Special Needs Assistants Beyond Role Definition: Relationship Between Perceived Organisational Support and Perceived Stress, Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction.

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Abstract

Previous research on Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) has primarily focused on the role of SNA; however, they are still a relatively unexplored workforce. The current study aimed to investigate whether SNAs in the Republic of Ireland feel supported in schools, how many perceived themselves to be stressed and the relationship between perceived organisational support (POS) and (i) job satisfaction, (ii) perceived stress (PS), (iii) self-efficacy. This study is a quantitative cross-sectional design. SNAs (N = 406) were recruited from a range of educational settings. They completed an online survey containing demographic information and four questionnaires to measure POS, PS, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. POS explained 47.2% of the variance in job satisfaction, 10.7% in PS and 1.5% in self-efficacy. Majority of participants self-reported a moderate score of PS (n = 286; 70.4%) and POS (n = 232; 57.1%). Results indicated the SNA workforce is female dominated (n = 397; 97.8%) suggesting that government policy may need to be reviewed in order to promote males into the SNA workforce and to higher minimum requirements for the role of SNA. Findings suggest school management may use POS to create better work and learning environments through its association with the factors investigated in this study.

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Introduction

Special needs assistants (SNA) are a fast-growing workforce in the education system, within the Republic of Ireland (RoI) yet despite this population's interaction with the most vulnerable children daily, there is limited national research pertaining to their role. The numbers employed as SNAs in RoI has risen substantially, from 8,390 in 2006 to 10,320 employed in 2011, demonstrating the growing influence and success of the role. There was a further increase from 2011 to 2017 with 10,320 posts in 2011 and 13,969 posts in December 2017(National Council for Special Education [NCSE], 2018). This translates to an increase of 56% in students with special needs receiving SNA support and, therefore, attending mainstream education from 2011 to 2017 (Zhao et al., 2021). This increase of SNA support could be due to an increase in children diagnosed with special needs. For example, in the last twenty years, the reported prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in RoI has increased (Department of Health [DoH], 2018) which echo findings in the UK, that demonstrated the ASD rates increased threefold in twenty years to 2006 (Keenan et al., 2010). Despite this, research in RoI on the role of SNAs has been limited compared to the paraprofessional role in most other countries (Zhao et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the limited number of Irish studies carried out, focused on the definition, and the parameters of the role set out in government policy (Griffin & Blatchford, 2021). The lack of studies used throughout this literature review reflects the scarcity of research in this area. Teacher studies or studies on similar roles in different countries were used as substitutes, as teachers are working in similar work environments with the same students and challenges. However, a circular from Department of Education (DoE) in 2014, clarifies and differentiates the role of teacher and SNA, clearly stating teacher is educator and SNA is to

assist with care needs in a non-teaching capacity (Department of Education [DoE], 2014). Moreover, the skill set required to be effective in the role of SNA is viewed differently by the various stakeholders in education.

For example, this summer, the DoE did not look to raise the minimum requirement of holding the role of SNA. The minimum requirement from the state to hold the role is three passes in the Junior Certificate or equivalent (DoE, 2021). In contrast to their minimum requirements, the DoE recognise the effectiveness and the value of the SNA scheme. This is evident from the findings of a review of the SNA scheme the DoE carried out in 2011. This review had three key findings: firstly, provision of SNAs enhanced students' experiences in schools, secondly, was relevant to enable as many children as possible to attend mainstream schools, and finally ensured schools could adequately meet the additional care needs of children with disabilities (DoE, 2011). However, it must be noted that the same report found the cost-effectiveness of the SNA scheme was compromised by an over-allocation and the role of SNA being more diverse than outlined by the scheme.

In 2018, a further review of the SNA scheme was carried out by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) on behalf of the DoE. Their findings showed that better training, qualifications and job security were required for SNAs and suggested further expanding the role (NCSE, 2018). The first dedicated national training programme for SNAs was announced by the government in 2020 (DoE, 2021), however, critics point to the lack of accreditation of the course.

Unlike the DoE, school management at the local level demonstrate a greater understanding of the high demands and skill set required of the SNA, resulting in only 3% of respondents in a survey of 2,688 SNAs holding the minimum requirement (Forsa, 2018).

School management around RoI has set a higher standard of qualifications required due to the crucial role SNAs play in helping children with special needs integrate into mainstream schools as dictated by Irish education policy and based on the principle of inclusion (Zhao et al., 2021). In 2014 the DoE defined the role of the SNA, as one of a non-teaching role and allocated for care needs such as toileting, administration of medicine, and assisting with mobility (DoE, 2014).

However, the most recent study shows that SNAs still continue to perform other supports to children including academic, social, emotional and behavioural support, which all are outside their prescribed non-teaching care role (Griffin & Blatchford, 2021). Children with extreme behaviour, e.g., emotional behavioural disorder (EBD), can be allocated an SNA but only in cases where schools can prove other behaviour management strategies have failed and the student is a danger to themselves or others. This reflects a change in government policy and eradicated any automatic right to SNA access due to special needs. This change was due to the rewording in government policy to incorporate "significant additional care needs" in the purpose of the SNA scheme which was included in a 2014 DoE circular (Morrissey, 2020). SNAs also play a role in developing individual care plans (ICP) for children with special education needs (DoE, 2011).

In a recent survey of 81 SNAs undertaken by Kerins and Mc Donagh (2021), almost half the respondents currently supported students with EBD or severe EBD. In the same survey, almost two-thirds of SNAs communicated and engaged with parents as required by their schools. The survey found that the categories of special educational needs (SEN) the children they were assigned most frequently identified by SNAs were ASD, EBD/severe EBD, dyslexia, and physical disability (Kerins & Mc Donagh, 2021). The survey is limited because the data was collected from a small sample size, which increases the likelihood of a

type 2 error (Smith, 2012). Their ability to fulfil the role has led education stakeholders, teachers, parents, and students to highly value the contribution of SNAs (Zhao et al., 2021).

Despite stakeholders' appreciation for their contribution, a SNAs permanent contract is renewed each year. However, the allocation of SNAs in a school is dependent on the number of children diagnosed with SEN enrolled in cycles of three academic years (NCSE, 2018). The SNAs permanent contract may not be renewed when there is a reduction in the number of children with SEN in a school. Unlike teachers, they do not have the security of a supplementary redeployment panel which would offer them the opportunity of a similar position in a nearby school.

The dissonance between the requirements of the Department to hold the role and dealing with the extreme behaviours of students, e.g., EBD, varied responsibilities, liaising with many different stakeholders and lack of job security, could lead -either separately or combined- to occupational stress in SNAs. As will be shown below perceived stress, job satisfaction, self-efficacy and perceived organisational support may impact employees' and teachers' work. These factors are defined, and the current literature on their possible influence on SNAs and their work performance is explored below. This is important as it may impact SNAs wellbeing and learning outcomes for the children who they support, using teacher or other studies when no SNA studies were available. The shortage of studies on stress in SNAs or studies in general on SNAs in Irish schools demonstrates the need for this current study.

Stress

It is essential to investigate stress and in particular the stress SNAs perceive they are under to ensure their wellbeing and protect the children with special needs that rely on them. This section shall outline and examine the reasons why this is crucial. Due to stress being a broad concept and many definitions in existence it has no standard definition (Segerstrom &

O'Connor, 2012; Siqueira Reis et al., 2010). According to Mirela and Mădălina-Adriana, (2011), *Organisational stress* or *work stress* is defined as a cognitive, emotional, physiological, and behavioural response of an individual to the harmful aspects of their role including work environment and organisational climate. *Perceived stress* is when the demand of stress an individual feels or thinks they are under, outweighs their perceived capacity for coping with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In what could be significant for SNAs, Ghani et al. (2014) found that stress among special education teachers was mainly due to excessive workload and the negative causes associated with it, e.g., having to supervise the yard during lunch. They speculated that the complex needs of teaching special needs students might also be a factor in their excessive workload. Their findings were similar to other studies findings on teachers, that workplace stresses include: excessive workload, limited time, lack of organisational support, low salary, lack of resources, and having to perform different tasks (Kebbi, 2018; Kunkulol et al., 2013).

According to Hester et al. (2020), teacher burnout due to stress is the main reason teachers leave the profession in the U.S. In addition, it discovered that burnout could negatively impact the quality of education students with special needs receive, resulting in poorer academic achievement. Support is shown in findings that showed burnout in teachers affected their effectiveness in their professional roles (Chesak et al., 2019). This raises the question that their students would be adversely affected if SNAs suffered similarly from chronic stress and burnout. Darmody and Smyth (2016) found in schools in RoI that student behaviour problems and relationships with other staff members were the most significant stressors for teachers, while the organisational climate had a substantial impact on job satisfaction and work stress in teachers. These factors may be a reality for SNAs as they work

with the same students and environment. However, due to a lack of research, this is only speculation at this moment in time.

Job satisfaction

Though there is a wide variety of available definitions for job satisfaction, they merge on the idea that it is how satisfied an individual is with their overall workplace (Worrell et al., 2006). Unfortunately, no studies could be found on job satisfaction among SNAs in RoI. Similarly, few studies have taken place on job satisfaction and the processes that shape job satisfaction among teachers and principals in RoI (Darmody & Smyth, 2016).

Job satisfaction levels of SNAs may adversely or positively affect their students. Therefore, it is crucial for SNAs and the students they support that research is carried out in this area. Pathak (2012) supports this point by showing how dissatisfied employees will lessen their work commitment and cause them to retreat mentally or emotionally from the organization. Likewise, Lopes and Oliveira, (2020) show an example of the negative consequences of a lack of job satisfaction in teachers, finding teacher job satisfaction to be an essential factor in students' academic achievement.

The role of a typical SNA places great importance on job satisfaction due to the high demand and low control of the role. Dicke et al. (2020) support this view, explaining how job satisfaction takes on more significance in similar roles and is essential in employee retention and wellbeing. This adds importance to a recent study that identified two predictors of job satisfaction in teachers: classroom discipline and teacher self-efficacy (Lopes & Oliveira 2020). SNAs' job satisfaction, it may be speculated, may also be affected by these two factors. As mentioned earlier, SNAs may be allocated to children with behavioural issues once a school can show how other strategies failed. This exposes SNAs to heightened

classroom indiscipline, which may lower their job satisfaction, may affect their wellbeing and is possibly detrimental to students with special needs academic achievement.

Organisational Support

Organisational support theory (OST) suggests that employees perceive how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing; this is known as perceived organisational support (POS) (Aldamman et al., 2019).

It is crucial to measure the organisational support or the perceived organisational support (POS) SNAs feel they receive from their schools. This is due to SNAs' wellbeing and work performance may affect job satisfaction, stress, self-efficacy. For example, Kurtessis et al. (2015) and Bibi et al. (2019) demonstrated that POS was positively associated with job satisfaction and self-efficacy while at the same time negatively related to job stress and burnout.

Students, especially those with special needs, need routine and a trusting professional relationship with SNAs who help them to manage mainstream schools' complexities (DoE, 2014). This is reflected in a longitudinal study of experiences and outcomes for children with special education needs when, the primary school children with special needs told of their appreciation of this support from an SNA (Rose et al., 2015). In contrast, post-primary pupils in the same study said they preferred not to have this support as it made them different from their classmates. SNAs who show more outstanding commitment to a school through being present every day and longevity in one school could help create that for the students. SNAs could be helped in this regard by POS. Kurtessis et al. (2015) show how POS performs an essential role in fulfilling the socioemotional needs of the employee who give a more outstanding commitment to the organization in return. Likewise, Armeli et al. (1998) emphasize that POS helps fulfil respect, caring, and approval needs.

Schools can manage the level of perceived organisational support an SNA feels. For example, special education teachers identified factors that promote organisational support and job satisfaction in Pakistan, such as reasonable workloads, a pleasant work environment, fair working conditions, and administrative support (Bibi et al., 2019). Furthermore, when a school manages to create organisational support through a trusting work environment it has an association to reducing teacher burnout and increased commitment to the school, but only if the organisational support builds teachers' self-efficacy (Ford et al., 2019).

However, schools must exercise caution in balancing the level of POS. For example, Armeli et al. (1998) found that performance declined in one group with low socioemotional needs when they had a positive POS. The authors offered the reason as the group had rested on their laurels, which lowered their work performance. Furthermore Burnett et al., (2013) also found that POS had a U curve and at a certain point, higher levels of POS would lower work performance. Next, this study will examine another of interest in possible effect on SNAs and their work performance, that is self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy

Bandura, (1977) defines *self-efficacy* as the confidence a person has in their abilities to produce the desired outcome by their behaviour. Unfortunately, there is a lack of studies on SNAs and self-efficacy, and although most countries have engaged in more research in similar roles to SNAs, there are other countries similar to RoI that are slightly behind in this regard. For example, Breyer et al. (2019) show a lack of studies in Learning Support Assistants (LSAs, similar to the role of SNA in RoI) in Austria. In addition, despite the possible importance of the role, both states have a low threshold of qualifications for their respective roles in inclusive education.

SNAs require high levels of self-efficacy due to the many different stakeholders they must liaise with daily, e.g., teachers, students, parents, and the variety of tasks the role entails. As Cherian and Jacob (2013) identified, self-efficacy provides the basis for personal wellbeing, motivation, and achievement. Subsequently, they suggest that self-efficacy impacts on individual's emotional reactions and thought patterns.

As mentioned earlier, SNAs play an essential part in integration and inclusive education, which also requires high levels of self-efficacy. Based on findings in 2016 by Walk and Beck that self-efficacy was necessary for the successful implementation of inclusive education, Breyer carried out a study on the self-efficacy of Styrian (Styria is a province in Austria) LSAs. They found medium to high correlations between LSA self-efficacy and age, the perceived feeling of being qualified due to training and professional knowledge (Breyer et al., 2019). However, this study was on small sample size, and any findings must be interpreted with caution.

Therefore, teachers' and, arguably, SNAs' self-efficacy may have a link to their occupational wellbeing. Higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with more positive outcomes ranging from greater job satisfaction and performance to better academic performance and positively influenced employees' work performance (Cherian & Jacob, 2013). Similarly, lower self-efficacy levels in teachers were associated with stress and burnout (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). The strength of this study was that it had a sample size of 4,567 Finnish teachers, a mix of class teachers and special class teachers. In contrast, Lauermann and Ten Hagen (2021) advocate that a reliable link between teachers' self-efficacy and students' academic outcomes is still lacking.

The rationale of the current study

According to the United Nations, to successfully implement inclusive education, it is necessary to meet student's individual needs with appropriate support (Breyer et al., 2019). The role of SNA is seen as an essential growth factor to help ensure those needs are met (NCSE, 2018; Zhao et al., 2021). However, very few studies have been carried out on SNAs in RoI, with those carried out being focused on the definition of the role of the SNA. Due to the lack of studies on SNAs, there was a wide range of possible factors that could affect SNAs and their work performance. The study identified four possible factors from this wide and varied range of possible variables. It did so based on previous studies evidence that these factors impacted on other workforces' wellbeing and work performance.

As demonstrated in the literature review, the identified areas: perceived stress, job satisfaction, self-efficacy and perceived organisational support were shown to impact employees' and teachers' work performance and wellbeing. However, it is unknown if these factors would affect SNAs' work performance and wellbeing. It is important to fill this lack of knowledge as it may impact SNAs and the students that rely on them. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether SNAs in the RoI, feel supported in schools, how many perceived themselves to be stressed and the relationship between perceived organisational support and (i) job satisfaction, (ii) perceived stress, (iii) self-efficacy.

Based on the literature three hypotheses were developed from these aims.

Hypothesis 1: It is hypothesised that SNAs have higher levels of job satisfaction when they perceive greater organisational support than SNAs who perceive less organisational support.

Hypothesis 2: It is hypothesised that when SNAs feel they have organisational support they perceive less stress than SNAs who perceive lower levels of organisational support.

Hypothesis 3: It is hypothesised that SNAs with higher perceived organisational support have greater self-efficacy than SNAs who perceive lower organisational support.

Methodology

A quantitative cross-sectional study was carried out to investigate whether SNAs in RoI feel supported in schools, how many perceived themselves to be stressed and was there a relationship between perceived organisational support and (i) job satisfaction, (ii) perceived stress, (iii) self-efficacy.

Participants

The current study recruited SNAs from primary, post-primary schools and other educational settings across RoI. No gratitude payment was offered for participation. Sampling was carried out over a weeklong period in November 2021 using convenience and snowball sampling on social media outlets (Twitter and Facebook). A post that contained a short description and anonymous hyperlink to Qualtrics who hosted the study (see Appendix A). Participants were able to share the link with others and were required to had given informed consent at start of survey. Inclusionary criteria included working as a SNA, an ability to read and speak English and be aged 18 years or older to participate.

650 individuals attempted the survey, of which 406 provided sufficient data to be usable for the current study. The vast majority of participants were female (n = 397; 97.8%) with significantly less males (n = 8; 2%). Participants ranged in age from 22 years to 69 years old. Participants' qualifications ranged from the minimum allowed which is Junior Certificate (n = 8; 2%), to those with college education (n = 178; 43.7%).

Measures

Demographic questions

The demographic questions included in this current study were age, gender, school level employed in, the highest level of education achieved and length of service. Participants were also asked to put their length of service into one of four categories; less than a year, 1 to 4 years, 5 to 9 years, or ten or more years, for more details on demographic questions (see Appendix B).

Perceived stress scale 10 item (PSS-10)

The first questionnaire encountered after demographic questions is the perceived stress scale 10 item (PSS-10) (see Appendix C). This current study found that PSS-10 had good internal reliability using Cronbach's alpha (α = .82), which is a similar result to that found by Nordin M. and Nordin S. (2013) of Cronbach's alpha = .87. Nordin M. and Nordin S. (2013) also found PSS-10 had a good construct validity (r = .57 and r = .71). PSS-10 uses a five-point Likert scale scored from zero to four with 0= never, 1= almost never, 2= sometimes, 3= fairly often and 4= very often for each of the 10 statements. Total scores ranged from 0 to 40, the higher the total score the higher the stress perceived. Scores ranging from 0 to 13 are considered low stress, 14-26 are considered moderate stress and scores 27-40 are considered high stress. There are four reverse-scored items, which are questions 4,5,7 and 8. The scores for these are 0=4, 1=3, 2=2,3=1,4=0.

Minnesota satisfaction questionnaire short form (GR-MSQ short)

The Minnesota satisfaction questionnaire short form (GR-MSQ short) (see Appendix D). This study found a very good reliability score Cronbach's alpha α = .90, Martins and Proença (2014) estimated internal consistency in the GR-MSQ short to be good (α = .78-.87).

GR-MSQ short may be considered a construct valid instrument for measuring perceptions of job satisfaction (Lakatamitou et al., 2020). GR-MSQ has 20 items in total and using a Likert scale, each item is scaled from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. Total scores can range from 20-100, the higher the score the higher the job satisfaction.

16-item survey of perceived organisational support

The third questionnaire used was a 16-item survey of perceived organisational support (see Appendix E). Items are scaled from 0 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. This study found a very good reliability score for this questionnaire (α = .94) which replicated findings of Rodzi et al., (2017) α = .86. Seven items are reverse scored: items 2,3,5,6,7,12 and 13. The questionnaire was edited with "your company" in the items being replaced with "your school" to acknowledge SNAs' work environment to be a school. The total score ranges from 0- 96, the higher the number the more support the participant perceived from their school.

New general self-efficacy scale (NGSE)

The final questionnaire was the new general self-efficacy scale (NGSE) (see Appendix F). It is a shortened version with eight items. Items are scaled from 1=strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Chen et al. (2001) found high internal consistency reliability for the NGSE scale, α = .86 and α = .90. This matches what this current study found, a good reliability score (α = .89). The total score was calculated by adding the participant's item scores and dividing the total by 8* (*as 8 is the number of items in the questionnaire). This answer gives you an average total score of between 1 and 5, and the higher the number the higher the level of self-efficacy.

Preliminary analysis

A preliminary analysis had to be carried out due to an error in the Likert scale presentation in this questionnaire for the first 235 participants (85 of which did not fully complete their survey and were not included in the data set). The Likert scale of 0-6 was presented with two 'slightly agree' options, rather than one 'slightly agree' and one 'slightly disagree' (see Appendix G). This was corrected, and from participant 236 onward the Likert scale was presented correctly. To investigate whether this had significantly affected their results, 16 independent t-tests were run on SPSS to compare a group (n = 100) who were presented with the erroneous Likert scale and a group (n = 100) who were presented with the corrected Likert scale on each item. None of the sixteen independent t-tests had a significant result, therefore it is assumed the error had no significant effect on their results. (See Table Appendix H), for detailed results of each item in the 16 t-tests including M, SD, mean difference, t and *p* scores for each of the two groups.

Procedure

This research study was approved by the National College of Ireland's (NCI) ethics committee and is in line with the Psychological Society of Ireland and NCIs code of professional ethics.

Though no harm was expected, the questionnaires aimed to identify stressors, levels of job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and organisational support of participants, which may cause them emotional distress and lead to unwanted feelings. To limit the risk of this occurring and as described below: an information sheet, consent form and contact details of support services were provided.

The information sheet detailed what the risks are to the participant while taking part in the study, what it will entail, the inclusion criteria, and that the information they gave was anonymous and kept securely in NCI server for five years and will be destroyed in May 2027 (see Appendix I). It clarified to participants that their participation was voluntary and had the right to withdraw at any time with no consequence for them, until they submitted the survey. It was explained that at this point individual responses could not be identified due to anonymity and therefore could not be withdrawn.

The consent form informed participants that the study will take no longer than twenty minutes to complete and that no payment will be received for their participation. It reminded them they could withdraw at any point. It informed them by clicking on consent to begin the study, they acknowledged: they were currently working as an SNA, participation was voluntary, and they could terminate for any reason at any time until they completed the survey and that they are aged 18 years or older (see Appendix J).

Furthermore, the contact details of several support groups and a reminder to ring their general practitioner (GP) or one of the support numbers if they felt distressed at any time was presented to participants at the beginning and the end of the survey (see Appendix K).

Qualtrics, an online platform, was used to collect data anonymously from the questionnaires, participants were always anonymous and IP addresses were not collected. A follow-up post was placed three days later (see Appendix L) to thank respondents and as a reminder that there was still time to participate. Once potential participants responded to the social media post and pressed the hyperlink, they were brought to the host site of the study, Qualtrics. Participants were presented with the information sheet, as described earlier. Following this sheet was the consent form. Participants were presented with two options on

the consent sheet, if they clicked Do not consent, they were brought to a thank you message, contact details of support groups and logged out of the survey.

When they clicked on, I do consent, they were brought to the start of the survey. First, participants were presented with the contact details of several support groups and a reminder to ring their GP or one of the support numbers if they felt distressed at any time. Then participants completed the demographic questions and the four questionnaires as described above. Each questionnaire would take no longer than 5-10 minutes to complete, with survey taking no longer than twenty minutes in total. Once completed the anonymous survey was sent to the researcher.

Analysis

SPSS was also used to run a Pearson product-moment correlation and three separate hierarchical multiple regressions. The Pearson product-moment correlation was run to investigate the relationship between all the predictor variables and criterion variables (age, gender, POS, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and perceived stress). The sample size (n = 339) for regression models was adjusted from the study sample (N = 406), to exclude those with missing data in age.

To test the first hypothesis, the first hierarchical multiple regression was used to investigate whether after controlling for age (PV1) and gender (PV2) that SNAs felt more job satisfaction (CV) the greater the organisational support (PV3) they perceived from their school. To test the second hypothesis, another hierarchical multiple regression was used to investigate whether after controlling for age (PV1) and gender (PV2) that SNAs who perceived greater organisational support (PV3) had higher levels of self-efficacy (CV). To test the third hypothesis, a final hierarchical regression was run to investigate whether after controlling for age (PV1), gender (PV2), and self-efficacy (PV3), that SNAs perceived less

stress (CV) the higher the perceived organisational support (PV4) from their school. Checking that the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and multi collinearity have not been violated. SPSS was also used to separate participants total scores in both perceived stress and POS into three groups: low, moderate, and high scores. This was to demonstrate how many participants had scored low, moderate, and high scores in these two variables.

Results

A sample of SNAs (N = 406) employed in primary, post-primary schools and other educational settings across RoI was recruited for this current study. Descriptive statistics for gender, school level employed in, and the highest level of education achieved variables are presented in Table 1. Majority of participants were female (n = 397; 97.8%) with significantly less males (n = 8; 2%) and a participant who preferred not to say (n = 1; .2 %). Length of service as SNAs in years can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 3 below.

Table 1

Frequencies for gender, school level employed in, and the highest level of education achieved (highest level of education)

Variable	Frequency	Valid %
Gender		
Female	397	97.8%
Male	8	2%
School Level Employed in		
Primary School	270	66.5%
Secondary School	83	20.4%
Other	53	13.1%
Highest Level of Education		
Junior Certificate	8	2%
Leaving Certificate	22	5.4%
Fetac level 5	58	14.3%
Fetac level 6	140	34.5%
College/ University	178	43.7%

Almost two thirds, (n = 270; 66.5%), of participants, were employed in a primary school setting and a minority (n = 53; 13.1%), worked in other settings outside of mainstream education, listed as Other. Participants' qualifications ranged from the minimum allowed, junior certificate (n = 8; 2%), to those with college education (n = 178, 43.7%). Sixty-seven participants failed to clearly state their age e.g., 40's, late 60's and therefore their age data was listed as missing, but other data they provided was included where possible. Participants ranged in age from 22 years to 69 years old, with the mean age of an SNA being 46.54 years old. Descriptive statistics for participant age and responding on each of the continuous self-report measures involved (i.e., POS, Job satisfaction, self-efficacy, perceived stress) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for Age and self-report measures (i.e., Age, POS, Job satisfaction, Self-efficacy, and Perceived stress)

Variable	N	*M* [95% CI]	*SD*	Range
Age	339	46.54[45.54 - 47.54]	9.4	22-69
POS	406	54.34[52.24 - 56.44]	21.54	1-96
Job satisfaction	406	63.26[61.90 - 64.62]	13.95	26-94
Self-efficacy	396	3.95[3.88 - 4.01]	.63	1.75-5
Perceived stress	406	18.75[18.14 - 19.36]	6.26	1-38

Total POS scores were grouped into three categories; low (scored 0-33), moderate (34-66), and high (67-96). A minority of participants (n = 64, 15.8%) scored in the low category, the majority of participants (n = 232, 57.1%) scored in the moderate category and the remainder (n = 110, 27.1%) scored in the high perceived support category. Likewise, total

perceived stress scores were grouped into three categories; low (scored 0-13), moderate (14-26), and high (27-40). A majority of participants self-reported a moderate score of perceived stress (n= 286, 70.4%), with 11.3% of participants (n = 46) recording a high score and the remainder (n = 74, 18.3%) a low score.

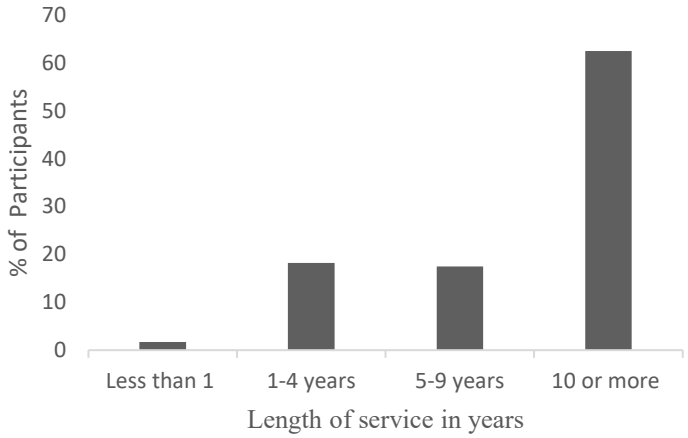
Table 3

Participant's length of service as SNA (N=406)

Length of service (years)	N	Percentage (%) of participants
Less than 1	7	1.72%
1-4	74	18.23%
5-9	71	17.49%
10 or more	254	62.56%

Figure 1

Percentage of Participants length of service as SNA (N= 406)



Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the ability of the measure of perceived organisational support to predict levels of job satisfaction after controlling for age and gender. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. Inspection of the scatterplot identified two outliers with a standardised residual of greater than 3. However, these scores were deemed to be a valid result and within the possible score range and therefore were included in the analysis. Tests for multicollinearity indicated that tolerance and VIF values were in acceptable range, thus indicating no violation of the assumption of multicollinearity. Correlations between the criterion variable and predictor variables were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (see Table 4). Two of the three predictor variables were significantly correlated with the criterion variable: those of gender ($r = .11$, $p=.035$) and perceived organisational support ($r = .69$, $p < .001$).

In the hierarchical multiple regression age and gender were entered at step 1, explaining 1.4% of the variance in job satisfaction. After entry of the POS at step 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 48.7%, $F (3, 335) = 107.87$, $p < .001$. The control measure explained an additional 47.2% of the variance in job satisfaction after controlling for age and gender responding R squared change = .47, F change (1, 335) = 310.61, $p < .001$. In the final model, only two measures were statistically significant (see Table 5) with POS recording a higher beta value ($\beta = .69$, $p < .001$) than age ($\beta = .10$, $p = .008$).

Table 4

Correlations table – Age, gender, perceived organisational support (POS), job satisfaction, self-efficacy and perceived stress.

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Age	1					
2. Gender	.08	1				
3. POS	-.02	.06	1			
4. Job Satisfaction	.10	.11*	.69**	1		
5. Self-efficacy	.12*	.14**	.12*	.19**	1	
6. Perceived Stress	-.14	-.06	-.34**	-.35**	-.38	1

Note: Statistical significance: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 5

Hierarchical regression model predicting job satisfaction levels

Variable	R^2	R^2 change	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*
Step 1	.02						
Age			.13	.08	.09	1.63	.106
Gender			9.95	5.25	.10	1.90	.059
Step 2	.49	.47					
Age			.15	.06	.10	2.65	.008
Gender			6.61	3.79	.07	1.75	.082
POS			.44	.03	.69	17.62	<.001

Note. R2 = R-squared; Adj R2 = Adjusted R-squared; β = standardized beta value; B = unstandardized beta value; SE = Standard errors of B; CI 95% (B) = 95% confidence interval for B; N = 339

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the ability of the measure of perceived organisational support to predict levels of perceived stress after controlling for age, gender, and self-efficacy. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Tests for multicollinearity indicated that tolerance and VIF values were in an acceptable range, thus indicating no violation of the assumption of multicollinearity. Correlations between the criterion variable and predictor variables were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (see Table 4). Only one of the three predictor variables was significantly correlated with the criterion variable, and it was negatively correlated: perceived organisational support (r = -.35, p<.001).

In the hierarchical multiple regression age and gender were entered at step 1, explaining 2% of the variance in perceived stress. After entry of self-efficacy at step 2, the total variance explained was 13%. After entry of POS at step 3, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 24.5%, F (4, 328) = 26.61, p<.001. The control measure explained an additional 10.7% of the variance in perceived stress after controlling for age, gender and self-efficacy responding R squared change = .10, F change (1, 328) = 46.48, p < .001. In the final model, three measures were statistically significant (see Table 6) with age recording a beta value (β = -.07, p = .019), self-efficacy (β=-.30, p <.001) and POS (β = -.33, p < .001).

Table 6

Hierarchical regression model predicting perceived stress levels

Variable	R^2	R^2 change	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*
Step 1	.02						
Age			-.09	.04	-.14	-2.56	.011
Gender			-2.23	2.31	-.05	-.97	.335
Step 2	.14	.12					
Age			-.07	.03	-.10	-1.99	.048
Gender			.31	2.20	.01	.14	.890
Self-efficacy			-3.46	.52	-.35	-6.62	<.001
Step 3	.25	.11					
Age			-.07	.03	-.12	-2.37	.019
Gender			.70	2.07	.02	.34	.736
Self-efficacy			-3.04	.49	-.30	-6.15	<.001
POS			-.09	.01	-.33	-6.82	<.001

Note. R2 = R-squared; Adj R2 = Adjusted R-squared; β = standardized beta value; B = unstandardized beta value; SE = Standard errors of B; CI 95% (B) = 95% confidence interval for B; N=339

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the ability of the measure of perceived organisational support to predict levels of self-efficacy after controlling for age and gender. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. Inspection of the scatterplot

identified seven outliers with a standardised residual of greater than 3 or less than -3. Another regression was run without these outliers but with no differences in results, and as these were valid responses, within the possible score range it was decided to keep them in the regression. Tests for multicollinearity indicated that tolerance and VIF values were in acceptable range, thus indicating no violation of the assumption of multicollinearity. Correlations between the criterion variable and predictor variables were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (see Table 4). All three predictor variables were significantly correlated with the criterion variable: age (r = .12, *p* =.029), gender (r = .14, *p* = .006) and perceived organisational support (r = .19, *p* = .019).

In the hierarchical multiple regression age and gender were entered at step 1, explaining 4.4% of the variance in self-efficacy. After entry of the POS at step 2 the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 5.9%, F (3, 329) = 6.90, *p*=.002. The control measure explained an additional 1.5% of the variance in self-efficacy after controlling for age and gender responding R squared change = .01, F change (1, 329) = 5.26, *p* =.022. In the final model, all three measures were statistically significant (see Table 7) with gender recording a higher beta value (β = .17, *p* = .002) than age (β = .11, *p* = .043) and perceived organisational support (β = .12, *p* = .022). However, caution must be taken with the results with gender as few males (n = 7; 2.1%) are in the regression model compared with females (n = 332; 97.9%), which replicates study sample gender breakdown.

Table 7

Hierarchical regression model predicting self-efficacy levels

Variable	R^2	R^2 change	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*
Step 1	.04						
Age			.01	.00	.11	1.97	.050
Gender			.73	.23	.17	3.21	<.001
Step 2	.06	.02					
Age			.01	.00	.11	2.03	.043
Gender			.71	.23	.17	3.11	.002
POS			.00	.00	.12	2.29	.022

Note. R2 = R-squared; Adj R2 = Adjusted R-squared; β = standardized beta value; B = unstandardized beta value; SE = Standard errors of B; CI 95% (B) = 95% confidence interval for B; N = 339

Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate whether SNAs in the RoI feel supported in schools, how many perceived themselves to be stressed and the relationship between perceived organisational support and (i) job satisfaction, (ii) perceived stress, (iii) self-efficacy.

In order to achieve these aims, the study categorised the responses to identify how many participants were in groups; of low, moderate, and high scores in perceived stress and organisational support. Also, by testing the three hypotheses through hierarchical multiple regressions, the association of perceived organisational support had on their job satisfaction, stress and self-efficacy.

Over two thirds (n = 285, 70.4%) of participants self-reported feeling moderately stressed. Similarly, over half (n = 231, 57.1%) felt moderately supported by their schools, with only 11.33% (n = 46) participants reported feeling highly stressed and 15.76% (n = 64) feeling low support from their schools.

The first hypothesis stated that SNAs with higher levels of perceived organisational support had greater job satisfaction than SNAs that perceived less organisational support. In support of the first hypothesis, results showed that perceived organisational support had a strong positive association with levels of job satisfaction.

In addition, the second hypothesis stated SNAs with higher levels of perceived organisational support perceive less stress than SNAs with lower levels of perceived organisational support. The results supported the second hypothesis, which showed that higher organisational support was negatively associated with perceived stress. Additionally, the model showed that age and self-efficacy might also be negatively correlated with stress.

Finally, the third hypothesis stated SNAs with greater perceived organisational support had higher levels of self-efficacy than SNAs who perceived less organisational support. This hypothesis may have found support in the results with POS having a statistically significant association with self-efficacy, but with very low variance (1.5%) for self-efficacy being explained by POS.

Caution is advised as none of these findings suggest a causal relationship between any variables, e.g., POS and perceived stress. Instead, it is an association between them.

The findings of the first hypothesis results are consistent with and broadly support the work of other studies which have suggested that higher perceived levels of organisational support are associated with greater job satisfaction (Kurtessis et al., 2015; Thevanes & Saranraj, 2018). While this association may not have previously been explored in SNAs, it is encouraging when comparing these findings with those found in the educational sector. For example, Chinomona and Sandada, (2014) found in South Africa, that teachers' job satisfaction is positively associated with their POS. Understanding the impact this association has on teachers' performance, as shown by Bibi et al., (2019) and Ashiq et al., (2019), highlights the importance of the positive association of POS and job satisfaction for SNAs, as it may impact their work performance. Although, other factors influencing job satisfaction cannot be excluded. For example, recent studies have noted the importance of self-efficacy on teachers' job satisfaction (Türker & Kahraman, 2021).

SNAs' ability to manage stress is crucial due to the stressful work environment and daily demands placed on them. If not managed correctly, these could lead to chronic stress, which has a more profound effect on an individual's health, increased absenteeism and decreased work performance (Colligan & Higgins, 2006; Mirela & Mădălina-Adriana, 2011).

Previous research has indicated a negative correlation between POS and perceived stress levels (Kurtessis et al., 2015; Sarfraz et al., 2019). The findings of this study offer support and reflect these previous findings. Kurtessis et al. (2015) and Armeli et al. (1998) further encouraged an association between POS and perceived stress by demonstrating that POS may help fulfil the socioemotional needs of an employee, in particular helping to fulfil respect, caring, and approval needs which may lower stress levels. This could be important for SNAs and children who rely on them. Furthermore, in examining stress and coping in combination can inform efforts to improve teacher wellbeing and positively influence student learning environments (Herman et al., 2020).

This adds further importance to understanding stressors in SNAs, it could help management to improve SNAs wellbeing and aid improvements in a students' learning environment. While the current study's results showed an association between POS and perceived stress, it was weaker than hypothesised. Age and self-efficacy are two possible variables influencing perceived stress that this study may have revealed.

This current study found that self-efficacy and POS had an association between them, supporting previous research findings (Kurtessis et al., 2015). However, while the relationship was statistically significant, with POS accounting for only 1.5% of the variance in self-efficacy, it is debatable if it is genuinely significant. The other two variables, age and gender, add additional uncertainty, accounting for a more significant percentage of variance in self-efficacy than POS.

Although the regression model controlled for gender, the disparity between the number of male and female participants in this study must be recognised. There was an expected difference in males and females populations working as SNAs, but the scale was surprising.

Secondary findings

Gender

Only 2 % (n = 8) of respondents were male, with 97.8% (n = 397) female. It is deficient even when compared with percentages of the gender breakdown in traditionally female-dominated careers as demonstrated in the 2016 Census of Ireland. That found 8.2% of nurses and 18.2% of health/social care workers are male. This disparity is more pronounced when compared to males in primary school teaching roles, 13% of teachers and 41% of managerial roles in primary schools being male (*Census*, 2017). Males make up 21.7% of teaching assistants in the United States of America (Zippa, 2021). A similar low male worker percentage to SNAs in RoI, is reflected in the childcare and early childhood education sector, with between 1-3 % male workforce on average across the globe (Warin, 2017).

The importance of SNA gender diversity is reflected in the reasons given for more male pedagogues in childcare. Wohlgemuth (2015) identified that diversity of gender might help generate a better working environment. In addition, it would offer children a broader view of gender and possibilities. Warin (2017) warns that it is not a question of simply attracting more males, but the promotion of gender flexibility. However, it must be noted that this was the findings of a single case study of a single nursery in the U.K. These findings would require further research to ensure would be appropriate to help promote more males into the role of SNA and examine any benefits this may bring.

Qualifications

Another unexpected finding was the extent to which SNAs are overqualified compared to the minimum required by the DoE, with only 2 % (n = 8) of SNAs holding the minimum requirement of Junior Certificate. These findings are consistent with previous

studies, which recorded 3% of SNAs holding the minimum requirement (Forsa, 2018). A majority (n = 178; 43.7%) of SNAs reported achieving college-level education in this study.

The significance of the inconsistency between minimum requirements, what the role requires, and the qualifications SNAs hold cannot be underestimated. It can harm the workplace, including other employees and the organisation itself (Zhang et al., 2015). Likewise, according to new research, it can increase staff turnover (Chen et al., 2021).

Despite this evidence and SNAs being overqualified, the current study findings are contrary to increased turnover in staff, with most SNAs (n = 254; 62.56%) reporting ten years or more experience working as an SNA. One possible explanation for this contradiction, and one that could be explored, is that self-efficacy can limit the adverse effects of being overqualified (Chen et al., 2021).

There is a distinct lack of training available to SNAs in working with emotionally vulnerable children, even though SNAs are often the "one caring adult" in a student's life and overqualified (Griffin & Blatchford, 2021). The government attempted to address this with a new ten-month SNA training course, though it is limited by not being accredited (DoE, 2021).

Major Implications

School management

The results of this study, by showing an association between POS and job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and perceived stress, may support school management with the development of school policies. For example, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and stress all affect employees'

quality of work (Ashiq et al., 2019; Brackenreed, 2008; Cherian & Jacob, 2013; Chinomona & Sandada, 2014; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Therefore, knowing the association of POS with these factors may help develop school policies that create a better work environment for SNAs, their teaching staff and a more positive learning environment for the students.

Government policy

It is suggested from the current study's findings and previous research (Forsa, 2018) that SNAs are overqualified, and the minimum requirements as set by the DoE may then be obsolete and require a policy review.

SNAs have developed and adapted to their changing role (Keating & O'Connor, 2012). In conjunction with the demands of the role being recognised by government policy and reflected in higher minimum requirements this could raise their self-efficacy and improve the children's learning environment. Another implication to be considered for policy is promoting the role of SNA to attract more males to the profession.

Understanding of SNAs

These findings could help school management, government and parents, to begin to understand SNAs as committed care professionals who benefit from organisational support. Furthermore, they may add understanding to previous studies (Zhao et al., 2021) of their significant role in creating an inclusive education environment. This better understanding could lead to a better working partnership, leading to better outcomes for children with special needs.

Strengths and Limitations

Several limitations and strengths should be acknowledged before interpreting these results. Firstly, an error in the Likert scale presentation in the POS questionnaire for the first 235 participants (85 of which did not fully complete their survey and were not included in the data set). Although this error was corrected and shown to be statistically insignificant through a pre-analysis, it is a limitation that should be acknowledged.

Secondly, the study was cross-sectional, and the results do not infer causality. Future research would benefit by using a longitudinal study model. For example, measuring how POS may lower perceived stress levels at different times of the year (Christmas, exam time) may benefit schools to manage the spike in stress, if any, at these times.

Thirdly the measures were self-reported, which led to some invalid responses, e.g., approximately two hundred participants returned partial responses. When investigated, it seemed that the majority missed one question in a questionnaire, and rather than returning to the question and due to the questionnaires (except the demographic) being mandatory, subsequently failed to complete the survey in full. Additionally, this may have been due to another limitation- technology. The survey would not allow participants to move on but did not bring them to the exact question left blank, making it more difficult to fully complete the survey.

Another question that had a notable number of invalid responses was age. Even though participants were reassured it was anonymous, some left it blank; others filled in the late 40s, etc., leading to invalid data. Given the apparent sensitivity of the question, this may be an example of social desirability bias (Demetriou et al., 2015).

Some strengths were that it was a novel study using questionnaires with good reliability scores. No other study in RoI attempted to understand SNAs through the variables

focused on in this study, which may have led to the study's most prominent strength- sample size. There was a significant response with over 600 responses within a week, instead of the expected 100 participants. Two reasons can be speculated to create such a high response rate. Firstly, the personality traits of someone successfully fulfilling a caring role with children, a want to help others. For example, Loveland et al., (2005) showed camp counsellors that displayed high agreeableness performed better socially. Secondly, the desire to be acknowledged and recognised as a professional body and an opportunity to express their opinions may have led to such a dramatic uptake. Other surveys of SNAs have had mixed responses. However, in 2008, a study of training and qualifications by Forsa trade union had over two thousand responses, possibly showing the area SNAs feel needs the most attention. However, at present these reasons are speculation and would require further investigation.

Future Research

Some recommended future research would investigate possible areas that SNAs identify as needing to be addressed. For example, another field of research with SNAs would be identifying possible factors that impact their job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and perceived stress. The importance of this is shown in previous studies to affect teacher performance and students' learning environment (Dicke et al., 2020; Edinger & Edinger, 2018; Lauermann & Ten Hagen, 2021).

Other exciting research could focus on gender and how to promote the role of SNA as a profession desirable to males, perhaps building on previous studies for example, Warin, (2017) and investigating if it could be applicable and appropriate to use with SNAs. Also, explore why and if women SNAs feel social desirability bias about their age.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to fill the gap in research into SNAs, to provide empirical evidence on POS and possible association with job satisfaction, perceived stress and self-efficacy in SNAs. It also aimed to explore how many SNAs felt supported and levels of their stress in schools. To achieve these aims three hypotheses for these variables were tested using hierarchical multiple regressions and some demographic questions were used to add to the general knowledge of SNAs.

First, it was hypothesised that SNAs have higher levels of job satisfaction when they perceive greater organisational support than SNAs who perceive less organisational support. It was hypothesised that when SNAs feel they have high organisational support, they perceive less stress than SNAs who perceive lower levels of organisational support. Third, it was hypothesised that SNAs with higher perceived organisational support have greater self-efficacy than SNAs who perceive lower organisational support.

The results showed that most SNAs are female, experienced, loyal to the role of SNA, feel supported, and overqualified for the post they hold. The current study results gave support, although at different levels, to all three hypotheses. The hypothesis regarding self-efficacy and POS was statistically significant but not significant in percentage of variance. When considering the sample size, interesting secondary findings were SNAs could be open and welcome further research and SNA workforce lacks gender diversity.

These findings may have implications for government policy. Policies for gender diversity and minimum qualifications required may need review. Additionally, school management can create better work environments and possibly learning outcomes for students by considering the possible association of POS with job satisfaction and perceived stress when developing school policies and strategies.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Social media advertisement

My name is Leo O Mairtin, and I currently work as a sna while studying for my psychology degree at night. For my final year project, I am researching special needs assistants in the workplace. I hope to help people understand the stress sna's feel under, the support they feel from their school, the confidence in their ability to do their work, and job satisfaction levels. Are you actively working as a sna? Can you read and write in English? are you 18 years or older? Then maybe you would be interested in filling in my survey, it takes about 20 minutes in total. It has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the National College of Ireland. All responses are anonymous. If you are interested and would like to know more, please click the link below; https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_29sQcDVzh1EJh0

Appendix B

Demographic Questions

What age are you (in years)?

What gender are you?

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary
- Prefer not to say

What school level are you working in?

- Primary school
- Secondary school
- Other

What is the highest Level of education you have achieved?

- Junior Cert
- Leaving Cert
- Fetac level 5
- Fetac level 6
- College/University

What is your length of service as SNA (including previous schools)?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10 or more years

Appendix C

10 item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)

The questions in this scale ask about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way **in the last month**. Choose the score that you feel most suitable for you. Each statement is scored from 0-4, were 0=Never 1=Almost never 2=Sometimes 3=Fairly Often 4=Often

	0	1	2	3	4
l. How often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?					
2. How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?					
3. How often have you felt nervous and stressed?					
4. How often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?					
5. How often have you felt that things were going your way?					
6. How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?					
7. How often have you been able to control irritations in your life?					
8. How often have you felt that you were on top of things?					
9. How often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?					
10. How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?					

Appendix D

Minnesota satisfaction questionnaire short form (GR-MSQ short)

Ask yourself: How satisfied am I with this aspect of my job? Tick the box that you feel is right for you 1-5 with; 1= very satisfied,2= satisfied, 3= neither dissatisfied or satisfied, 4= I am dissatisfied, 5= very dissatisfied.

On my present job, this is how I feel about:	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1.Being able to keep busy all the time					
2.The chance to work alone on the job					
3.The chance to do different things from time to time					
4.The chance to be "somebody" in the community					
5.The way my boss handles his/her workers.					
6.The competence of my supervisor in making decisions .					
7. Being able to do things that don't go against my conscience .					
8. The way my job provides for steady employment .					
9. The chance to do things for other people .					
10. The chance to tell people what to do					
11. The chance to do something that makes use of my abilities.					
12. The way company policies are put into					
13. My pay and the amount of work I do.					
14. The chances for advancement on this job.					
15. The freedom to use my own judgment					
16. The chance to try my own methods of doing the job.					
17. The working conditions					
18. The way my co-workers get along with each other.					
19. The praise I get for doing a good job					
20. The feeling of accomplishment I get from the job					

Appendix E

16 item survey of perceived organizational support

Listed below are statements that represent possible opinions that you may have about working at your school. Please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the one that best represents your point of view about your school. Each statement is scored from 0-6, with 0= strongly disagree, 1= moderately disagree, 2= slightly disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4= slightly agree, 5= moderately agree, 6= strongly agree

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. My school values my contribution to its well-being.							
2. If my school could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would do so.							
3. My school fails to appreciate any extra effort from me.							
4. My school strongly considers my goals and values.							
5. My school would ignore any complaint from me.							
6. My school disregards my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me.							
7. Help is available from my school when I have a problem.							
8. My school really cares about my well-being.							
9. Even if I did the best job possible, my school would fail to notice.							
10. My school is willing to help me when I need a special favor.							
11. My school cares about my general satisfaction at work.							
12. If given the opportunity, my school would take advantage of me.							
13. My school shows very little concern for me.							
14. My school cares about my opinions.							
15. My school takes pride in my accomplishments at work.							
16. My school tries to make my job as interesting as possible.							

Appendix F

New general self-efficacy scale (NGSE)

How confident are you in each of these statements? Tick the one that best matches you. The scores range from 1-5, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree.

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I set for myself.					
When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them					
3. In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me.					
4. I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind.					
5. I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges					
6. I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks					
7. Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well.					
8. Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.					

Appendix G

Error in Likert scale (POS)

Listed below are statements that represent possible opinions that you may have about working at your school. Please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by selecting the one that best represents your point of view about your school. Each statement is scored from 0-6, with 0= strongly disagree, 1= moderately disagree, 2= slightly agree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4= slightly agree, 5= moderately agree, 6= strongly agree

Appendix H

Pre-analysis T-tests

Items	*Error group M*	*Error group SD*	*Corr group M*	*Corr group SD*	*Means Difference*	*t*	*p*
1.My school values my contribution to its well being	3.30	2.00	3.58	1.62	-.28	-1.09	.278
2.If my school could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would	3.60	2.05	3.68	1.90	-.08	-.29	.775
3.My school fails to appreciate any extra effort from me	3.00	2.07	3.04	1.79	-.04	-.15	.884
4.My school strongly considers my goals and values	2.74	1.91	3.17	1.76	-.43	-1.66	.099
5.My school would ignore any complaint from me	3.70	1.93	3.49	1.94	.21	.769	.443
6.My school disregards my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me	3.53	1.99	3.37	1.85	.16	.59	.443
7.Help is available from my school when I have a problem	3.76	1.92	3.95	1.70	-.19	-.74	.460
8.My school really cares about my wellbeing	3.34	1.98	3.73	1.72	-.39	-1.49	1.38
9.Even if I did the best job possible my school would fail to notice	3.67	2.00	3.47	1.88	.2	.73	.467

10.My school is willing to help me when I need a special favour	3.79	1.66	3.89	1.66	.1	-.41	.686
11.My school cares about my general satisfaction at work	3.17	1.87	3.33	1.69	-.16	-.63	.527
12.If given the opportunity my school would take advantage of me	3.15	2.25	3.02	2.00	.13	.432	.666
13.My school shows very little concern for me	3.64	1.96	3.86	1.77	-.22	-.83	.406
14.My school cares about my opinions	3.21	1.89	3.29	1.55	-.08	-.33	.714
15.My school takes pride in my accomplishments at work	3.11	1.78	3.14	1.56	-.03	-.13	.899
16.My school tries to make my job as interesting as possible	2.51	1.92	2.76	1.69	-.25	-.98	.331

Note:

Appendix I

Participant information leaflet

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Please take the time to read this document before you begin, explaining why the research is being done and what it would involve. If you have any questions about the information provided or any other concerns, please feel free to email me, Leo O Mairtin, on x18137504@student.ncirl.ie

What is this study about?

My name is Leo O Mairtin, and I am a final year student at the National College of Ireland. As part of my BA degree in psychology, we must carry out an independent research project. I am researching Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in the workplace, measuring the stress they feel under, the support they feel they receive from their school, their confidence in doing their work and job satisfaction. I will be supervised by Dr Amanda Kracen, senior lecturer at the National College of Ireland. She can be contacted at Amanda.Kracen@ncirl.ie

What will taking part in the study involve?

If you give consent, you will be presented with four questionnaires. Please be advised; Some questions are related to stress, levels of self-efficacy, job satisfaction and organisational support. These questions involve self-reflection and may trigger emotional distress to some. In addition, you are provided with contact details of some support groups. You are advised to contact them or your GP if you are distressed. You will be asked your age, type of school you work in, highest educational level, years of service if you feel supported in the workplace and your gender. The completed questionnaires then are automatically sent to me.

Who can take part?

Participants would be a) actively working as an SNA, b) able to read and write in English c) be aged 18 years or older.

Is the information you share confidential?

Yes. All data is confidential. All responses that are given are anonymous. Responses are kept securely in the National College of Ireland for five years and then are destroyed (May 2027).

Do I have to participate?

Participation in this research is voluntary; you do not have to participate, and a decision not to participate will have no consequences for you. However, suppose you do decide to take part. In that case, you can withdraw from participation at any time up until you have submitted your questionnaire. As the questionnaire is anonymous, individual responses cannot be identified once they have been submitted. Therefore, it will not be possible to withdraw your data from the study at this point.

Appendix J

Consent form

The study should take you around 20 minutes. You will receive no payment for your participation. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge:

You are actively working as a Special Needs Assistant.

You can read and write in English.

Your participation in the study is voluntary.

You are 18 years of age or older.

You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation at any time for any reason.

Select your option below by clicking on it.

- I consent, begin the study
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Appendix K

Contact detail sheet of support services

If any part of this study has you feeling distressed, please contact your GP or any of the support services, contact details of some are listed below for your convenience;

Aware; Phone:1800 80 48 48

Website: https://bit.ly/3rEwkee

Pieta House; Phone: 1800247247

Website: https://bit.ly/3Er15JP

Samartians; Phone: 116 123

Website: https://bit.ly/2ZbMxNW

Appendix L

Follow up Social media advertisement

Just a quick note to thank all who took part in my survey, it is very much appreciated. A gentle reminder there is still time to complete your survey if you so wish. My name is Leo O Mairtin, and I currently work as a sna while studying for my psychology degree at night. For my final year project, I am researching special needs assistants in the workplace. I hope to help people understand the stress sna's feel under, the support they feel from their school, the confidence in their ability to do their work, and job satisfaction levels. Are you actively working as a sna? Can you read and write in English? are you 18 years or older? Then maybe you would be interested in filling in my survey, it takes about 20 minutes in total. It has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the National College of Ireland. All responses are anonymous. If you are interested and would like to know more, please click the link below; https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_29sQcDVzh1EJh0