and at the national level. In the examination setting, it is important to have broad coverage of psychosocial measurements. This broad coverage also includes central elements of ideas generally utilized in research of work and health, such as the demand control and the effort–reward imbalance (ERI) models, as well as other psychosocial factors such as emotional demands and quality of leadership (Burr et al., 2019).

The teacher stress literature has frequently relied on quantitative methods for assessing psychosocial factors including highly structured rating scales with fixed response options such as the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ). The tool is a standardized and validated questionnaire that covers a broad range of psychosocial work environmental factors. It was developed in 1997 to satisfy the need of Danish work environment professionals and researchers and this questionnaire has become the national standard for assessing psychosocial work environments in Danish workplaces. The use of the questionnaire is extensive and it has been translated into several languages (Pejtersen, Kristensen, Borg, & Bjorner, 2010). Another questionnaire measuring burnout is the Psychosocial Work Environment and Stress Questionnaire' (PWSQ). This scheme involves a sequence of scales that measure the psychosocial work environment factors, as well as stress reactions (Agervold, 2003).

2.3 Definition of Stress

There has been some disagreement within the stress literature on how to define stress, nevertheless, it is generally agreed that stress is an unpleasant emotional experience. Everyone experiences stress at some point in their life. However, the majority of people find it hard to say what stress is or how it is defined. Stress as a term was first introduced into the health psychology language in 1926 by Hans Selye, who is considered to be the founder of the stress concept (Baqutayan, 2015; Marek, Schaufeli & Maslach, 2017). He defined stress as a non-specific reaction made by the body to any demands that it goes through. These demands can be physical as well as mental (Baqutayan, 2015; Mondy & Martocchio, 2016).

According to Danish health authority (Nielsen & Kristian, 2007) stress can be defined as 3 types:

1) as a condition within the individual, such as tension, irritability, insecurity, anxiety or agitation

2) as an environmental condition such as high demands, time pressure, threats, losses or hazards

3) stress as interactive, meaning that there is a relationship between conditions in the environment such as demands, control and support (Karasek, 1979).

Short-term stress is not a diagnosis but a condition where a mental overload occurs. However, long-term stress can develop into diseases like anxiety and depression (Andersen & Brinkman, 2013). Stress is not found in official diagnostic systems, such as ICD and DSM, however, the American Psychological Association (APA) distinguishes between three different types — acute stress, episodic acute stress, and chronic stress. The three types of stress each have their own characteristics, symptoms, duration, and treatment approaches (Psychologytoday.com, 2018). In the early 20th century, Sir William Osler, the father of American Medicine recognized the relationship between stress and heart disease. However, not until recently has modern medicine started to focus on emotional and psychosocial stressors as important risk factors for heart disease (Angerer, 2003).

2.4 Occupational stress

In recent decades, stress and its influences have gained much attraction in organizations. The occupational stress literature points to a number of factors that are important for developing work stress, such as poor management, low rewards and recognition, workplace bullying and the combination of having high demands and low control over one's work (Agervold, 2003). According to the APA´s 2014 work and well-being survey the most commonly reported sources of work stress are low salaries and lack of opportunity for growth (Tetrick & Winslow, 2015). One of the negative psychological consequences of prolonged workplace stress is burnout. Job-related burnout is increasingly recognized as a contributor to workplace issues (King, 2019).

2.5 Burnout

The concept job burnout was first described by (Freudenberger, 1974) and has since been a central concept in the analysis of the psychosocial work environment. Job burnout is a special type of work-related stress and is a mental, emotional and physical exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity (Angerer, 2003). Burnout is a progressive process that begins with fatigue, the feeling of being insufficient, not feeling like going to work and physical symptoms such as headaches, difficulty sleeping and loss of appetite. Failure to do so may result in irritation, avoidance of work duties, isolation or conflicts with colleagues, powerlessness, negativism and doubts about one's own ability to work and chronic psychosomatic symptoms (Møhl, 2017). Today burnout is included in the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) on problems in the occupational context postulated as follows:

> Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions: 1) feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; 2) increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job 3) reduced professional efficacy.

Over the past few decades, scientific research has made enormous strides which ICD-11 is based on and according to the official diagnostic system, burnout is not a disease, but occupational phenomenon (World Health Organization, 2018).

When discussing the concept of burn out various definitions have emerged on the matter. One is that ambitious individuals are at more risk developing a burn out because they make every effort to achieve maximum job performance leading to exhaustion when goals are not met. Another explanation is that burnout is the result of various job stressors (Angerer, 2003). Other studies have since shown association of burnout with heart attacks (Theorell & Rahe, 1972). Some researchers have emphasized that the key to general wellbeing is to have a fair amount of work and good leisure time. The same study also showed that communication and management practices in the workplace have a major impact on employee well-being, but the most common work-related health problems are due to musculoskeletal problems and stress (Cox, Griffiths, & Rial-González, 2000). According to Maslach Burnout is described as:

> "a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some

capacity. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Depersonalization refers to a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people, who are usually the recipients of one's services or care" (1993, pp. 20, 21).

Many studies have shown that burnout can be attributed to working conditions that involve much human interaction (Maslach and Jackson, 1981;, such as preschool teachers as their work requires a great deal of communication with the children as well as the parents and colleagues.

2.6 Assessment of burnout

Burnout is a complex phenomenon that can manifest in a range of ways. In order to measure burnout, the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) was developed. CBI allows for measuring three different (but related) types of burnout: (1) personal burnout, (2) work related burnout and (3) client related burnout. The CBI makes a distinction between psychical and psychological exhaustion.

The most widely used and validated survey tool to measure burnout is the Maslachs model. MBI has been pioneering for over three decades and has 22 items and assesses three distinct components: (1) emotional exhaustion, (2) depersonalization and (3) personal accomplishment. It has been considered the standard tool for research in this field and has been translated and validated in many languages. The MBI scale had high reliability and validity as a burnout measure (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

2.7 Teacher's psychological well-being

Working conditions have an impact on staff, and problems preschool teachers face relate to noise and space allocated among others. In a survey designed to gather information about the current state of Michigan kindergartens, it was revealed that there are generally too many children in each class, usually in the range of 24-29. The prevalence of behavioral problems in such large groups is higher, it is more difficult to monitor and assess the development of individual students and it is difficult to work on certain tasks with smaller groups when the amount is so large. It is fair to say that with each child being enrolled in preschool, the chances of incidents between the students increase which can have a negative effect on the behavioral problems in the class. At the same time, the preschool teacher needs to watch more children and therefore his ability to monitor individual students is reduced,

making it more difficult to intervene in individual incidents. These situations can definitely threaten teachers' well-being (Gallant, 2009).

A Swedish study from 2016, with mainly open-ended questions, answered by preschool teachers show that teachers prefer groups with fewer children than they have today (Pramling Samuelsson, Williams, Sheridan, & Hellman, 2016). Fewer children provide better opportunities for conversation and other forms of communication. This allows better time to listen to the children, monitor their interactions with other children, and ask open-ended questions. Many teachers do not perceive themselves as professional workers when the group is too large because all the energy goes to putting out fires, preventing conflicts and conducting behavioral problems instead of dealing with children's interest and development, rather than going deeper into teaching the children in different areas. It is stated that it is important to balance the age of the children, gender, nationality and financial background. In this way, the children get the opportunity to get to know each other's different backgrounds and learn from each other. The number of children in the class is therefore of great importance for the preschool teacher's perspective and ability to cope with situations that arise. The more children, the more stress. Of course, the number of employees is important too, but space never increases, even though the number of children and employees increase, so there is always this enlarged likelihood of incidents (Pramling Samuelsson et al., 2016)

According to the research preschool children need more space for their activities and it is important to lower the ratio of children in each class for optimal learning outcomes, as well contribute to teacher's wellbeing.

3. Classic theories of stress

Throughout the literature review different workplace stress theories, models and approaches have been proposed, with some gaining more support than others. Some of these will be outlined below, starting with some well- known models that have been influential in the past in occupational stress research. These models and theories have been chosen in an attempt to guide occupational stress research and evaluate research findings. Within this chapter there following models will be accounted for: Job-Demands-Control (Karasek, 1979), Effort-Reward Imbalance (Siegrist, 1996), Job-Demands-Resources (Demerouti et al., 2001)

3.1 Job Demands-Control model

To understand the effect of stressors upon a job, it is important to look at the balance between demands and control the worker has over their own responsibilities. The most famous model on stressors in the work environment was developed by Robert Karasek around the year 1979 and is known as the Demand-Control Model (Hvid, 2009). It has proven very influential because it is straightforward and practical, and more importantly it is widely tested (Theorell, 2013). According to the literature, the concept of control has had a central position in research into the psychological working environment over the last 30 years (Holt, Hvid, Kamp, & Lund, n.d.; Hvid, 2009). Control has been understood as the degree of the autonomy and discretion the employees have for using different skills, whereas demands refer to the workload and intellectual requirements of the job. This creates four kinds of jobs: passive, active, low strain and high strain. According to the model, those who have a high degree of work pressures and experience a low degree of control have an increased risk of developing stress (Hvid, 2009; Karasek, 1979).
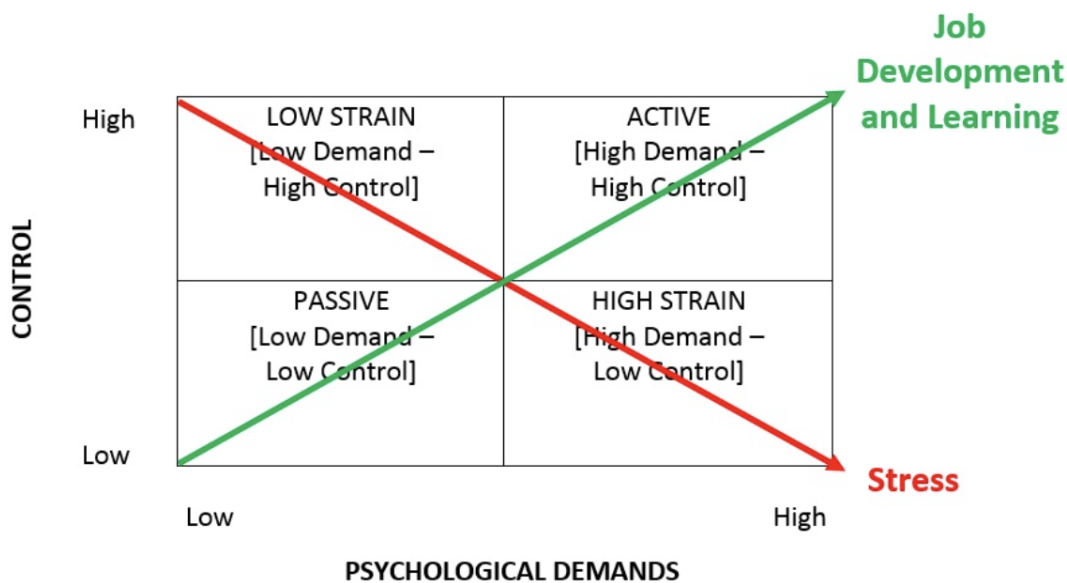
Figure 1. Karasek's Demand-Control Model of Occupational Stress

Work related stress, then, is a physiological and psychological response to a mismatch between the resources of the individual and the demands of the job- environment.

As mentioned above, the demands-control model is the most famous model when it comes to exploring the psychosocial work environment and stress. This might relate to Karasek's understanding of the relationship between the work environment and employee health. Karasek and Theorell (1990) argue that the previous stress theories have been developed on the basis of acute stress that is due to uncontrollable situations, like natural disasters. In the workplace, the stressors are different. They are constant, but changeable. Therefore, Karasek focuses more on the context than on the individual. As could be seen from the literature review the teachers are struggling with increasing demands such as too many children and lack of resources when it comes to the school facilities. In their case it is thus, the way the work is organized that is the source of the work stress, where the main focus is on the environment and the context. However, Karasek and Theorell point out that there are individual differences in how work organization is experienced and handled, but these differences are not the main factors in relation to stress reactions, the basic problem lies elsewhere. Thus, they consider it more important to change the organization itself rather than the individual. This implies that if you simply treat the individual, you only treat the symptoms instead of the base of the problem.

As explained above, Karasek's model is important in understanding the effect of stressors upon a job. Within the teachers occupation some potential job resources include autonomy or positive and supportive relation with coworkers and the parents. Job demands, on the other hand, include lack of time, too many students or noisy environment. Therefore, according to Karasek's model if there is a mismatch between job demands and insufficient levels of job resources it can pose a high risk of stress or burnout. One example is if preschool teachers experience too many students (high demands) compared to teachers (low control) this could have an increased risk of developing stress.

3.2 Effort-Reward Imbalance model

Another model used to identify a stressful psychosocial work environment is Johannes Sigerist's effort-reward imbalance model (ERI). The model has been widely used in international research since the late 1990's, and it differs from the others mentioned above as it explicitly combines information on extrinsic and intrinsic factors. According to the ERI model the greatest risk of developing stress at work is to be found when there is a mismatch between high efforts spent and low reward received.
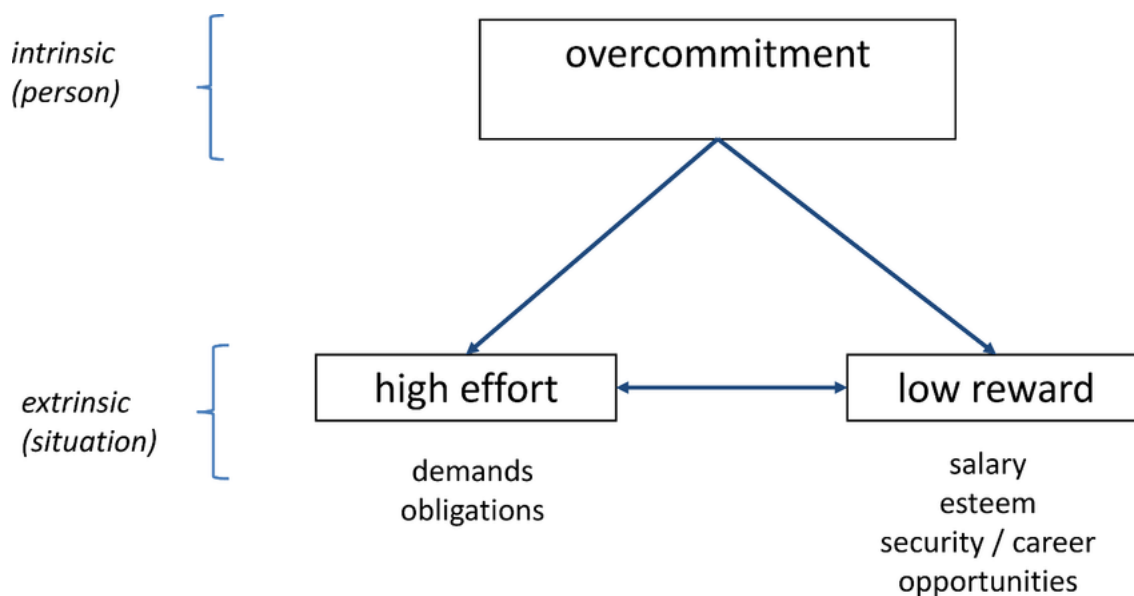

Figure 2. Sigerist's effort-reward imbalance model (ERI).

Figure 2 (Kendel and Rockenbauch, 2016) shows the different processes of the ERI model. Here you can see that the employees who work hard and make every effort in their work but receive little or nothing, no reward, burn out rather than those who get it. Examples of rewards include salary, promotion prospects, job security, and esteem, recognition (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

In teacher's occupation there are little opportunities for promotions to higher positions such as assistant-/supervisor, nor opportunities for other kinds of higher positions due to the democracy of teacher's education. In short, the ERI model says that if the rewards are not there, employees are more likely to be stressed. The teacher's occupation resembles an imbalance in high effort and low rewards and are therefore of great risk developing work related stress and eventually burn out.

The DCM model does not place as much emphasis on rewards as the ERI model, but independence is the most important factor in work stress. If independence at work is not present, the greater the likelihood that employees develop stress. Many consider it a disadvantage of these models that they focus on only one aspect of the work, rather than taking into account more factors that may have an impact (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

3.3 Job Demands-Resources model

The Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R model), described by Arnold Bakker and Eva Demeroutis, was introduced as an alternative to other models of employee well-being, such as the demand-control model and the effort-reward imbalance model (2007). Teacher burnout is often explained using this model. According to the JD-R model, the causes of job-related burnout can be classified into two general categories: job demands and job resources (Demerouti, Nachreiner, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2001). Job demands refer to the physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of a job that require continued mental or physical effort, such as work pressure and emotional demands (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005). In teacher's occupation this could account for a student with behavioral problems, low pay, work overload, poor physical work environment, and a lack of promotional opportunities, all of which can cause emotional strain among teachers. Job resources refer to aspects of a job that can reduce job demands, help teachers achieve work goals, and support their development and personal growth (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Job resources for teachers, for instance, include access to information, manager support, and an innovative school climate and social climate (Hakanen et al., 2006). Bakker et al., (2005) claim that regardless of the occupation, when both job demands and resources are high, high strain and motivation is to be

expected, when on the other hand, when both are low, job burnout is to be expected. Although job demands may lead to burnout, they may also increase sense of challenge and motivation if matched with adequate resources.

4. Introduction to the Icelandic preschool

The theories emphasize both job demands and job resources, though they focus on different aspects. But how does that fit with the situation for Icelandic teachers in general? To answer that, it is necessary to look at the structure of the Icelandic preschool to begin with. This structure will also help create an understanding of the everyday life of the informants in the study conducted.

As mentioned, the Icelandic education system resembles those of Denmark and other Scandinavian countries. Regardless, for readers unfamiliar with Iceland and its preschool system it can be useful to get a contextual description. The purpose of this chapter hence is to provide such contextual basis, as well as introducing the challenges Icelandic preschool teachers face in their psychosocial work environment based on the findings in section 2. This relates to working conditions, such as noise exposure and small spaces, rising demands, low salaries and lack of respect.

4.1 The school system

Iceland is one of Europe's smallest independent nations, with a population of only around 350.000, set in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean directly on the continental divide between North America and Europe (Statice.is, 2018b). The Icelandic term for preschool is „playschool" and is used in all official early childhood programmes and preschools. Play is a central concept and the word "playschool" itself reflects the view that young children learn best through play. This outlook distinguishes early schooling from mandatory schooling (Mms.is, 2018).

The National Curriculum Guide for Preschools in Iceland emphasizes play as both an aim and a method, where time frames are usually flexible and teaching methods are indirect. The National Curriculum Guide for Preschools of 2011 is based on the Preschool Act No. 90/2008 which is the framework legislation for the Early childhood education and care (ECEC). Each individual municipality in Iceland has the responsibility for financing and running the preschools. The preschools are to set their own school curriculum guidelines, and it is the role of the municipality to closely follow the implementation of the guidelines for each school. The Ministry performs external review of preschools (Government.is, 2016).

The country exhibits one of the highest enrollment rates in ECEC. For instance, around 97% of children aged between three and five years, respectively, participate in ECEC, according to statistics Iceland (Statice.is, 2018a). Moreover, 83% attend public institutions, which is in line with other Nordic countries, such as Denmark (82%). Consequently, most children attend school for

around seven and a half to eight hours a day, with the longest stay of around nine hours. On average, children attend preschool until the age of six, children may, however, complete preschool and commence compulsory school study earlier or later if certain requirements are met (Government.is, 2011). In Iceland, as in most other countries, preschool teachers are mainly female. The participation of women in the workforce is among the highest in the world.

In Iceland, special classes or preschools for children with special needs are close to non-existent. The emphasis on equality and inclusion for all students is strong: According to the framework legislation for the ECEC in Iceland (Preschool Act 90/2008), "local authorities are responsible for all matters regarding the accommodation for children with special needs and disadvantaged children. Municipalities are to include these measures in their general policy on preschools within their district" (Mms.is, 2018, p.2).

4.2 Working conditions

The average person spends a lot of time at work, generally Icelanders work 8 hours per day, five days of the week. That sums up to 40 hours per week, or about 2000 hours per year. The average worker spends a tremendous long time in the workplace and jobs can make a huge impact on the quality of people's lives, yet this also depends on working conditions. According to a survey with open-end questions answered by icelandic preschool teachers, the working conditions in Icelandic preschools appear to be unacceptable for many teachers (Dýrfjörð, 2019.) Furthermore, one part of preschool teachers' problems are long working hours and contact times with children according to the survey. This can also be seen in the OECD report "Starting Strong", where the statistics showed that Icelandic preschool teachers have one of the longest contact times with children of all preschool teachers in the OECD countries, as well as a longer preschool year than for other OECD countries. Heavy workloads (working hours and the physical demands of the job), and working conditions are related to stress according to the report (OECD, 2017).

The ratio of children to staff is often used as an indicator of the resources available in preschools. In Iceland, this number is particularly low, with four children for every contact staff member (teachers and teachers' assistants) compared to nine on average across OECD countries and should icelandic preschool teachers therefore have better work conditions compared to the other countries. Lack of preparation time is one of the challenges preschool teachers are experiencing in Iceland, as well as time for professional development. This problem is the factor teachers seem to be most dissatisfied with (Dýrfjörð, 2019).

Teachers feel that everybody has to work faster while still doing their best but with no chance to actually catch up. Preschool teachers say this shortage of time to prepare is impacting them professionally and is why many of them are approaching burnout or leaving the profession (Dýrfjörð, 2019).

In Icelandic preschools, staff turnover and absences are a serious problem, it is expensive both financially and emotionally and doesn't only affect the employees and the organization, but also, and most important the children. High employee turnover increases the likelihood of burnout (Hallsdóttir, 2015). According to the ERI model an imbalance between high efforts and low rewards is associated with longer sickness absence duration and more frequent absences (Clays, Derycke, Rots, Van de Ven & Rots, 2013)

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4.3 Small spaces

For the last decades there have been many changes in group size and the space allocated to the children in Icelandic preschools. It seems, the number of students is on the rise and the space is diminishing (Dýrfjörð, 2019). When the number of children is too large for the space provided, stress may arise. According to an OECD report on preschool issues, discussion of preschool issues in Iceland has been quite prominent. Preschool administrators in Akureyri (a small town in north Iceland), emphasized the fact that children generally stay longer in preschools than before, and the number of children in each class is too high for young children for such a long period of time (Vikudagur.is, 2018). Younger children need more time and interaction with teachers for a quality education, supporting a lower ratio of students per teacher in early education (oecd.org, 2019). Furthermore, a prolonged presence of young children in an over-sized group in too little space can affect both their mental health and also the teachers.

4.4 Noise exposure

One of the concerns preschool teachers face is excessive noise. The activity of many children in small spaces creates noise, which can place children and teachers at a high risk of hearing loss. According to the Icelandic Occupational Health and Safety at Work (OHSW) laws, there are no specific laws or

standards that limit noise in educational settings although they exist for other workplaces. A study conducted in preschools in Reykjavik showed that noise was over limits of other types of workplaces in most of the assessments and for 80% of the incidents the noise had caused discomfort in the past month. Excessive noise for a prolonged period of time can cause stress, which is one of the risk factors for burnout (Guðmarsdóttir and Tómasson, 2007). The problem of noise in preschools in Iceland was raised with the Icelandic ombudsman for children, who was especially concerned about the long term effect of noise on both children and teachers. It was pointed out that according to some measurements, the noise in preschools can exceed 85 decibels, a noise level that would require hearing protection devices in most workplaces (Dýrfjörð, 2019).

Studies have pointed out that a too long resonance time can deplete teachers and they feel prolonged fatigue. Resonance time is a measure of echo. Lack of energy can reduce job satisfaction and eventually lead to exhaustion. Not only is there a risk of lack of energy because poor sound quality can have a significant effect on a teacher's voice health and lead to serious voice problems. According to Icelandic research, 50% of teachers believe that at some point in their working lives they have had voice problems. Poor voice health of teachers can lead to reduced life and job satisfaction, lead to less social participation inside and outside of work and increased stress and anxiety. Furthermore, women are more at risk than men, mainly because their vocal cords are more widely used, as they are shorter and fluctuate much faster than men (Ki.is, 2020a).

4.5 Rising demands and low salaries

The common barriers workers of the education system are facing in Iceland include staff shortages, classroom size, lack of funding and professional development opportunities. But it seems the biggest barrier is the low income (OECD, 2019). In times of financial crisis, it is easier to get preschool teachers, other specialists and assistants to apply for work in the system. Economically prosperous times, when there are many job opportunities, tend to be times of crisis for preschools.

Educational requirements to become a licensed preschool teacher are high in Iceland. Yet, teacher salaries do not necessarily reflect this level of educational requirements. It is very common that during university studies in Iceland people rely on loans to support themselves during the studies. This results in high depths after graduation. When looking at starting salaries among preschool teachers in the OECD countries, Iceland has the lowest pay of the Nordic countries, while Denmark has the highest (using converted purchasing power parity). Furthermore, teachers earn almost the

same amount at the beginning and the end of their career (OECD, 2017). With the advent of social media the demands have increased, such as registering attendance, meal times, communicating with parents, and each child's resting time, as well, news updates and photos are to be put on the institution's web page.

4.6 Lack of respect

One of the concerns teachers have been facing from society is the lack of respect. And this can especially be seen among preschool teachers as they have experienced all kinds of disrespect from the society as their professional education was not as well recognized as the professional education of elementary school teachers. At the same time, they agreed that their working conditions had become worse after the 2008 economic crisis, as shortage of teachers, timelessness, less flexibility and increased stress is more common now than before (Jónasdóttir, 2013).

Another aspect of this discussion relates to the development that has occurred in the Icelandic preschools when it comes to legislation and increased educational requirements for preschool teachers. People's attitudes toward preschool teacher work do not appear to have followed increased educational requirements and seems to be influenced by prior ideas on women's role as caregivers (Jónsdóttir, 2012). Such perception can affect how preschool teachers evaluate their work and their importance.

Another view in the discussion on lack of respect is that the profession is highly feminized. The stereotypical gendered perception and discourse in society means that working with the youngest children is considered women's work and is therefore subordinated. This view makes it harder for preschool teachers to be seen as professionals as it may be taken for granted that anyone, especially women, can "take care" of children. Apart from that, Icelandic teachers have, for a long period of time, expressed dissatisfaction with their income and are experiencing a lack of respect for their work

The problem of teacher shortages is a very known problem in the icelandic preschool system. According to the OECD report, It is of utter importance to make the teaching profession more financially and intellectually attractive to meet a growing demand for high quality teachers. The Icelandic teachers Union considers better basic pay and improvements in working conditions to be key factors in attracting young people to teacher's training programs and careers in the country´s schools (Ki.is, 2020b).

As mentioned, to become a licensed preschool teacher in Iceland you need to complete five years of Master's education, and, according to law, at least 2/3 of the positions in each preschool

should be filled by licensed preschool teachers. Unfortunately this is not the reality and, only a minority (approximately 32%) of the staff working with children in the preschools have licensed preschool teacher education, furthermore, unskilled staff accounted for more than one-half (52.3%) of staff working in education and childcare in December 2016, as per Statistics Iceland in September 2017.

These common problems within the educational system, partially relates to the financial crisis in 2008 where some preschools were merged with other preschools, making them larger and at the same time cutting down on staff members. However, today it appears that Iceland has moved beyond the financial crisis, but the preschools are still struggling. Research and report on the psychosocial work environment among preschool teachers in Iceland indicate stress and an unstable workforce (Dýrfjörð, 2019). Furthermore, considerable burnout exists among preschool teachers in the country (Hallsdóttir, 2015).

Summing up, the work conditions for Icelandic teachers have deteriorated over the last few decades as the economy suffered from the crisis at the beginning of the millenium. As the economy bounced back, conditions for teachers did not improve, leaving them with low status and little respect, high levels of noise, an increasing number of students in small rooms and an increasing amount of demands that for instance today's use of social media and focus on the individual child facilitates. These conditions are in accordance with stressors identified in the DCM, ERI and JD-R theories.

5. Methodologi

The three theories draw a bleak picture of the work environment of the Icelandic preschool teachers. With this as background information, a study was conducted to investigate if and how these stressors influence three specific preschool teachers. Further theory will be included to explain their individual situation. But first the methodological considerations of the study. Therefore, in the following chapters philosophies, approaches, choices, techniques and procedures, also ethical considerations in conducting this qualitative research will be accounted for.

5.1 Qualitative research

Interviewing people about their experiences, attitudes and their life stories has become a widespread research practice in the humanities and social sciences. The interview probably represents the most widespread approach to qualitative research, and in some disciplines the interview has become the most prevalent empirical method of them all (Brinkmann & Taangaard, 2010). In order to gain a better insight into the causes of work stress & burnout among icelandic preschool teachers and in addition to the literature review, a qualitative research method was adopted based on interviews of three participants' as a way to get the in-depth information on the topic. The research interview was inspired by phenomenological philosophy. When it comes to qualitative research, phenomenology is generally a concept that points to an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors' own perspectives and describes the world as it is experienced by the informants based on the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it (Brinkmann & Taangaard, 2010). In accordance, the focal point of the research problem of this study is to gain insight to the first person perspective of the informant's life and experiences, as well as the psychosocial factors they encounter in their workplace. Therefore, the phenomenology helps to understand why the informants are experiencing stress and how the workplace is associated with it.

Another important research method that I could have chosen in this research is the quantitative research approach in the form of questionnaires, such as the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) but as I wanted to uncover the meaning of the informants experiences of stress and burnout in their profession, I decided qualitative research interviews was the best choice. If the aim was to draw samples from large-scale data sets, quantitative designs are more preferred. There is also the possibility of combining these two methods and adopting mixed methods, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

In a qualitative ethnography, the aim is to produce contextual real-world knowledge about the behaviors, social structures and shared beliefs of a specific group of people. As this methodology is less controlled and more interpretive, one will need to reflect on one's position as a researcher, taking into account how one's participation and perception might have influenced the results. The method is suitable for the questions why and how. Even though unstructured interviews usually produce results that cannot be generalized beyond the sample group, they have shown to be especially useful to gain a personal narrative where the primary emphasis lies in how meanings are constructed and shaped discursively. Kvale (1996) also agrees that interviews allow people to communicate and transfer information from others' perspective and in their own words, which helps the researcher understand the truth and situation from the subjective point of view, and also explore more from the participants daily experiences.

Even though much of the value of qualitative interviews lies in its flexibility and openness, it is extremely important to develop a basic structure and framework which will make the study useful and worthwhile. In Steinar Kvale's (1996) book *Interview - En introduktion til det kvalitative forsknings view* he gives practical guidelines on how to approach this. He recommends that the research is to be organized into seven stages; thematizing, designing, interview, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. The investigation of this study is based on his guidance and presented through the following stages:

1. Thematizing: Here I formulated the purpose of the investigation and described the concept of the topics to be investigated before the interviews took place.

2. Designing: At this stage, the design of the study was planned, where all seven stages were taken into consideration before the interview started.

3. Interviewing: The semi-structured interviews were conducted based on an interview guide and with a reflective approach to the knowledge looked for.

4. Transcribing: At this point the interview material is prepared for analysis, which commonly includes a transcription from oral speech to written text.

5. Analyzing: Here I decide which methods of analysis are appropriate on the basis of the purpose and topic of the investigation, as well, the nature of the interview material.

6. Verifying: At this stage, the generalizability, reliability, and validity of the interview findings are discussed. Reliability means how consistent the results are, and validity refers to whether an interview study explores what it is intended to explore.

7. Reporting: The last stage is about communicating the results of the study and applied research methods in a way that lives up to scientific criteria, and takes into account the ethical aspects as well the results in a readable product from which others can gain new knowledge.

5.2 Approach and strategies

As mentioned, the interview has become a very common way today to obtain knowledge about people's life situation, their opinions, attitudes and experiences. Therefore it is of great importance that the interviewer realizes how to approach an interview project before he embarks on the journey and is conscious of how the qualitative research interview differs from related interview forms, as well as what understanding of knowledge and people's lives the interview is based on as practice (Brinkmann & Taangaard, 2010). These were all considerations that were kept in mind before conducting this research as the optimal goal of the qualitative interviews was to get as close as possible to the informants' experiences on their work stress and explore how the workplace is associated, and ultimately formulate a coherent and theoretically well-informed third-person perspective on the experience in a written form.

The interview research is multifaceted and can take place between two people the regular face-to-face way, or in groups or via email to mention a few (Brinkmann & Taangaard, 2010). In this particular study the interviews were conducted with the help of FaceTime. This is due to the COVID-19 pandemic and geographical differences between the informants and the researcher. The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes each. The spoken language was Icelandic, however when converting the interviews into written text, English was chosen.

5.3 Semi-structured interview research

In a semi-structured interview project, it is an advantage to start with *what* questions before deciding how to concretely proceed in the project. In short, it should be clear what the researcher wants to seek knowledge about before considering how to best obtain the desired knowledge (Brinkmann & Taangaard, 2010). In this study, such considerations were taken before beginning the research. In this

case the aim was to acquire knowledge of the informant's lives, experiences and the psychosocial factors they encounter in their workplaces as preschool teachers. Initially, this work started with the literature review where the effort was to gather, recognize, evaluate, choose and combine all noteworthy evidence related to the research problem.

The three interviews in this study were semi-structured, where some questions were fully decided and others not fixed with the intention to resemble a conversation more than an interview. This method allowed more room for a discussion rather than a straightforward question and answer format. Therefore, the informants were given the option of freely expressing their own views in their own terms. The chosen interview form also provided some flexibility during the interviews and this is seen as a plus because it gave room to put the interview guide aside and go in a different direction if some interesting and new relevant topics emerged. This means that the dialogue could be turned in a direction that is interesting to explore further (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2015). This was therefore used as a baseline in this research to put emphasis on making room for the informants' own opinions, feelings and experiences. They were therefore not restricted from moving away from the interview guide and questions. A good dynamic is possible when restrictions are removed and open and follow-up questions are deliberately asked to the informants, because their answers should preferably be understood exactly as they express them during the interview and because it should not be the interviewers preconceptions that are expressed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

An interview differs from an ordinary conversation in a way that possesses a more clearly defined purpose and a certain structure, because the purpose of an interview is that it must produce useful empirical data (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2015). This is exactly the purpose of this qualitative research interview: to form an understanding of why the informants developed stress and the related experiences. The project is therefore aimed at generating empirical data and the interview questions are centered around this, and as the informants strive to answer the questions there is a certain structure attained. The entire interview with the informants were planned with the help of an interview guide and it is here that the interview questions were planned and recorded (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2015)

5.4 Interview guide and ethics

As mentioned previously, an interview guide has been prepared and it was developed for the purpose of generating empirical data on why the informants developed stress and the experiences associated with it. This is a semi-structured interview project, and the interview guide was formed on small sets of self-prompts serving as a help to investigate the research problem. The questions varied and gave an opportunity to ask in-depth questions. The method gave the interviewer an opportunity to manage the interviews while allowing the respondents to answer the questions freely. The semi-structured interview can be useful if you only have the opportunity to interview the informant once, as in this case and therefore it is important to make sure that all key issues are touched.

Asking questions and getting answers in an interview is far harder than some might immediately think, therefore a pilot interview was conducted before embarking on the actual study. It allowed the interviewer to review and revise the interview to better prepare and appear competent during the interviews. This resulted in some adjustments in regard to some of the interview questions which were changed and improved. One example is that the theoretical framework that I originally used, did not yield very good questions, so the theoretical framework was adjusted to include much more from Agervold, Lazarus and Rosa. It also made me realise the importance of having more than one informant, as was originally planned, and be able to identify a pattern in the responses.

Ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and consequences for the informants were taken into account in this study. The participants were informed about the purpose of this research and the main features of the design. Protecting the welfare of the informants, name, institution and identities are kept discreet in this research.

5.5 Transcription

In the following section considerations regarding transcription style will be discussed based on Steinar Kvale's recommendation. As a consequence, it was decided to exclusively transcribe the relevant parts of the interviews and those who have been included in the analysis section. Those parts are transcribed in their full unfolding because I wanted to ensure that the nuances are included. Transcription takes a long time and is a heavy process, and by excluding relevant parts of the

interviews, it made it possible to be more concentrated in the transcription, which Kvale also argues for (1997).

5.6 Selection of participants

The informants of this study were three Icelandic females working in preschools in Iceland and the reason for selecting these particular informants relates to them being able to answer the research problem of this investigation. The aim was to explore their experiences in regards to why they developed stress and/or burnout and how their work environments contributed, as well investigate if the chosen theories match the teachers experiences. They were considered in this study by their roles as preschool teachers as well their experience level in the profession and can therefore best and most broadly inform the interview questions. Informants vary in age, length of employment, and education, among other things. Those resembling a longer work span in the profession can give other experiences than those who have been shorter. Their differences are seen as important to get different perspectives on the research problem. A further description is given as below:

Informant A, 37 years old, single and no kids. With eleven years of experience working within the same preschool in Reykjavik, with the title pre-school assistant, a 2 years preschool education study achieved parallel to working at the preschool. According to information from the preschool's website, there are 50 pupils enrolled, divided after age, in three classrooms, with 16 employees. The informant had previously been on sick leave for one and a half month, suffering from work-stress as well anxiety and depression.

Informant B, 38 years old, married with three kids. Works as a pre-school assistant in the same preschool as informant A, and has 7 years of experience working in the early education setting.

Informant C, 25 years old, single and no kids. Works as a pre-school assistant in a preschool in Hafnarfjörður, little outside Reykjavik. She has 3 years of experience working in this particular profession. Parallel to working she is finishing her Master's degree of preschool teacher education. According to information from the preschool's website, there are 75 pupils enrolled, divided after age, in five classrooms, with 28 employees.

5.7 Analysis strategy

The following section will outline the analysis strategy of this qualitative research study. Much of the analytical work is about achieving a synthesized understanding of the connections between different elements in the empiri and material (Brinkmann & Taangaard, 2010). To create this overview Kvale's work is the primary source of inspiration when it comes to analysis strategy in this research. He accounts for four different steps in the process which are as follows: *description, discovery, interpretation* and *analysis of interviews* (Kvale, 1997). Kvale's four analysis steps have been used in the project as it gives access to the lifeworld of the informants. However, it must be emphasized that a fixed analytical direction has not been followed and therefore it is important to explain approaches in the analysis strategy to be able to show transparency (Kvale, 1997; Olsen, 2002).

In Kvale's first analysis step *description* the informants describe their lifeworld during the interview. Tell what they experience and feel in regards to the work and the experiences associated with their development of stress.

In Kvale's second analysis step *discovery*, the informants discover new relationships during the interviews such as how the stress comes about in the workplace.

In Kvale's third analysis step *interpretation*, the interviewer condenses and interprets the meaning of what the informants describe in the interview.

In a fourth step, the analysis of the recorded interviews begins by the interviewer. Here the concepts of meaning, coding and condensation have been used. For example, it was common in the interviews that long formulations were given and statements were passed back and forth due to the less structured interview form, and an opinion condensation helped to gather the long formulations and compress them into shorter formulations without the essence disappearing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The next step was to use color coding because it helped to provide an overview of the empirics, and after a thorough reading and listening of the interviews, they were categorized and thematized according to why the informants developed work-related stress and their experiences associated with it. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

6. Theoretical background for the analysis

In this project, the research problem is aimed at the informants' world of life and it is about the psychosocial factors that existed in the informants workplace. As mentioned before phenomenology helps to give an understanding of why they were stressed and their experiences associated with it. The intention is to understand and explain the informants' world of life and their experience of the work environment during stress development, stress handling and finally to identify the psychosocial factors that had an impact on their stress development. This is done with the help of the cognitive stress theories of Mogens Agervold and Richard S. Lazarus, and Hartmund Rosa's critical theory. These theories will be used primarily to analyze the empirical part of the thesis and to understand and explain causes of stress, as well investigate if their core values match the informants' life experiences of this study. The theories are criticized for not being empirically based, but are applicable to be able to understand the theoretical foundations of the societal processes that surround the preschool teachers in the empirical material of the thesis. However, the intent is not to prove or disprove the validity of the theories, instead the theories are to help shed some light on the problems surrounding stress.

6.1. Mogens Agervold

Mogens Agervold presents the case that one should not solely focus on organizational psychology when investigating stress. Agervold believes that dealing with the psychosocial work environment is of equal importance, particularly in a modern workplace, in which there is a greater focus on social relations in the workplace (Agervold, 2003). There was previously widespread criticism of research into the psychosocial working environment, due to its focus on subjective values, with critics being of the opinion that one could not produce generalizable observations.

Behaviorism and Taylorism similarly state that if research is to be scientifically sound, the observations from repeated experiments should be the same. They do not believe that the subjective opinions can be used for scientific purposes as they are variable, and that research into the psychosocial work environment is thus not scientifically grounded (Agervold, 1997). Mogens Agervold disagrees with these statements by critics however:"...*if one were to omit dealing with central subjective dimensions, such as the worker's level of interest in their work, due to the inability to unambiguously classify this concept based on objective criteria, it would equate to throwing away significant knowledge on what is important within the context of a work environment*"(Agervold,

1997, p. 159). Agervold states that separation of the subjective opinions and the physical options is impossible, as there is a dialectical relationship between these two spheres.

The psychosocial factors of the work environment are the individual's appreciation of their own work environment, and as such they are determined by both the organisational arrangement of the environment and the person's personality in relation to the work-related values. The psychosocial conditions are thus determined by the environment, which through a transactional context encounters the individual and their personality – a meeting that implies a number of personal appreciations of the environment, through which one determines whether it is "interesting work" or not (Agervold, 2003). In the case of Lazarus, the result of the transaction was determined by whether or not the stress was deemed to be positive, negative or meaningless to the individual. A negative experience of stress results in consequences for the individual by way of an experience of loss, threat or challenge. A stress process is then initiated because of this. A positive experience of stress results in the individual feeling an experience of personal growth and development (Ibid.). Agervolds model below illustrates the psychosocial work environment. A meeting between the individual's own personality and their work environment provides a transactional result, which leads to either a sickness or growth, depending on whether stress is deemed to be something positive or negative (Agervold, 2003).

The model below is an illustration of Agervold's simple interpretation of the transaction process:
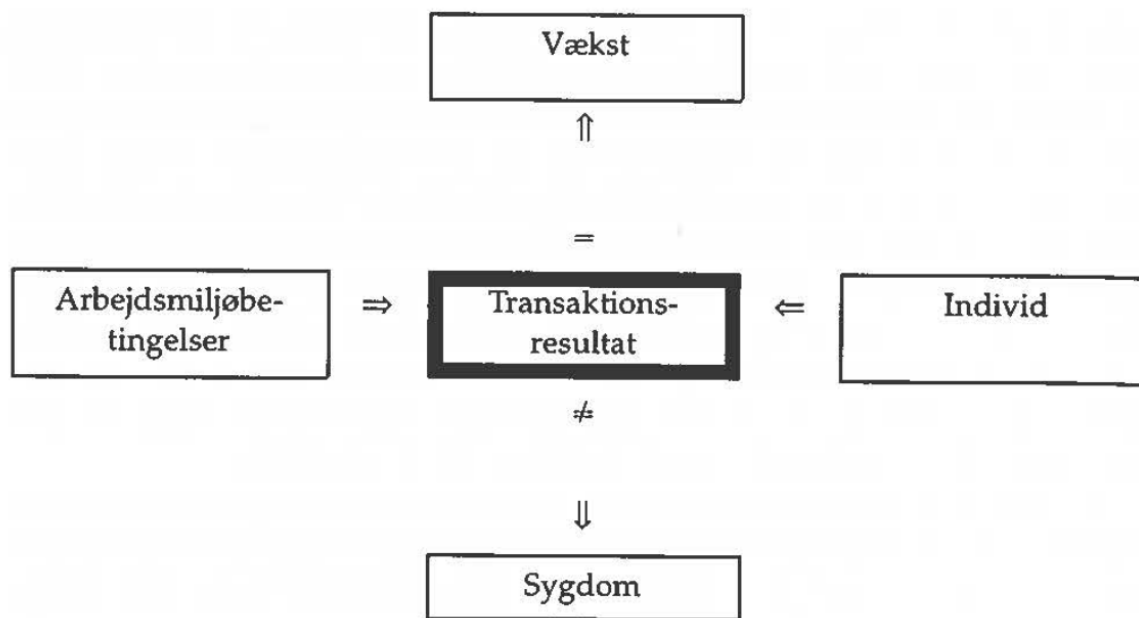

Figure 1. Simple transactions model (Agervold. 1998)

Agervold furthermore concerns himself with the relationship between the employee and the manager. Among other things he describes human relations as being a trend that considers the importance of the informal good relations and group formation between the manager and the employee. The focus of human relations primarily lies on investigating the relationship between the manager and the employee with the relations between employees being secondary. A manager may have different democratic attitudes towards their employee. A democratic manager delegates responsibility and allows their employee to control the actual work, and in a more general sense gives their employee a more representative form of empowerment. An employee is thus provided with a number of options which allow the employee to make their own decisions in their work. Wage-related measures are less important, provided an employee's fundamental needs are fulfilled. People prefer to control and plan their work lives, which results in an employee becoming alienated if their autonomy is limited in work situations (Agervold, 2003).

Mogens Agervold is of the opinion that work environment conditions can be characterized into two groups: the technological one, which covers material goods (wage, gadgets, positions, etc.),

and the organisational one (organisation of the work). The organisational condition is the one that forms the basis of work environment psychology (Agervold, 2003). Agervold states that the fulcrum of work organisation is the control of a work situation. The psychosocial factors are assessed in parallel as reactions to a given work environment. If there is an unreasonableness in relation to requirements and resources, the psychosocial factors will take the form of an individual's experience of challenge, loss or threat. If a person regards their work as being meaningless and without prospects, this will threaten the self-feeling of the individual and lead to coping or potential stress factors. However, if a person enjoys their work and the work is an important part of their life, then it may lead to growth and personal development, even if that person encounters stressful work situations (Agervold, 2003). For there are a lot of factors that are relevant to the individual, and the following describes the psychosocial factors that Agervold puts forward:

6.1.1. Autonomy

Autonomy relates to whether the person is a co-determinator in the organisation and its collective means of influencing decisions. The autonomy of an individual relates to whether an individual can handle themselves in a work situation and utilize their abilities, while simultaneously being assigned an area of responsibility that allows them to organise and control their work according to their own ability. Mogens Agervold states that from the managerial side of things, it is a matter of having a method of participation wherein the employee is consulted regarding important work tasks, the responsibility is distributed and the employee is internalised. The tasks of an employee and a manager's expectations of them are clarified and there is an agreement on targets and means, while context and a connecting thread are provided within the organisational hierarchy in relation to values, objectives and in relation to the employees' tasks and the organisational concept in a wider sense. Autonomy thus takes on various forms depending on the combination of the following elements:

1. co-determination and control over own work
2. influence over the business
3. participatory management method and clarity regarding roles

A high or low level of autonomy will vary depending on the level of control, influence, management method and clarity regarding roles (Agervold, 2003).

6.1.2. Integration

Integration relates to the cohesiveness of a work situation and the extent to which it is meaningful for the individual. Is the work meaningful, fun and exciting? Are there opportunities for learning and development? Can one live up to one's potential and make use of one's knowledge and competencies? Is it possible to secure opportunities for learning and development through challenging and stressful work situations? Is there a long-term goal in the work situation that provides a positive outlook on the future? The above elements are vital to whether a person feels burnt out or worn out in a work situation. An assessment of the integration level can be done from the following circumstances:

1. interest, engagement and challenge
2. connection between work and personal development
3. opportunities for learning and development of competencies

A job is a large part of a person's life, and this contributes to a person's self-esteem and to the person judging themselves through their work (Agervold, 2003).

6.1.3. Cooperation

Cooperation relates to the work's social and collaborative aspects: forming a fellowship with colleagues regarding work, in a formal and informal sense, is an important element for employees in an organisation. If workplace groupings collaborate seamlessly and people respect each other on a professional and personal level, your work will earn you respect, and your personal development will advance. An assessment of the level of cooperation depends on the following conditions (Agervold, 2003):

1. cooperation and shared problem solving
2. recognition and respect from colleagues
3. inter-human relations

An analysis of the above transactional factors is not purely of interest to the individual situation, indeed it is the long-term development of an employee that should be examined. One needs to dig deeper into an individual's permanent assessment of their influence on their workplace conditions and the emotional reactions the person experiences with regards to their work. The psychosocial work environment factors are thus determined by the individual's attitude towards their work, and by the

assessive, emotional and intentional elements. These are based on a transactional process over time, in which one part is based on personality and the other is based on the work environment (Agervold, 2003).

6.2. Richard S. Lazarus

Agervold agrees with Lazarus' definition of stress. According to Lazarus, stress cannot be medically measured or weighed in the way that, say, the flu can, which means that you cannot calculate your way to precisely what is triggering stress in the individual (Lazarus, 2006). In spite of many stress processes containing many of the same attributes across different individuals, there is a large difference in individual character as regards the surroundings that lead to the development of stress. Stress is neither purely determined by the environment, nor by the personality, and thus it should be regarded as a relationship (Lazarus, 2006). Even though stress is hard to define, Lazarus has attempted to formulate stress as being something that develops when work tasks, workload, expectations, demands and the like overload the resources and abilities of the individual, which leads to the individual reacting to the incident through coping (Agervold, 2003). The concept of coping is used to examine how stress-afflicted people attempt to handle the situation based on their background and the environmental circumstances. The concept of coping is a type of assessment process that an individual undergoes, in which the individual must assess a threat as either being a threat or a danger to its resources. In Agervold's book, Lazarus shares an assessment process in two parts, consisting of a primary and secondary assessment process (Agervold, 2003).

Lazarus' primary assessment process is based upon the extent to which an individual feels that they are experiencing an overload. In this, the individual assesses whether the overload or the threat applies to their own abilities, obligations, values or self-perceptions. Such an assessment therefore depends on whether the overload agrees or disagrees with the core values of the individual (Lazarus, 1999). If the situation does not overload or disagree with the individual's abilities and core values, the risk of stress will be low. If an individual deems the situation to be threatening or overloading, the secondary assessment process will activate. Lazarus' secondary assessment process then focuses on the options the individual has for handling, or coping, with the threat (Agervold, 2003).

Lazarus' secondary assessment process can trigger two coping reactions, which may, however, occur simultaneously and should therefore not be considered completely distinct elements. These coping reactions are the emotion-focused coping and the problem-focused coping (Lazarus, 2006). An emotion-focused coping consists of the emotional reactions. An individual will attempt to revisit the incident and try to assess the situation as being something other than an overload. If that does not succeed, the emotional reactions might for example be that the individual represses the negative emotions or accepts them. An individual's repression of the negative emotions is an attempt to ignore the situation or to attempt to hide it from others and avoid reacting too obviously or aggressively. The individual will withdraw in the hope that the threat will disappear at some point. If they succeed in reassessing the situation as being something positive, this will be encouraging for them, resulting in personal development.

A problem-focused coping examines the external surroundings and the central element is the relationship between the person and the circumstances. An individual may thus attempt to review the situation in relation to the external "forces" such as workload (conditions) and so forth. An individual thus attempts to express their situation to their colleagues or others in order to receive social support. An individual will make a plan of action and act in accordance with it in order to overtly get themselves out of a situation (ibid.). The two coping strategies should not be regarded as two separate ways of handling stress, instead an individual will usually start with a problem-focused coping and, should that fail, they will utilise an emotion-focused coping (ibid.). At first sight a problem-focused coping may seem to be the most effective way for an individual to handle stress, but Lazarus believes that, in spite of it being an effective method, an emotion-focused coping should also be utilised based on a positive reassessment — thus a mix of both strategies (ibid.). It should for good measure's sake also be mentioned that there are other coping strategies than the ones mentioned, but above are the most frequent and how people handle/cope with their situation is entirely up to the individual. A couple of examples of other coping strategies are humour, creating meaning and acceptance, vigilance, wishful thinking and optimistic or pessimistic expectations. An individual will usually test various coping strategies in which the personality and background of the individual have a say in how they cope, and there is for that reason no universal law on how an individual will handle stress (Lazarus, 2006).

In other words, Lazarus argues that one should avoid simplifying stress and reject universal laws. He believes that one should examine a number of individual situations in order to gain an

overview of stress (Lazarus, 1999). The stress factors may be the same, but observations are needed in order to examine the various individuals's responses and consider their personality and background (ibid.). Lazarus believes that it is the person's assessment of the situation or their coping for it that is important for the triggering of their stress reactions. The extent to which the situation is stressful at all depends on how the person regards the situation in question (ibid.). It is thus not possible to put forth a coping strategy with a high probability of being effective, as it depends on the environment of the situation in question as well as the type of person (ibid.). From Lazarus' point of view, coping and stress have a reciprocal relationship. For example, if an individual's coping is not effective, they will have a larger chance of experiencing stress, a chance that would be lower if their coping was effective (Lazarus, 2006).

Furthermore, Lazarus also tries to examine the relationship between how the emotional aspect of stress is experienced and discussed, and thus constructed (Lazarus, 2006). According to Lazarus, Stress is connected to emotions, but the reverse is not always the case. It is thus Lazarus' opinion that one should not separate emotions and stress, as a separation would distort the national meaning of the phenomena. Coping, emotions and stress make up an interconnected whole, but the emotional concept is the main overriding factor, as it includes both coping and stress (Lazarus, 2006). It would thus fragment the psychology if stress was to be treated as two separate spheres, which is what is most often done (Lazarus, 2006). For example, shame, anger and melancholy are feelings that may lead to stress emotions, as they are based on harmful and threatening circumstances in the individual's environment. There is in other words a relationship between the external factors and the internal conditions for how a person experiences stress (Lazarus, 2006). The most important thing is how the individual emotionally experiences a potentially stressful situation, and depending on the force and circumstances of the stress, this may lead to emotional disorders, vulnerabilities and issues with the individual (Lazarus, 2006).

In the analysis I will use both Agervold's and Lazarus' concepts and theories in order to understand the development of stress in the informants. Both theorists utilise different concepts to analyse stress, and the use of both theories has thus been relevant to the task. Even though they both have the same overall understanding of stress, with both regarding stress as being a transactional and relational matter between the individual and their work environment, they each describe stress in different ways and with different concepts. As one can read in this, the two theorists compliment each other very well, and in this way their theories resonate. However, elaboration on all of their theories

is not the focus of this task, in part because it would not be possible within the scope of the task, and in part because it is not the focal point thereof. Their theories will only serve to provide a better understanding of the subject, and thus present a system of concepts that can be drawn upon.

6.3. Hartmut Rosa

As to this part I will account for Hartmut Rosa's theory on social acceleration. Rosa advances an account of the temporal structure of society from the perspective of critical theory, and will be used primarily to be able to analyze the empirical material of the thesis in a socially critical perspective. In his book *Fremmedgørelse og acceleration* he identifies three categories of change in the tempo of modern social life: *technological acceleration*, evident in transportation, communication, and production; *the acceleration of social change*, reflected in cultural knowledge, social institutions, and personal relationships; and *acceleration in the pace of life*, which happens despite the expectation that technological change should increase an individual's free time (Rosa, 2014). In the following figure the circle of acceleration is explained.
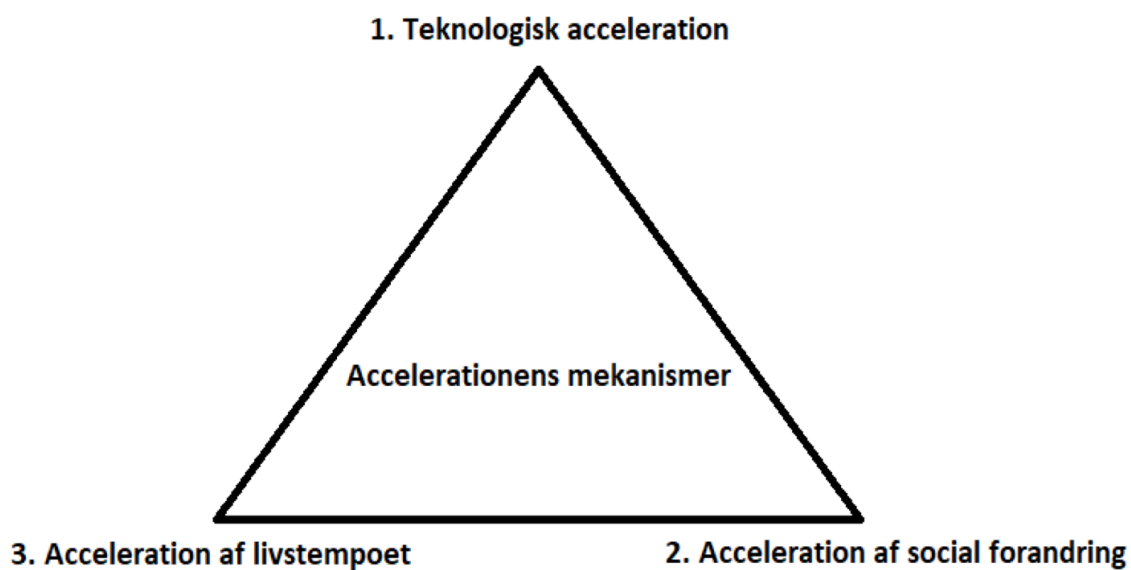

Figure 3. The circle of social acceleration

As to the individual, the acceleration in the pace of life is also at a higher pace. It manifests itself as a feeling of never having enough time. People are trying to make things take less time, e.g. power naps and speed dating. Society moves faster and it increases the demands on the individual. People

need to achieve more in less time. This requires the individual to be more structured if to be able to maintain an overview. Task orientation is a key word; keeping the deadlines are more important than the time spent. At the same time, everybody constantly wants to live faster and are afraid of missing out on opportunities. This can be seen on social media where people are constantly checking for notifications and updates. Nobody wants to slow down or say no to tasks at work. People want to prove they are ready for change. The fast life has become synonymous with the good life. The more experiences the individual has, the better life it gets.

Rosa is known for comparing the acceleration society to a hamster wheel that runs faster and faster. We are all trapped in the hamster wheel and run as fast as we can to keep up. The hamster wheel is driven by competition. The consequences of social acceleration leads to alienation according to Rosa. The acceleration means that people do not have time to think very much about what choices they make in their lives. When you do not have time to think about your choices, then you will make choices that do not fit you. The choices lead you to do many things you do not want to do. Doing things you do not feel like to do often Rosa calls alienation. Where slow time, time for immersion are constantly being threatened, and working hours are eating into leisure. According to Rosa some respond poorly to the increased speed and risk burning out as a consequence of prolonged stress or risk getting depressed (Rosa, 2014).

The transformations of work we have seen in recent decades have fundamentally changed the dimension of time. This acceleration of time and expectations, according to him, creates a great deal of concern in people, which causes enormous stress due to the experience of lacking time (Rosa, 2014). Rosa attaches great importance to the fact that it is especially the experience of the high pace that creates many of these concerns, as they exceed much of the actual pace that takes place in modern society (Rosa, 2014). This is particularly interesting as the scope of this project is based on individuals' experience of stress.

In the following section I will account for critical theory and how it is relevant as to analyse the empirical material of this research.

6.4. Explaining critical theory

The term "critical theory" is used here in its specific sense, especially as a term for the theoretical-scientific tradition that developed from the beginning of the 1930s at the Institut fur Sozialforschung

in Frankfurt am Main. The tradition is also known as the Frankfurt School". The first generation of critical theorists included names such as Theodor W Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Leo Lowenthal and others. In the second generation, Isir Jiirgen Habermas, but also, for example, Oskar Negt and Alfred Lorenzer were each in their own central figures. The third generation is currently drawn primarily by Axel Honneth (Brinkmann & Taangaard, 2010). Hartmut Rosa, who, as mentioned before, delivers a sharp critic of the acceleration society, is also considered to be a leading representative of the new critical theory and was a student of Axel Honneth.

In this project the critical theory is used to be able to understand the theoretical foundations about the societal processes that surround the preschool teachers in the empirical material of the thesis. Critical theory places the main emphasis on the theoretical framework that qualifies the study's problem horizon and places the analysis in a larger societal and cultural perspective (Brinkmann & Taangaard, 2010). Rosa's critical theory of Social Acceleration is the starting point for the point of view from which the empirical material of the thesis is considered and analyzed. He gives indications that acceleration is an integral part of our society, which create alienating elements that promote stressful tendencies for the individual (Rosa, 2014).

7. Analysis of the empirical work

To be able to analyze the empirical part of the thesis and to understand and explain causes of stress, the cognitive stress theories of Mogens Agervold and Richard S. Lazarus, and Hartmund Rosa's critical theory will be used as guidance. Based on the analysis strategy and the theoretical background the following themes emerged and will be discussed in detail: *Working conditions, the psychosocial environment* and *a personal life story of a burnout*.

7.1 Working conditions

As examined in section four about the working conditions of icelandic teachers they are challenged by exceeding numbers of students and too small facilities as well as a rise in demands. As working conditions are related to stress I was interested in investigating from the interviews if there's anything in the informants working conditions contributing to their wellbeing and consequently leading to stress.

7.1.2 Small spaces and noise

After I had asked the informants to describe themselves and how long they had been in the occupation they were asked about what they thought were the biggest challenges in their work, and/or if there were any stressors. The teachers' voices revealed some very interesting sources of stress in regards to their work environments, where the problems of too much noise and small spaces came up repeatedly throughout the interviews.

> "It's just not enough space. Where I am working the school is old and very small, the rooms in my class are just really little and combine that with a fairly large group it can get really crowded and noisy. This is just really a huge challenge".

The informants mutually agreed that it is very difficult to stay in such a noisy environment for a prolonged period of time, also for the children, without having the opportunity to escape the noise for just some period of time for restitution. The teachers also mentioned that they would prefer the groups to be smaller or at least have the opportunity to be able to divide the children up to be able to minimise the noise as can be seen in the following quote:

> "We have a full house. There are 24 children in each group and there is no place for peace and quiet. For example, there is often a lot of noise in the wardrobe. The consequences of the noise are that we become irritable and reprimand the children, and our minds get tired".

The subject of too many students in the classes continued to come up throughout the interviews and, as mentioned before, the teachers would like to see smaller group sizes as a way to reduce the overall workload, which would allow more attention to the children. Moreover, stating that a classroom with fewer children is potentially less noisy and chaotic, also more easily allows children to engage in appropriate activities and cooperative play, as can be seen in the following statement:

> "The most stressful part of my job is knowing that you can't devote all your time to all the children in your class at once. I have a ratio from 1-10, and I have currently nine children enrolled. So sometimes I feel they are pulling me in different areas and I'm not able to have one on one time with this person, you know, because I feel rushed. I wish there were maybe more teachers in the classroom. But I think that children want that one on one time. And I wish I could give it to them.

And the concerns continued in similar words:

> "Our classes are too large. If there are less students in each class, then we have more time for small groups and individual needs. You cannot provide enough individual support with 29 children in your class. Our children come to us with very little background knowledge, language concerns, and behavior problems".

The problems of too many students in the groups and consequently a loud environment, as well as not being able to devote individual time to the children is in accordance with the main stressors found in the literature review of this study.

As can be seen from previous examples, the teachers are assessing their work as challenging and they feel disempowered when they are not in control, or do not have the autonomy of the ratio of the class and have concerns about not being able to meet individual needs. According to Agervold stress can arise as a result of a mismatch between the individual's resources and the demands of the environment, as this can be decisive for the transactional result. If an unreasonableness is present in

relation to demands and resources, the psychosocial factors assume forms that are perceived as being a challenge, loss or threat to the individual. If a person experiences their work as meaningless and without future possibilities, it threatens the individual's self-esteem and will result in coping or any stressors. If, on the other hand, a person enjoys his work and work is an important part of his life, then it can result in growth and personality development even if the person encounters stressful work situations (Agervold, 2003). For my informants, this was not the case. The combined pressure of increasing demands and lack of influence on their work condition, did not lead to a positive development of either their professional role or their personal growth. On the contrary, it led to a feeling of loss and insecurity, depleting their resources.

When the preschool teachers were asked about what they experience in their environment that is so noisy they reported that the noise levels are highest when the children are coming or leaving the preschool, or moving from one place to another, also in lunch times or playing with hard toys, such as emptying a plastic box full of Lego´s One of the strategies the preschool teachers have come up with themselves is to try to reduce the noise by talking about it with the children and teach them to lower their voices when playing inside, and on the other side, teach them it is more acceptable to make noise when outside. This is an attempt at a problem-oriented coping strategy according to Lazarus. Another example is when the children get reminded of using their "indoor voices" instead of "outdoor voices" when playing inside for example. However, the children need constant reminding to do so according to the interviews. Another solution was to put in rugs on the floor to minimize the noise when the children were emptying boxes of toys on the floor. However, according to the informants, the most important source of noise are the children themselves. The bigger the group, the more noise it creates. None of these problem-oriented coping strategies work, therefore, the most efficient way to prevent noise in classrooms is to keep group sizes small enough.

It has been previously mentioned that the noise in preschools can get so high that it can place children and teachers at high risk (Dyrfjord, 2019) and this is a matter some of the preschool teachers from the interviews were really concerned about saying: *I have seriously thought about if I should start wearing hearing protectors at work, just to avoid getting hearing damages in the future".* It has been pointed out that noise in preschools can exceed 85 decibels, a noise level that would require hearing protection devices in most workplaces (Dýrfjörð, 2019). There is a risk of hearing loss, when the noise level rises to 85 decibels for eight hours repeatedly.

Based on Agervold's theory, autonomy, as mentioned earlier, is about whether the person is in a co-determination over the organization and its collective channels of influence. A high degree of

autonomy will lead to the employee feeling understood and included. A high degree of autonomy will therefore lead to job satisfaction and personal development, while a low degree of autonomy will lead to the opposite and thereby lead to a higher risk of developing stress. Based on these previous statements of the preschool teachers it can be seen that they do have a form for autonomi when it relates to work with the children but a lower autonomi on an organizational level, such as group sizes and facilities.

7.1.3 Lack of resources

The ratio of children to staff is often used as an indicator of the resources available in preschools. In Iceland, this number is particularly low compared to other countries. However it came prevalent from the interviews that the preschool teachers are experiencing something completely different, or the problem of too few employees in the class compared to the amount of children. They expressed that they are often left alone with the class when coworkers are on a break, being sick or attending some other work duties. It was reported that they are barely managing to take care of the children, or deal with challenging behaviour on their own, as they are often alone with half the class or the whole class for some amount of time. An example from one of the teachers shed a light on this problem:to prepare future activities for the children".

It was reported by the teachers that when the child-staff ratio exceeds its limits it puts a lot of pressure on them and they have trouble coping with the situation. The teachers expressed that they felt overwhelmed in these situations and made them lose their confidence. Agervold says

> "There are 19 children in my class, and we are supposed to be three employees' but we are often only two, as it happens a lot that someone is on a break, or sick, or away that in the case of a mismatch between demands and resources, the psychosocial factors will take forms that are perceived and assessed as a challenge, a loss or a threat. If the work is considered meaningless, due to the feeling of failing in their work as can be seen in the previous examples from the teachers, this is a threat to the person's self-esteem, which will initiate secondary processes and coping and possibly stress similar to Lazarus' description of the stress process (Agervold, 2003).

Furthermore, the teachers mentioned that when coworkers are off from work the work assignments pile up to such an extent that they feel they can not cope with them and often go home with the feeling of not succeeding in their work. When asked about why they are fewer than supposed to, it was revealed that there are no substitutes and it is very common in the preschools that coworkers are away from work due to illnesses, both for short periods of time and others for a longer period of time on sick leave. Following examples are quotes from the informants that shed an important light on the work problems the teachers are experiencing:

> "It's very common that colleagues are off work being sick, but for me it's a sign of how much stress there is in this work".

> "Currently, there are two employees from my department that are off work because of stress and burnout".

> "All together there are three employees from my department that have been suffering from prolonged stress and burnout".

Another interesting point that was spoken about in the interviews was that there is a high employee turnover and they are experiencing it more often that coworkers are getting hired for the position with plans on not staying for long time in the position, and it was made clear that it was not something arranged in advance as can be seen in temporary job positions. The teachers said it was because people don't look at their job positions as something they see themselves wanting to be doing in the future and are on the outlook for something better. The following examples was given:

> I have also noticed that this work is used a bit like a bus stop. I mean, people are getting into these positions maybe after graduating and are waiting to get into something better.

When I tried to ask for their assessment of why that is they said it was very likely related to the stress factors that are accompanied in this kind of work. According to Rosa, this frequency of high employee turnover that can be seen within the teachers profession relates to the phenomenon of social change,

which means that attitudes and values, obligations, norms and habits change at a faster pace nowadays (Rosa 2014). He means that work today, due to both the cultural engine and the acceleration of social change, is easily interchangeable. If the job does not live up to the individual's requirements, it is replaced by another job with greater potential for the individual to realize himself and live out his dreams (Rosa, 2014).

7.1.4 Low salaries

According to the APA´s 2014 work and well-being survey the top sources of workplace stress are low salaries and were the most commonly reported source for four years in a row (Tetrick & Winslow, 2015). When looking at OECD reports it can be seen that Iceland has the lowest pay of the nordic countries when it comes to starting salaries among preschool teachers. Furthermore, teachers earn almost the same amount at the beginning and the end of their career (OECD, 2017).

When I asked the informants about their opinions in regards to their salaries they unanimously showed an obvious frustration toward the low salaries they are receiving as preschool teachers. Furthermore, one of the teachers from the interview, who is currently studying to get her Masters degree of preschool education, parallel to be working full time in the preschool, came with an very interesting statement who reflects on how frustrated she is toward her low paying job. Stating that she has always been able to support herself, and even moved away from home when she was nineteen but is now moved back into her parents home as she doesn't earn enough money to support herself and rent, or buy an apartment. She gave some serious statements about her decisions becoming a preschool teacher, where she reported that it was the worst financial decision she has ever made:

> „For some time I thought that going to Master of preschool teacher education was the best decision I had ever made. I'm starting to see that I was wrong. I'm starting to see now that my decision to spend five years in University to become a preschool teacher was probably the worst I've ever made".

The subject of low salaries continued to come up throughout the interviews and they unanimously expressed that their low salaries is seen as a lack of recognition for the work they do. According to the ERI model the greatest risk of developing work stress is to be found when there is a mismatch between high effort spent and low reward received. Examples of rewards include salary, promotion prospects, esteem and recognition. It can be interpreted from the interviews that the teachers

profession is resembling an imbalance in high effort and low rewards and therefore of great risk developing work related stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Furthermore according to Agervolds (2003) theory he says it is vital to whether a person feels burnt out in a work situation that the employee has a long-term goal in the work situation that provides a positive outlook on the future. Based on this I asked the informants if they believe teachers salaries are going to be better in the near future to see if they had that vital positive outlook. They all three disagreed and do not believe there is going to be any changes soon. Apart from that, they do not see themselves continue working in the profession in the near future.

As mentioned previously, all the informants showed a lot of anger and disappointment towards their salaries, where they all stated they could not make a living out of it if they were entirely independent persons. They all reported that they are in some kind of a position where they can rely on others to either pay their rent or support their living expenses in some ways. It could be interpreted from the informants statements that they are experiencing a dilemma in regards to working full time and consequently push themselves to the extremes or work part time, to take care of themself, but then consequently be dependent on others. As Agervold (2003) states, a job is a large part of a person's life and this contributes to a person's self esteem. It is highly likely that the informants judge themselves through their work and if their salaries are so low that they can not rely on themselves for appropriate living arrangement it puts a negative effect on their self esteem.

7.2 The psychosocial work environment

The psychosocial work environment relates to interpersonal and social interactions that affect workplace behavior and development (Jacobs, Hellman, Markowitz, & Wuest, 2013). It includes factors that can affect the work environment both positively and negatively. For example, meaningful work, cooperation and more demands. There may also be issues regarding the organization of work, such as the balance between resources and requirements, between effort and reward, whether the distribution of task is done with equity as well as social capital (Stressforeningen, 2016).

7.2.1 Meaningful work

One of the elements that is crucial to whether a person feels burnt out or worn out in a work situation is integration and more organizations recognize that fostering meaningful work is crucial for engaging their employees. According to Agervold integration is about how a work situation is connected and whether it is meaningful for the individual. Is the work meaningful, and fun and exciting, rather than

just a source of income for the preschool teachers? That was one of the questions I was interested in exploring in regards to the interviews. It gave some interesting perspectives and all the informants emphasized how rewarding it is to be working with children and how it can be positively challenging and aspiring. Furthermore, the children's joy has a special significance for them to thrive as teachers in everyday life, and how their joy passes on to the teachers and can make the workday so much better. Children can be so giving, and warm, honest and hilarious. It was mentioned how amazing it is to get to experience things with them and how the teachers are often the first to witness so many groundbreaking moments, as can be seen in the following example:

> "You are giving all day, all day. And you know, you can't not give, how could you? because these two little eyes are looking at you and need you, and you have to give. Give, give give. Some days you feel I don't have anything left, you know. And then, when you start wanting to give up - one of the children has a breakthrough, and you just want to jump up and down in happiness. There is nothing better than having a high-five moment when one of the children makes a breakthrough - another one of the awesome reasons why being a preschool teacher is rewarding.

It can be seen from the example that in these moments the teachers experience their work as meaningful and as a recognition of having done a good pedagogical work.The teachers thus find joy in being able to follow the major changes in the children's development and in being able to take action when it is deemed necessary in relation to the child's further development. But they find particular joy in the small actions in everyday life, such as when a child asks for help, wants a hug or sitting on their lap.

It can be interpreted from the interviews that the teachers are facing a dilemma when it comes to the meaning part of their work. As they unanimously emphasized how much they love working with children but then on the other side there are these fundamental things in their work environment that are not functioning.

7.2.2 Cooperation in the workplace

One of the working conditions that is of great importance for the well-being of the teachers is cooperation in the workplace. According to Agervold, cooperation is about the social and co-elements of the work. It involves the level at which employees participate in decision-making, how

management and employees work together to resolve problems, and how all levels of the organization work together to achieve common goals. It is seen as an important element of the employees of an organization to be able to be part of a community with colleagues, as well working in a formal and informal sense.

When looking more closely at what the informants emphasize as particularly important in relation to the relationship with their coworkers, the relationship is primarily about two forms of understanding: An understanding among colleagues in the event of absence and an understanding of each other's differences.

The first form of understanding is closely linked to the work with the children, as it is especially in the absence of a co-worker that the remaining teachers feel that they have to re-organize their whole work day. A day in the life of a teacher is often very busy, and it is important to know, if a person is sick, that someone else can take over their work responsibilities. The absence of a teacher is often highlighted as a sensitive and vulnerable situation for both the co-workers and the person who is absent. The co-workers are given an extra workload, as the remaining teachers get responsibility for more children. At the same time there is a risk that planned activities throughout the day will have to be canceled, which is perceived as frustrating. Consequently, the person who is absent often feels guilty about knowing that coworkers are being given an extra burden when they are away. This problem was apparent from the following examples:

> "I only call in sick if I am bed ridden sick or can't stop vomiting, yet still feel guilty. I just know everyone is going to have to work harder to pick up the slack, or cancel planned activities and all because of me. And since my coworkers are usually my friends, and I know how hard some days can be, I feel badly for them".

This can also be seen from a research of 14.000 participants conducted by BUPL, where 7 out of 10 pedagogues have gone to work sick during the past year. Furthermore, 84% have shown up to work sick, to help things run more smoothly for their coworkers (Bergmann, 2018). It can be seen from these numbers that preschool teachers are feeling guilty about staying home when sick to protect their coworkers for the extra burden in the workplace if someone is away.

It is therefore of great importance for the teachers well-being how they handle it when co-workers are absent. For the person who is absent, their guilty feeling is lessened if he or she knows

that there is a mutual understanding among coworkers that they are away, and that they have flexibility to continue with planned activities. From the co-workers' perspective, it is also of great importance for well-being how the absence is handled: Do you continue in a certain kind of unchanged state, where planned activities are carried out with small adjustments, or is it necessary to put the activities on standby? It is especially in cases where planned activities must be changed due to necessity rather than choice that the individual teacher experiences stress and lack of resources in their working conditions.

The second kind of understanding that matters when it comes to the relationship within the coworkers is having an understanding of each other's differences. Differences can be seen as either a limitation or source of irritation, but it was pointed out by the informants that they see each other's differences as a strength. They possess different competencies, where they supplement one another in everyday life as to working with the children. Overall, when it comes to the relationship within coworkers, it appears from the interviews that it has a special significance for the well-being of the coworkers that they have the support of one another. Support means that the individual teacher experiences recognition from his or her coworkers and that they do not feel overwhelmed with responsibility, as the others support decisions.

It's not only for the teachers that it matters whether they thrive in everyday life it also has a great significance for the children, who "..can feel it when you are stressed, and they become more overwhelmed, and then you become more stressed, and then it just gets worse"

It is clear that the close cooperation between coworkers plays a significant role when it comes to pedagogical work. The teachers are highly dependent on one another, which is why it is emphasized that it is of great importance that they have each other to rely on and seek support in everyday work life.

7.2.3 More demands

Another problem revolves around how modern life has undergone major changes and how it requires the preschool teachers to be more flexible and consequently affects their working conditions. As a consequence of the industrialization in the middle of the 20th century, women incorporated more in the labor market and therefore became more necessary with day care institutions where children could stay during the day. At that time, fewer demands were placed on the day care institutions, as the essential thing was not the pedagogical, but rather taking care of the children. In late modern society, this trend is changing. Today there are around 97% of children aged between three and five years,

respectively, that participate in day care institutions in Iceland (Statice.is, 2018a). The transition from the industrial- to the welfare society and on to the academic society has led to a change from a daycare to a learning culture. There has been more focus on children as independent individuals who have requirements, needs and opportunities for development and learning. The role and working conditions of the educator have therefore changed (Hvid, Lund & Holt 2013).

In the following section the teacher's attitude to the modern day demands are examined in more detail. In relation to examining the educators' attitudes to the external initiatives, however, it is important to take two perspectives into account. The first perspective will be characterized as the execution of the measures in practice. By this is meant the concrete work with the measures in relation to the children. As the second perspective, there is the documentation of the fulfillment of the measures to the municipality.

It came prevalent that there are a lot of administrative tasks involved in being a preschool teacher that aren't as obvious when initially thinking about the position. I asked the informants to explain and give insight into their work problems in regards to administrative work and they were unanimous that one problem was concerning lack of time to prepare. It was revealed that it isn't always possible to find time to get away from the children and into the office to prepare activities or new learning experiments as it often happens that there are too little staff. Lack of preparation time is also a problem in general for preschool teachers in Iceland, and not having time for professional development. (Dýrfjörð, 2019).

In today's institutions it is very normal for parents to have access to reports of their child's daily behaviors, eating habits and preschool activities, including photos, among other things to keep parents informed. This modern technology is time consuming for the teachers, and they often fulfill these tasks while they are taking care of the children. They feel these tasks are taking important time away from the children as can be see from the following statement:

> "I'm getting so tired of this enormous press, and I know I can't be doing this until I get old. In that time my body has said stop. Especially not if we need to be documenting everything, at the same time there is funding being cut down all the time. I mean we have to be ready to take pictures of the children and their activities, while watching our job, as well as writing a diary about each and every child's day. This is taking a precious time away from the children. I sometimes choose to prioritise the children instead rather than the documentary."

It could be interpreted from the interviews that the preschool teachers are being put in enormous pressure at their workplace, they are getting tired and feel they don't have enough time and can't keep up. These time constraints, busyness and the feeling that the time does not strike are part of an modern epidemic according to Hartmund Rosa's theory on social acceleration. In the next chapter *Personal life story of a burnout* I will discuss his theory in more detail and put it in perspective to the changes preschool teachers are experiencing in their new modern working lives. In the following section the elements of demands from parents will be discussed.

It could be seen from the interviews that an increasing number of demands are placed on preschool teachers, both centrally as well from the parents side. It was pointed out by the preschool teachers that their resources, in relation to both children and coworkers, is a sensitive one as to the demands that parents, employers and the rest of the society place on them. These can both be directly and indirectly formulated demands and expectations. However, the external demands are not in themselves perceived as bad or negative, but often as some demands that require more resources than the municipalities have chosen to provide to the institutions. When there is a mistchmats between the resources of the individual and the demands, frustration easily arises within the teachers, and thereby potentially creates a psychosocial work environment (Karasek, 1979).

Another struggle the informants have experienced in their profession evolves around dealing with parents, some of whom can be quite demanding. Stating it can be difficult to manage parent requests, questions and complaints as they drop off or pick up their child when they maybe have other things on their minds, such as the day's lesson plan.

> "I have come across some difficult parents in the past. That is definitely a stressor in this field. You know, you want to please and you want to work with those parents as a team and sometimes that can be a little difficult".

It was brought to attention by the teachers in the interviews that the parents are increasingly expecting them to give good advice and want to chat about the children and how to raise them. At times, however, it is difficult to give advice and guidance, as the teachers do not always have the in-depth knowledge of the individual family and their habits and traditions. It was also mentioned as a problem how the parents make specific demands on their children's everyday lives to a degree where the

fulfilment of the demands take place at the expense of the other children and families. This can make the teachers feel powerless in terms of aligning different expectations and demands.

7.3 Personal life story of a burnout

Burnout is a central concept in the analysis of the psychosocial work environment and is a special type of work-related stress. It is a mental, emotional and physical exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity (Angerer, 2003). Burnout is not something that happens over a night, it is a progressive process that begins with fatigue, the feeling of being insufficient, not feeling like going to work and physical symptoms such as headaches, difficulty sleeping and loss of appetite. The individual feels irritated, avoids going to work, isolates himself or has conflict with colleagues, feels powerless, is negative and doubts own ability to work (Møhl, 2017). Burnout can be attributed to working conditions that involve much human interaction (Maslach and Jackson, 1981), such as preschool teachers, as their work requires a great deal of communication with the children, to the parents and coworkers.

One of the informants in this study has had the unpleasant experience of this special type of work-related stress. In this section will solely focus its emphasis on her personal story including her experiences, feelings, and opinions. Her story is of special interest to shed a light on a personal narrative of what caused the stress, how it evolved to a burnout and what factors contributed to it. She has been in the profession for eleven years and can therefore give insight into the changes preschool teachers have been experiencing for the last decade. I started by asking her if she could explain from her perspective what it was that resulted in her burning out and going on sick leave from work. She mentioned it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what it was and described it had happened over a long period of time, insidiously. She quoted:

> "My body just shut down, even without me noticing. I was on my toes all the time and thinking about what would happen next. Even when I had a group of kids… I was always overwhelmed and overthinking. It was like my mind was always two steps ahead, and my brain was on overload. And it had been there for a long time, but i hadn't realized it"

She said that she was constantly feeling tired, agitated and described it as she was always on the breaking point of crying and that the burnout had been building up for an extended time without her recognizing it. Her deteriorating health also made her more vulnerable to illnesses like colds and flu which consequently resulted in calling in sick more often which added to her stress as she did not want to disappoint her coworkers. She continued with her personal story and explained that she had been dealing with depression and anxiety for a long time but added that the stress of the job was not a good contributor to her health. I asked her if she thinks that her problems of stress were solely consequences of work factors alone or if it stems from her own personality, then she replied that it was definitely something that stems from work but there were also factors from her private life that contributed to it. According to Agervold, a meeting like this provides a transactional result, which leads to either a sickness or growth, depending on whether stress is deemed to be something positive or negative (Agervold, 2003). A negative experience of stress results in consequences for the individual by way of an experience of loss, threat or challenge. A stress process is then initiated because of this. In the informant's case it can be assumed that her personality experienced the work stress as negative and it is this transactional that eventually resulted in her burning out, as stated by Agervolds model.

I continued my investigation and asked if she could point out some factors in her work environment that could have contributed to her burning out. She described her working conditions as inadequate. I asked her if she could give a deeper explanation and then she mentioned the problems of too many children, colleagues often sick and that there are no substitutes, as well the problem of staff turn-over. She continued and mentioned that the work assignments are exceeding and she feels that she is not getting the respect she deserves, both from society and the municipality. According to Agervold (1997) it is important when investigating human relations to look at the relationship between the manager and the employee, and the relationship between employees. And therefore I asked her about her relationships with her coworkers and manager to she if that was a factor contributing to her work related stress where she replied:

> Not at all...on the contrary. And that's also one of the reasons why this work keeps me going...it's because of how much I'm connected to these women I work with. This is like my family.

It could be interpreted from her statements that her coworkers and manager are a great source for her wanting to continue in her workplace but on the other hand the fundamental needs, such as salaries

are not fulfilled. She expressed a great amount of anger and resentment toward the salaries who she also means weigh a great deal of her wellbeing. She mentioned because of her health issues, and since the burnout, that she is only capable of working part time, which is resulting in even lower income and is forcing her to rely on others for living arrangements which is not helping her mental health.

> „I am currently working part time as my health doesn't allow for more. So working from 9-17, three days a week is enough for me as it is now... I'm turning 37 years old and I can not live on my own because I work as a preschool teacher and with that salary, I just can't afford it, especially not now while working part time".

Another interesting problem she expressed relates to that it happens more often now than before that she is answering emails and parents messages, as well preparing activities in leisure time. According to her, this particular problem is very common in her profession but happens more often when there is a lack of staff in the opening hours and she therefore does not have the time to do administrative work in the workplace and decides to do the work at the comfort of her home to try to save some time away from the family. This new flexibility and the pressure to perform is something she did not experience at the start of her career as a preschool teacher eleven years ago. These changes in her working life are very common in modern life and require her to be more adaptive and in more control of her work that can be done almost everywhere and instantly with the help of technology. The informants situation is a great example of how the teaching profession is evolving more towards boundaryless work as modern IT enables faster information flow and communication, but on the other hand an opportunity that oftens becomes a demand. According to Rosa this phenomenon is termed social acceleration and puts a lot of pressure on the individual, which is a significant source of stress and long-term alienation (2014).

Rosa is of the opinion that the acceleration leads to various forms of alienation in e.g. time and space and in continuation of the above, he describes how the self-reinforcing logic of acceleration contributes to an alienation of the individuals own actions, as the person completely voluntarily chooses to do something they 'really' do not want. There is a tendency for the individual himself to seek short-term pleasures instead of long-term desires, as this is more easily done in an accelerated society where time, according to Rosa, is shrinking (2014). This could be seen from the interview as the informant voluntarily chooses to take administrative work with her home instead of doing it at the

office after hours, even though she doesn't really want to but feels that she kind of has to to keep up with the demands.

After the informant got diagnosed with burnout by her doctor she spent one and a half month away from work on a sick leave to focus on improving her health. She informed me that she did not receive any treatment to improve her health while she was away. As to why, she quotes: "It is too expensive to seek help from a psychologist". In Iceland you pay full price, it is not paid for by the health system. However, she was offered help battling her mental health problems by referring her to a psychiatrist which she accepted. "He only offered me pills, which I tried. These were antidepressant pills". She informed in the interview that the medical help she got didn't make the difference she was hoping for. Even though she was aware that she was not yet fully recovered she returned back to work part-time. She stated as follows:

> "I did not feel ready to go back to work. I went back because I felt like it wasn't doing me any good just staying home and not doing anything. I did not feel better not to work."

Another reason for her returning back to work this early in her sick leave was also out of guilt of her coworkers. She stated:

> "I was worried about what this would look like for the other employees. I'm supposed to be off for six months on full pay. But I just thought it looked bad and I couldn't have it on my conscience that they would have to take all the extra burden because of me being away".

I asked if the preschool had not hired some replacement while she was away. She said that was not the case and apart from that there were more coworkers also on a sick leave at the same time and no additional person was hired to lighten the workload. When she returned back to work she mentioned that she felt accepted and welcome, both from the manager and the coworkers, who tried to be supportive and helpful. She admitted that in her case she should have taken a longer time away to focus on getting better and that she wasn't feeling healthy enough to be working and that she is slowly giving up now: "I feel like I'm in a bit of a surrender again", I never intended to start working in in a preschool again, she said.

When asked she would continue in the profession if the salaries were higher or if that would change anything she replied laughing and said:

"That would change everything, I would definitely want to continue in my job then. That would be a completely different matter. Then maybe I could start feeling better about myself and would afford to do stuff for a change".

8. Discussion

Based on the analytical findings in this study it can be seen that preschool teachers are moving towards more boundaryless work. With the help of today's technology it is becoming more normal to take the work with you home and finish assignments that have piled up as there isn't enough time to finish them within the working hours. In this research the concept of social acceleration is put in perspective as the preschool teachers are experiencing this through a high pace of development and change in both legislation and technology. This is perceived as stressful, as both the legislative changes and technological changes are time consuming and thus becomes a counterproductive aspect in the constant development. It could be seen from the analysis of the empirical data that the teachers are experiencing this problem of not having enough time to finish their work demands. Due to the technology, they can now work from home, and therefore feel obliged to work hard in the evenings so that they can live up to the demands made by both the employer and their professional pride - thus it is the acceleration in society that seems to be one of the main causes of stress in the preschool teachers. Therefore, it seems that Rosa is right from the perspective of my informants. As can be said about the other stress models in this study, there are too many demands put on the teachers, and their workdays get changed with short notice due to sick coworkers and they lose control over what to do and when. They experience it as rewarding working with children but it is not enough in relation to the effort they put in it. All the informants stated they need to depend on others economically to survive. There is an imbalance in demands and resources, as the teachers stated there are these fundamental thins in their work environments that are not functioning.

The three theories have been developed as counterplay to each other because the newer models think that the previous models haven't been completely able to answer the issues of stress and burnout. However, in order to be able to explain the teachers situation adequately, it is actually necessary to apply all three theories so that they complement each other. At the same time, the models do not explain why the conditions have developed that way or what is happening within the teachers. Other theories must be at play in order to fully **understand the reasons why teachers are increasingly stressed or burnt out**, whereby Lazarus, Agervold and Rosa can contribute to the part of the understanding that the three models cannot provide.

What needs to happen in the future for employees to minimize stress? This section will discuss how a societal tendency to focus on individual resilience has recently come to the forefront within occupational psychology, and how this relates to the above analysis. Employee resilience is a key capability enabling employees to manage and adapt to continually changing circumstances and a key strategy that helps employees tackle stress. Time constraints, busyness and the feeling that the time does not strike are part of an modern epidemic, not only in working life but also in people's everyday lives. We talk about gaining time, borrowing time, producing time, and even stealing time (Hvid, Lund & Holt 2013). The world is moving at an ever faster pace and I therefore see it both as a necessity for the individual, the organization and society to be resilient to stand a chance at surviving the many new demands.

9. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate causes of work stress and burnout among preschool teachers in Iceland and to see if the theories and life experiences match. It began by looking at recent central studies that examined causes of stress and burnout. The literary review revealed that three models can be used to understand the dynamics of why some people experience stress. These models are Karasek's Job Demands-Control model, Siegrist's Effort-Reward Imbalance model and Bakker's & Demeroutis Job Demands-Resources model. These three models agree that stress is the result of an imbalance, but they disagree as to what factors need to be balanced.

Using these three models as a background, this study examined the individual experiences of three Icelandic Preschool teachers. Iceland was chosen because it has encountered a growing number of teachers with stress - in particular young people. It is interesting because the country has recently recovered from an economic crisis, and therefore teachers expected an increase in fundings for the school system. This has not happened. According to the three models factors such as noise, lack of resources, staff turnover, a growing amount of demands, a low salary can explain a large amount of the stress from an organisational point of view, but they cannot account for the individual experiences. So, in order to gain insight into the informants' experiences, a semi-structured qualitative interview was created and conducted using Kvale's practical guideline as a foundation.

To better understand the personal responses, the interview data was analysed using Agervold, Lazarus and Rosa's theories. The analysis revealed that the biggest challenges in the work environment are noise due to small rooms with more children than the room can handle, lack of resources to fund adequate numbers of staff - including substitutes in case of teachers on sick leave and increasing amounts of demands due to the expectations of the parents and the government in terms of documenting the everyday life of each child separately. Factors fuelling the feelings of inadequacy amongst the teachers were low salary and not receiving any respect from the outside society. The society thinks that it takes nothing to be a teacher, as anyone can take care of a child. This feels degrading to their professional identity, however, they do feel reduced to only minding the children rather than teaching them due to the work circumstances. Agervold and Lazarus gave insight into how the teachers feel they cannot cope with the work demands and how to handle stressful situations. Rosa supplied an understanding of how their coping mechanisms were challenged by the boundaryless work life, which enhanced this feeling of not having time enough, having to work at a

very fast pace yet not being able to live up to the demands of society and their professional pride, which again caused the teachers to work through the evenings at home in order to meet expectations.

Summing up, causes of stress of burnout among Icelandic preschool teachers are multiple and diverse. Many causes fulfill the expectations of models of stress, while others need to be understood from a phenomenological framework. In order to alleviate stress amongst workers in the future, one option is to increase employee resilience as it does not seem that the world will slow down nor that demands will decrease.

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