Prevalence of Stress amongst Teachers in Rural-Based Primary Schools in South Africa

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Abstract: This study explored the prevalence of stress amongst teachers in rural-based primary school in South Africa. The purpose was to ascertain teachers' perception of stress, its causes, impact and coping strategies. To address the purpose of the study, a quantitative research design was employed. The sample for the study consisted of fifty respondents, five each from ten primary schools in Nzhelele Circuit. Data were generated using five-points Likert Scale questionnaires structured in the format, strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), neutral (N), disagreed (D) and strongly disagreed (SD). The analyses of the data followed a statistical tabular presentation. The results reveal feeling of pain, constant worry; something you cannot easily bear; excessive tiredness; pressure and difficulty responding to demand as teacher's perception of stress. Causes include, learner behaviour, radical curricular changes, excessive workload, poor teaching and learning environment among others, whilst the impact of stress is seen on quitting the job, absenteeism from work and alcoholism. Finally, the stress-coping strategies revealed include smoking, relaxation and voicing out problems.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Eustress, Organizational Stress

1. Introduction

Teacher stress has become a major topic of concern, not affecting teachers in African countries only, but also in countries such as Britain, and the United States of America and Asia. Stress is currently a phenomenon that must be recognised and addressed in various professions, because of the complexity of present-day society, and the teaching profession is no exception (Smith & Neisworth, 2000; Steyn & Kamper, 2006; Fisher, 2011; Samad, Hashim, Moin & Abdullah, 2010; Oliver & Venter, 2003; Kerr, Karriker-Jaffe, Subbaraman & Ye, 2011; Zedan & Bitar, 2013). Teacher stress is caused by various factors such as organisational, redeployment and retrenchment of educators, negative workload, isolation, extensive working hours, toxic work environments, lack of autonomy, insufficient resources, lack of support and / or autonomy, difficult relationships among teachers and management, management of time,

as well as bureaucratic rules (Naidoo, Botha & Bisschoff, 2013; Agai–Demjaha, Minov, Stoleski & Zafirova, 2015, Bano, 2018; Kaiser, 2018; Dhar & Magotra, 2018).

Wen, Talwar, Tan, Nur, Oon and Katrin (2019) are of the opinion that academic stress among primary school teachers differs from country to country. Zedan and Bitar (2013) found that studies conducted in Western countries have shown that one out of every three teachers reported being under stress or even extreme stress. This has been supported by Smith et al (2000), who revealed that in the UK, educators are highly stressed, and that stress is rooted in the way teaching is organised. Arnold, Copper and Robertson (1998) point out that much of stress at work is caused by lack of rewards, praise and, more importantly, by not providing individuals with autonomy to do their jobs as they would like.

Many researchers seem to have a reasonable understanding of the causes of stress, whereas little is known about the effects of reducing or mediating the impact of stress factors. This view accords with that of the grand master of stress research, Style (1980) who argues that stress as a concept has suffered from the mixed blessing of being too little understood. Recently, Kongcharoen, Onmek, Jandang and Wangyisen (2019) argue that the stress of a teacher is related to mental or physical health, and it is associated with students' performance, they may be inactive, get poor marks or lack motivation to learn.

1.1 Defining Stress

The word stress has many connotations and definitions based on various perspectives of the human conditions. According to Schaffer (1992), definitions of stress are neither wrong nor right. In the same vein, Walts (1992) also confirms that it is difficult to define stress because of the use of this concept in so many disciplines. The word 'stress' may mean many different things depending on different situations. Because of this, stress may be regarded as a situation-specific word, that is, a word which assumes various meanings according to the specific situation or context in which it is used. Stress means many different things to different people as influenced by their past experiences. Thatcher, Miller, Milner and Khoza 2008) indicate that numerous definitions of stress exist in literature and there is a controversy over the nomenclature as to whether the term stress, stressor, or strain should be used to define various aspects of stress. They argue that some theories address stress primarily as a stimulus, in other words, as an event or situation that affects the individual and is potentially harmful. Alternatively, stress may be regarded as the psychological or physiological response of the organism to an external threat, whereas Naidoo, Botha and Bischoff (2013) define stress as being a person's adaptive response to a stimulus that places excessive psychological or physical demands on the individual.

However, in trying to define stress, Selye (1974), the father of stress research, introduced the terms "distress" meaning damaging and unpleasant and "eustress" which means pleasant. Expressed in simple terms, stress may be pleasant or unpleasant. This view also accords with that of Fisher (1994), who emphasised that stress has both positive and negative qualities. Both types of stress tax the individual's resources and adjustment, though distress typically has the potential to do more damage (Rice, 1992).

Several other definitions of stress are found in the literature. Schaffer (1992) states that stress is an arousal of mind and body in response to demands made upon them and cannot and should not be avoided, but can be contained, managed and directed. Seaward (1994) defines stress as a non-specific response of the body

to any demand placed upon it to adapt, whether that demand produces pleasure or pain. Inability to cope with the perceived or real threat to one's mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing may lead to stress. Stress is "the result of some appraisal mechanism. Stress may be regarded as the psychological or physiological response of the organism to an external threat (Milner & Khoza 2008). For Cranwell-Ward (1990, p. 8) "either the perception of threat from the environment, or the endangerment of well-being, or the perception that there is an imbalance or discrepancy between the demands made upon the individual and the individual's ability to meet or cope with the demands. Failure to meet or cope with this demand has important consequences for the individual". Kaizer (2018) and William (2020) define stress as a medical or biological context which is a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. Stress can be external (from the environment, psychological, or social situations) or internal (illness, or from a medical procedure) and it can impact physical or emotional health. Stress can initiate the "fight or flight" response, a complex reaction of neurologic and endocrinologic systems. As shown in the definitions above stress is present all the time, as it makes life on the individual continual demands which must be met. Every individual face demands caused by threatening situations and challenges which call for coping behaviour. Much of the time a person's reaction to these occurrences is so mild that he or she is not even aware of them. It is when an individual perceives these events as threatening and out of control that his or her reaction to them becomes a potential problem (Selye, 1974; Varghese, Norman & Thavaraj, 2015). Some of the personal reactions associated with stress include but not limited to the feeling of pain (Mosadeghrad, 2014; Rožman, Grinkevich & Tominc, 2019; Stumne, 2021), constant worry (Goldberger & Breznitz, 2010) and excessive tiredness (Dittner, Wessely & Brown, 2004).

The teaching profession, including the administrative side, is generally seen as a highly stressful one. According to some scholars, teaching in seen as stressful because of the massive interpersonal demand of the job and its attendant role as well as its large task demand and expectation (Pithers & Forgathy, 1995; Naidoo, Botha & Bisschoff, 2013). Furthermore, there is research that indicates that work-related stress among teachers has various implications for work performance, as well as the health and psychological status of these professionals (Naidoo, Botha & Bisschoff, 2013). This, in turn impacts on their students. Several causes of stress can be identified in the literature, and these are discussed in the next section.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Causes of Stress

The situation in which teachers find themselves, i.e. the actual teaching in the classroom and the manner in which pupils behave, has been identified by several researchers as source of stress (Gold & Roth, 1993; Agai–Demjaha, Minov, Stoleski & Zafirova, 2015). Dunham (1992) states that teachers have identified several stressful situations in their work with disruptive children in the school environment, and they experience insecurity because of the unpredictability of the children's behaviour in class at school.

Curriculum demands: Changes in education occur regularly. For example, themes such as AIDS and sex education, drug education and vocational guidance are recent introductions. These changes in curriculum have effect on teachers. Such changes in the curriculum are sometimes difficult for teachers to implement and adjust too and can easily raise the level of stress. Curriculum work can be as a source of frustration when it does not meet the needs of the learner, or when the school administration uses the curriculum as

an instrument of domination, imposing it rigidly and offering teachers no freedom to adjust it (Walker & Soltis, 1992; Agai–Demjaha et al., 2015; Dhar & Magotra, 2018), Teachers may receive a direct order to conform to the official written curriculum. When they deviate from it, they feel doubt and uncertainty. If they do change the curriculum, they may receive official reprimands. Yet, as Fullan and Hargreaves (1993) point out teachers are simultaneously both the subjects and agents of change.

Excessive workload: Teachers have a lot of work to do and the time they have is reported to be insufficient. Researchers point out that heavy workload with little time generally features as a stressor in studies with educators (Schulze & Steyn; 2007; Agai–Demjaha et al., 2015). They often do not have enough time to achieve the standards of teaching and learning they would like to, or to meet the needs of their learners. Fisher (1994) indicates that time pressures are regarded as stressful by teachers. Rice (1992) indicates that overload is brought about by the carrying out of several roles simultaneously, and this can cause frustration. It seems the relative balance of these comparative tasks has not been formally investigated and is likely to vary between individuals. Howard and Johnson (2013) state the following as sources of stress caused by excessive workload:

- Inadequate time for preparation;
- Unrealistic demands are made by administrators/managers; and
- Unrealistic deadlines are imposed.

Lack of resources: Scholars point out poor working conditions which can cause stress, these arise when: there are inadequate facilities and resources; class sizes are too big; there are excessive noise levels in the working environment; and the school is geographically isolated (Howard & Johnson, 2013; Agai–Demjaha et al., 2015).

Low salaries: According to Arnold, Copper and Robertson (1998), much of the stress at work is caused by lack of reward, praise and – more importantly – by not providing individual teachers with autonomy to do their jobs as they would like. One of the important rewards is, of course, low salary or wages (Mrozek, 2013; Barabanshchikova, Meshkova & Surova, 2014).

Learner behaviour: Poor learner discipline is a common stressor According to (Schulze & Steyn, 2007; Barabanshchikova, Meshkova & Surova, 2014). Examples of these poor discipline includes disruptive behaviour, negative attitudes towards work, aggression and violence against educators.

2.2 Strategies for Coping with Stress

Bano (2018) states that when teachers are able to deal with problems or difficulties in a calm and appropriate manner it is commonly referred to as coping with stress. Successful coping either eliminates the stress experienced by individuals or, if stress cannot be eliminated, coping reduces the discomfort and thus leads to tolerance. Unsuccessful coping leads to confirmation of the stress symptoms, and possibly to their intensification because of the anxiety produced by failure to cope satisfactorily.

Sometimes the attempted coping response takes the form of a dysfunctional type of behaviour, such as alcohol and drug abuse, and further problems are thereby created. Strategies that may be successful and appropriate in one situation may not be especially appropriate on another occasion, nor will they be

appropriate at different times. Bowers (1995) believes that teachers who opt for an assertive, persuasive style in coping with many of the forms of job-related stressors, which they encounter, experience less psychological stress. Following paragraphs discuss some of the strategies of coping with stress.

Communication: Problems with interpersonal relationships, create many stereos. According to Rice (1992), being open as a person and able to share thoughts and feeling with others are a way of releasing stress. People often suffer from increased (high) levels of stress because they distance themselves from people who can support them. The communication medium plays an important role in the process of coping with stress. To filter the right information and listening selectively are the two main procedures when receiving and sending messages, respectively (Kaiser, 2018).

Avoidance and withdrawal: Strategies of avoidance and withdrawal may be used to protect the individual against unwanted emotions. A person using such a strategy usually withdraws and seeks to eliminate stress by mentally leaving the scene. An individual may avoid seeing a doctor, for instance, for fear of hearing about his or her HIV status. The overuse of this strategy has detrimental effects upon an individual's stress management. According to Scott (2019), avoidance coping is maladaptive form of coping that involves behaviour change where people avoid thinking or feeling things that are uncomfortable. In other words, avoidance coping involves avoiding stressors than dealing with them. Problem-solving skills: Problem-solving is a behavioural process of cognitive which provides effective responses that has the potential to deal with a difficult situation, and increases the possibility of selecting the best answer (Ebrahimi, Atri, Ghavipanjeh, Farnam & Gholizadeh, 2013).

According to Rice (1992), many events may be stressful because they require problem-solving skills. Knowing how a problem can be solved reduces the chances of being stressed. When an individual can solve a problem readily, he/she experiences little stress. Only when the solution to a problem involves competencies beyond what an individual possesses, stress is likely to occur. Rice (1992) proposes an acronym: SODAS (S for Stop and identify the problem, O for Options to be listed, D for Decide which option is the best, for Outline step by step plan to implement the decision and act, and S for reinforcing with Self-praise). Self-praise was identified and described as the most important component of coping strategies (Rice, 1992; Trevor & Simon, 1990).

Cognitive behavioural approach: This approach to managing stress is based upon the idea that 'self-speech', the way we talk to ourselves, exerts control over our behaviour in much the same way as might speech coming from another person. Sometimes people are unaware of how negatively they may be talking to themselves, anticipating failure and minimizing success. According to Schaffer (1992), self-talk is self-fulfilment, and the way an individual respond to stressful events is determined by his or her thinking.

A person may be taught to talk in a positive and confident way which propels success in each task. The individual can learn to shift negative, self-defeating internal dialogue towards positive, more realistic dialogue. Trevor et al. (1990) divided this task into three phases:

- Preparation for the difficult situation:
  'It is not going to be as I think'
  'I have coped with this very well before

- Coping in the difficult situation
  'I know it can't harm me'
  'One step at a time slowly does it'
- Praise following success in coping
  'Great, well done, I coped'
  'I handled it; it will be easier next time'

The aim of training is to help individuals to think more adaptively, as well as develop and improve their performance in any task.

Relaxation: The use of relaxation as a coping strategy is not a new phenomenon. According to Trevor et al. (1990), relaxation induces physiological effects opposite to those induced by psychological stress. Relaxation lowers the heart rate, reduces blood pressure, sweat gland and psychomotor activity. In addition, those relaxation techniques which incorporate muscle tensing exercises aim to teach people to become generally more aware of the muscular tension. Relaxation is a skill, a learned response to combat the experience of stress. Trevor et al., (1990) highlighted the fact that feeling relaxed helps a person to think in a more relaxed way. Corllis (2019) states that there are six relaxation techniques that can help stressful teacher to evoke the relaxation response and reduce stress. They are breath focus, body scan, guided imagery, mindfulness meditation, yoga, tai chi, and qigong, and repetitive prayer.

The direct-action technique of coping: The direct-action technique involves all types of actions aimed at dealing with a stressful situation. To put this technique on high level, Fisher (1994), identified four different forms of direct-action technique in dealing with stress. Making some effort to fight the stressor is one of the techniques. First the stressor must be identified, and thereafter be confronted. Fisher asserts that, in adversary situations such as conflict between individuals or groups, the source of stress may be perceived as a particular person, a group of people. The individual may resort to aggression and anger towards the source of stress. Another form of direct-action technique is avoiding or tolerating the demand. An individual selectively avoids the problems and focuses on more interesting work. According to Koslowsky et al. (1995), an individual may do this by gathering more information about the nature of the stressor, or otherwise react to the stressor by adjusting his or her internal environment. Negative coping would include dealing with the stressful situation by using drugs or alcohol or resorting to other destructive behaviour.

Setting realistic expectations: Accordingly, setting realistic expectations can reduce stress (Greer & Greer, 1992; Dunham, 1992). An unrealistic expectation which can lead to stress is to expect to be able to solve all students' problems by being a successful teacher. It is not always possible to do that, particularly for beginner teachers. To manage the challenging needs of students completely, teachers need to perform at a high level in the areas of curriculum, behaviour management, and instructional management. Attempting perfection in each area, especially early in career, may be unrealistic. The best way to be realistic is to target one area for improvement over the course of a year, and to learn as much as one can, either through reading or sharing with colleagues.

Koslowsky et al. (1995) is of the opinion that individuals should evaluate their own abilities more realistically. They further suggested that changing a self-centred attitude to a more realistic response can help individuals to reduce internal conflict and experience stress at a less threatening level. In this way, by becoming more realistic increases the capacity for coping.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the primary school teacher's perceptions of stress, its causes, impact and the coping strategies they use. From a quantitative perspective, the researchers investigated the experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers who were the respondents in the study by means of closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questionnaires are questions which only allow respondent to choose from the options provided (Land, 2010). The closed-ended questions were structured in Likert Scale format namely, Strongly Agreed (SA); Agreed (A); Neutral (N); Disagreed (D); and Strongly Disagreed (SD). It enabled the researchers evaluate the causes of stress, its impact and coping strategies for the purpose of interpreting the frequencies derived from the questionnaires.

3.1 Population and Sampling

Although it would have yielded more reliable results to collect data from all schools, only ten primary schools were selected. The names of all primary schools in Nzhelele Circuit were written on pieces of paper and put in a box, from which a sample of ten was picked, thus ensuring randomization. Five teachers from each school participated in study and these were again selected through simple random sampling. That is, a total of 50 teachers were selected as the study sample.

3.2 Data Collection

The face-to-face administration of the questionnaires reduced possibility of misinterpretation of the questions because the researchers explained the items thoroughly and encouraged respondents to ask questions where necessary. Rosnow and Rosenthal (1987, p. 107) hold the view that such a method of collecting data can help to formulate powerful and faithful generalisations about how and why people behave as they do.

3.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative data generated in the study were presented in tables and converted into percentages for ease of analysis. Inferences were drawn from the data for interpretation of the results.

4. Results

At least 64% of the sample were females while 36% represented males. This percentage distribution is indicative of the gender representation. Regarding teaching experience, 83% of the teachers had more than 5 years teaching experience.

4.1 Teacher Perceptions of Stress

On the subject, teacher perceptions of stress, the following perceptions have been given by participants;

feeling of pain, constant worry; something you cannot easily bear; excessive tiredness; pressure and difficulty responding to demand. These are depicted on Table 1 below.

Table1: Teacher perceptions of stress. N=48

Perception of stress/stress is	SA	A	N	D	SD
Feeling of pain	25.0	35.4	25.0	10.4	4.2
Constant worry	37.5	52.1	4.2	4.2	2.1
Something you cannot easily bear	22.9	39.6	25.0	6.3	6.3
Excessive tiredness	16.7	12.5	37.5	8.3	25.0
Pressure	45.8	35.4	12.5	2.1	4.2
Response to demand	16.7	33.3	18.8	6.3	10.4

4.1.1 Feeling of Pain

Majority of the respondents (60.4%) indicated that they felt pain when stressed, 25% of the respondents were neutral while 15% disagreed that they feel pain when stressed. Further, a high percentage of 62.5% of the respondents indicated that stress was not easily bearable.

4.1.2 Constant Worry

A very high percentage (89.6%) of the respondents feels stress as related to constant worry. Stress becomes a problem if it continues for too long or is repeated too often.

4.1.3 Pressure

With respect to pressure, as shown in Table 1, a very high percentage of 81.2% of the respondents viewed pressure as a sign of being stressed. It appears from the results that most respondents in this research associate pressure with stress. The results also show that half of the respondents agreed that stress was associated with failure to respond to various demands placed upon the individual.

4.1.4 Excessive Tiredness

On the issue of tiredness, there were mixed feelings with less than 30% of the respondents viewing excessive tiredness as a source of stress, 38% were neutral on the issue and 33% disagreeing with the assertion that tiredness was a sign of stress.

4.2 Causes of Stress

Table 2: Causes of stress N=48

Causes of stress	SA	A	N	D	SD
Pupil's misbehaviour	39.6	25.0	22.9	10.1	2.1
Radical and persistent curriculum change	20.8	35.4	22.9	6.3	14.6
Excessive workload	43.8	45.8	4.2	6.1	0
Poor conditions of service-Low salary	56.3	12.5	4.2	12.6	14.6
Poor conditions of service-Poor promotional opportunities	29.2	25.0	22.9	22.9	0
Poor teaching and learning environment-safety, shortage of materials	25.0	20.0	25.0	6.3	22.9
Poor teaching and learning environment Shortage of school buildings	18.8	25.0	25.0	10.4	20.8
Participation in decision making	25.0	20.0	25.0	6.3	22.9
Public criticism of teachers	25.0	27.1	20.8	8.3	18.8

4.2.1 Learner Misbehaviour

Learner misbehaviour was regarded by 64.6% of the respondents as a notable cause of teacher stress. Learners not properly behaving themselves in classes, therefore, according to the results can cause stress in educators.

4.2.2 Radical Curricular Changes

The radical curricular changes currently occurring in the South African education system are likely to increase rather than reduce the level of stress among educators. Radical and persistent curriculum change were seen by 56.2% of the respondents as one of the causes of teacher stress. It is interesting to know that teachers are not allowed to modify any curriculum. They are to implement it as designed by the department.

4.2.3 Excessive Workload

It is noted that a great majority of 89.6% of the respondents regarded excessive workload as a cause of stress. Assessing a great deal of written work of pupils and faced with other tasks such as collecting school funds, organising and doing administrative duties, all seem to be stressful for teachers.

4.2.4 Poor Teaching and Learning Environment

At least 45% of the respondents regarded a poor teaching and learning environment as having effect on their level of stress while 29.2% intimated that the environment had no effect on the level of stress. Such an environment would be where there is a shortage of teaching and learning materials and where there are safety risks. On whether a shortage of classrooms could be a cause of stress, educators seemed divided with 38.8% indicating that shortage of classrooms was a cause of stress while 31.2% disagreed.

The fact that some educators did not find the poor working environment as related to stress could mean that they are conditioned to working under such conditions.

4.2.5 Poor Conditions of Service

Regarding remuneration, results show that, 68.8% of the respondents perceived low salary as a cause of stress. It is understandable that a salary which does not meet the needs of respondents would be stressful. The perception of respondents is that it is stressful that they are not getting recognition and praise they deserve. Linked to monetary rewards, 54.2% of respondents experienced poor promotional opportunities as a cause of teacher stress.

4.2.6 Participation in Decision Making

About half of the respondents perceived imposed decisions by those in authority as a major cause of stress. This is an indication that educators want to be involved in formulating decisions that affect them and their work. On a related issue of public criticism of educators by the populace, while just over half of the respondents experienced being criticised by the public as stressful as shown in Table 2, more than a quarter of them indicated that they were not stressed by public criticism while under a quarter were neutral about public criticism as a cause of stress.

4.3 Impact of Stress/Consequences of Stress

Table 3: Impact of stress/ consequences of stress N=48

Section 4: Consequences of stress	SA	A	N	D	SD
Quitting the job	52.1	22.9	12.5	8.3	4.2
Absenteeism from work	29.2	37.5	22.9	10.4	0
Alcoholism	33.3	25.0	27.1	8.3	6.3

4.3.1 Absenteeism from Work Leading to Quitting the Job

From Table 3, it is noted that a majority (66.7%) of the respondents agreed that teachers who are stressed were likely to be absent from work. Less than a quarter of the respondents were neutral about this, and even fewer had a contrary perception, i.e., there is no association between absenteeism from work and stress. A large majority of the respondents (75%) viewed stress as one of the factors influencing teacher attrition. It is evident that, if teachers display a lack of concern about their job, the outcome may be that of leaving the job. Not many were neutral about this, and only a few could not perceive quitting teaching because of stress, possibly because they are conditioned to work under stressful conditions.

4.3.2 Alcoholism

Majority of the respondents (58.8%) perceived alcoholism as a resultant of stress. It appears that individuals use alcohol to relieve themselves from stress. A small proportion (14.6) could not see the association between alcoholism and stress, while more than a quarter of the respondents could not air their views.

4.4 Stress Coping Strategies

Respondents were probed to indicate how they coped with stress and three coping mechanisms were given, namely smoking, relaxation and voicing out their issues and concerns with relevant authorities.

Table 4: Stress coping strategies

Coping strategy	All the time	Sometimes	Never
Smoking	22.9	16.7	60.4
Relaxation	41.7	47.9	10.4
Voicing out of problems	22.9	16.7	60.4

4.4.1 Smoking

Minority of the respondents (22.9%) regarded smoking as the strategy to be adopted to cope with stress. However, a very high percentage (60.4%) were against this strategy probably because they are aware of the dangers of smoking.

4.4.2 Relaxation

A good number of the respondents (89.6%) used relaxation either sometimes or all the time believing that relaxation was one of the techniques of reducing stress.

4.4.3 Voicing out Problems

Nearly all respondents, as reflected on Table 4, (91,7%) regarded the voicing of problems as the best strategy to be adopted to cope with stress. This is an indication that, if respondents are given opportunity to air their views, stress may be reduced. Only a very low proportion of the respondents never used this strategy, and this may be because they are afraid of confronting authority, or perhaps they are not given a chance to voice their problems.

5. Discussion

The study has indeed shown that stress is prevalent in the area under study, necessitating the need for authorities to put in place necessary mechanisms to mitigate the negative impact of stress.

5.1 Perceptions of Stress

5.1.1 Pressure

The findings of this research indicate that pressure is seen by educators as a sign of being stressed. On the finding that stress is related to pressure to respond to overwhelming or conflicting demand, corroborative evidence can be found in literature. Stress is indicated for example, as a non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it to adapt (Seaward, 1994), with arguments that the quality of life depends on the ability to adjust to several demands both psychological and physical (Thompson, 1994).

5.1.2 Feeling of Pain

From the findings of the research on Table 1, most of the respondent, (60.4%) articulate that they feel pains because of stress. This result is consistent with Rožman, Grinkevich and Tominc (2019), whose study linked diverse feelings of pains as related to the symptoms of stress. According to them, physical pains associated to stress include headaches, neck and shoulder pains or elevated heart rate. Whilst in the research of Mosadeghrad (2014), the feeling of pain as a symptom of stress is associated with nonspecific and chest pain. Stumne (2021) described physical feeling of pains as a somatic symptom that is solely related mental strain or stress resulting from a new job, academic strain and depression among others.

5.1.3 Constant Worry

Worrying is one of the negative emotional states associated with occupational stress (Xin et al., 2019). From Table 1, another indicator linked to stress as revealed by majority of the respondents (89.6%) is constant worry. This finding corroborates Goldberger and Breznitz (2010) who reported worry and anxiety as symptoms of stress. However, when worrying becomes too regular (constant), it is described as generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) (Casarella, 2021). According to Casarella (2021), it is possible people get worried, but with those having GAD, life becomes unrealistic or out of proportion for the situation, as life is lived in constant state of worry, fear and dread. People with GAD tend to always expect disaster and will constantly worry about work and money among other things (Casarella, 2021).

5.1.4 Excessive Tiredness

Excessive tiredness is a necessary component considered in the definition of fatigue (Dittner, Wessely & Brown, 2004). Fatigue according to Caldwell, Caldwell, Thompson and Lieberman (2019) is the state of feeling very tired, weary or sleepy resulting from insufficient sleep, prolonged mental or physical work, or extended periods of stress or anxiety. 30% of the respondents on Table 1 link excessive tiredness to stress. This result agrees with Canicali Primo et al. (2019) who reported excessive tiredness as one of the symptoms of stress. In their study, excessive stress characterised the predominant symptoms among 84 women with exhaustion- and resistance-phase stress. In Southern India, excessive tiredness was reported as one of the symptoms of occupational heat stress on workers that account for productivity loss, and this ranked the highest, alongside fatigue followed by headaches (Venugopal et al., 2016).

5.2 Causes of Stress

5.2.1 Learner Misbehaviour

Learner misbehaviour emerged from the study as a key source of stress for educators. This learner misbehaviour is further exacerbated by the fact that corporal punishment has been outlawed in the South African schooling system. Pupil misbehaviour has also been reported in the literature as a cause of stress among teachers (for example, Kuar 2011; Baliyan, Baliyan & Mokoena, 2018; Dhar & Magotra, 2018; Gulzar, Qamar, Arshad & Haiderv, 2019). Baliyan, Baliyan and Mokoena, (2018) list disobedience to teachers and school rules and regulations, stealing of other pupils' properties, wearing unauthorised assorted dresses, smoking, alcohol and drug consumption, involvement in secret cult activities and immoral relationships as some pupil indiscipline in schools which cause teacher stress.

Dhar and Magotra, (2018) argue that while teachers are responsible for maintaining discipline, they do not have the authority for doing so due to legislative constraints. As Olivier and Venter (2003) show, the lack of discipline in schools, abolishment of corporal punishment in South Africa and unmotivated learners all contribute to raising the stress levels of teachers. In a study conducted by Kerr, Karriker-Jaffe, Subbaraman and Ye (2011) in Ireland, pupil discipline was found to be the single biggest stress, including increasing levels of aggression among both boys and girls and diminishing support from parents for disciplinary action. In the same vein, Lewis et al., (as cited in Zedan & Bitar, 2013) argue that the damage involved in the unruly behaviour of pupils is a double one because it has influence not only on the pupils in class but also increases stress on the teacher as well as injures their efficiency and health.

5.2.2 Workload

The issue of workload raised in this study has also been reported elsewhere in the literature (Katoch, 2017; Rabha 2017; Ravalier & Walsh, 2018; Dhar, & Magotra, 2018; Lenson et al., 2019; Sing, Othman, & Sivasubramaniam, 2019); Xin, et al., 2019; Kabito & Wami, 2020). Othman and Sivasubramaniam (2019) cited a survey conducted with Malaysian teachers which found that the teachers worked between 40 and 80 hours per week, with an average of 57 hours. Dali and Abu Barkar (2012) for example, state that unanticipated workloads and unexpected circumstances, like the diversity of the classroom, challenging political environments, and difficulties establishing positive communication with parents all combine to exhaust novice teachers. In the same vein Kerr et al. (2011) report that while most participants in their study felt the public saw their job as under-worked and overpaid, with short days and long holidays, the reality of the hidden workload was very stressful.

5.2.3 Radical Curricular Changes

The radical curricular changes currently occurring in the South African education system seem to increase the levels of stress among educators as shown by the large number (more than half) in the study that saw radical and persistent curriculum change as one of the causes of teacher stress. Fullen and Hargreaves (1993) pointed out that some of the curriculum changes impact primarily upon teachers. What is more, teachers are in the strange position of being simultaneously both subjects and agents of change. Referring to the changes taking place in curriculum development in South Africa, participants in a study by Tshiredo (2013) indicated that in terms of changes that were taking place from the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) to the newly introduced policy Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), changes were taking place too fast and that before they acclimatise with one policy, they were expected to catch-up with another and move to another change. In the same vein, Okeke and Dlamini (2018) argue that teachers appear not to be adequately prepared in terms of training to deal with such fundamental changes in the curriculum.

Steyn and Kemper (2006) stress that linked with new change initiatives, such as Outcome Based Education (OBE), is the amount of paperwork and simultaneous problems and uncertainties which educators also indicate as a stressful aspect of their work. Similarly, in a study by Zedan and Bitar (2013) in Israel, "The main factors for stress were found to be the workload and the changes in educational reform that were conducted by the authorities...Frequent changes, reforms and innovations in the education system, created stress..."

5.2.4 Poor Teaching and Learning Environment

From the results of this study, the poor working environment experienced by the teachers was a contributor to stress. According to Thompson (1994) and Rice (1994), a poor and unsafe environment seem to be an unquestionable cause of stress. Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana and Van Veen K. (2018) highlight that if teachers experience tension or stress for a longer period that could affect their overall behaviour and determine their attrition. Moreover, Ansley, Meyers, Mcphee and Varjas (2018) argue that prolonged stress may increase risk of chronic fatigue, heart disease and other ailments as stress tend to deplete mental stamina. Moreover, in their study, Harmsen et al. (2018) found that negative pupil aspects are significantly and positively related to tension, negative emotions and discontent. Some of the common symptoms identified by Ansley et al. (2018) include irritability, mood swings and exhaustion, which may escalate into depression, anxiety and lower quality of life. On the other hand, Jenitta and Mangaleswaran (2016) identify factors such as workload, working conditions, personal problems, environment and problems with the curriculum as some of the issues that contribute to teachers' stress. Ansley et al. (2018) indicate that physically, stress weakens the immune system and increases susceptibility to illness and can therefore, exacerbates pain and reduces physical stamina. Jenitta and Mangaleswaran (2016) reason that teachers need to be provided with appropriate trainings and counselling programs to cope with their stress level whilst in their career.

5.2.5 Poor Condition of Service

The perception of respondents in this study is that it is stressful that they do not get recognition and praise they deserve for working under unfavourable working conditions. Cooper and Marshall (as cited in Sing & Katoch, 2017) list factors such as poor physical working conditions, work overload or time pressures, role ambiguity and role conflict and lack of job security as well as under/over promotion as some of the factors associated with stress. Xin et al. (2019) argue that for young emerging teachers, one of the reasons for high stress levels could be due to challenging situations such as aiming for promotions. Other issues related to conditions of service cited in the literature include performance related incentives, poor pay in relation to work done, debt obligations, and lack of accommodation in schools (Dhar, & Magotra, 2018; Okeke & Dlamini, 2018) and lack of opportunities for professional enhancement (Rabha, 2017)

5.2.6 Participation in Decision Making

The findings of this study show that teachers want to have a voice in matters affecting them in the workplace and when such decisions are made unilaterally without their involvement, this leads to stress. Schools need to create conducive working environments that encourage involvement of teachers in decision-making. Studies report a significant relationship between teacher stress level and the structure and climate in organisation in terms of communication policy and practice (Othman & Sivasubramaniam, 2019), culture of the organisation, lack of participation in decision-making (Sing & Katoch, 2017), principals' leadership style (Lenson et al., 2019) and tight controls and punitive appraisal systems, little performance feedback, only downward communication and centralised decision making (Baliyan, Baliyan, & Mokoena, 2018).

5.2.7 Public Criticism of Teachers

More than half of the participants in this study found being criticised either in public or by the public as a stressful experience. Kaur (2011) argues that the profession of teaching has a very prestigious place in all professions and contends that, "A teacher is a kingpin in the entire system of education. Almost all cultures of the civilised world have considered their teachers in a very high esteem. Most thinkers and philosophers of the past who are still remembered are because they had their disciples and students." In a study by Quare (2018), the primary teachers reported criticism from inspectors and low status in the society as being sources of greater degree of worry and strain.

5.3 Impact of Stress/ Consequences of Stress

5.3.1 Absenteeism from Work Leading in Some Cases to Quitting of Job

This study revealed stress as one of the factors influencing the likelihood of teachers being absent from work and teacher attrition. This is echoed by Lenson et al. (2019) who cite employees' avoidance and abandonment of job as associated with stress. Similarly, teachers in a study by Baliyan, Baliyan and Mokoena, (2018) described how their personal and professional lives were affected by work-related stress- and feared they will be forced to leave the profession to escape the impact of teaching stress on their lives. Corroboratively, Kabito and Wami (2020) report that studies indicate that in Ethiopia nearly two thirds of teachers planned to leave the profession, while a Canadian study reported a 40% attrition rate in the first 5 years of teaching due to stress. In congruence with findings from this study, teachers who reported greater stress in a study by Sing and Katoch (2017) also reported greater frequency of absences and a greater number of total days absent, were more likely to leave teaching and less likely to take up a teaching career again.

5.3.2 Alcoholism

The results reveal that teachers sometimes resort to alcohol consumption because of stress. While temporary relief from stress might happen after alcohol consumption, alcohol addiction may result in health risk on the affected teachers. Teacher behavioural problems resulting from stress include but are not limited to poor appetite, increased alcohol, cigarettes, coffee consumption, having nightmares, inability to feel relaxed and being too fussy (Baliyan et al., 2018) and may lead to serious and even fatal conditions such as depression and anxiety (Kuar, 2011)

5.4 Coping with Stress

5.4.1 Smoking

Although indicated by a minority of the respondents (22.9%), smoking was regarded as a strategy to be adopted to cope with stress. However, a very high percentage (60.4%) of respondents were against this strategy probably because they were aware of the dangers of smoking. Negative anxiety has been for quite some time related with various maladaptive behavioral reactions, such as cigarette smoking, and an expanded utilisation of different substances (Maslach, 2009; Gulzar, Qamar, Arshad & Haiderv, 2019; Conley & Woosly, 2000; Dollard et al., 2003). Even more disturbing findings are revealed by Hassan,

Sanye, Rizk, and. Sief El-Naser, (2018), in whose study more than half of the teachers who indicated that they were under stress were smokers with a mean number of forty-three cigarettes per day. Kua (2011) underscores importance for teachers to maintain healthy lifestyles, advising that cutting back on bad habits like drinking and smoking will not just make teachers healthy people, but will also make them role models for their students.

5.4.2 Relaxation

Results from the current study reveal that many respondents used relaxation either sometimes or all the time believing that relaxation was one of the techniques of reducing stress. Baliyan et al. (2018) cite listening to music and relaxation as some of the simple ways to reduce stress. Stress does not only seem to affect teachers but also school principals. In research carried out to determine stress levels among school head teacher's principals, by Wadesango, Gudyanga and Mberewere (2015), relaxation featured prominently as a stress coping mechanism. The interviewees' argument was that head teachers needed time to relax after a hard day's work and advised that for the relaxation to be effective the schools' head teachers needed to be away from the school's physical environment.

5.4.3 Voicing out Problems

The fact that nearly all respondents, in this study regarded the voicing of problems as the best strategy to be adopted to cope with stress underlines the significance of open channels of communication in schools. This is an indication that, if respondents are given opportunity to air their views, stress may be reduced. Only a very low proportion of the respondents never used this strategy, and this may be because they are afraid of confronting authority, or perhaps they are not given a chance to voice their problems. Sing and Katoch (2017) isolate occupational satisfaction as a necessary condition for a healthy growth of teacher's personality. Kuar (2011) argues that fear of speaking one's mind and fear of losing one's job may prevent people from voicing out their concern and advises teachers to visit those they are able to confide in such as guidance counsellors, as this can help one identify any underlying psychological or behaviour problem related to workplace stress.

6. Conclusion

A conclusion based on the findings, review of related literature and empirical data were drawn that, indeed primary school teachers are stressed; intervention by the government can be expected to have beneficial effects on the performance of teachers. This study revealed that teachers in primary schools are highly stressed. In the light of the above, it remains a challenge to educators and the government to create a safe environment where effective learning can take place, provide resources for the school such as classroom, toilets and libraries and retrain teachers for the new curriculum

7. Recommendations

As part of the school policy a code of practice on the identification of teachers who are stressed should clearly be stipulated so that effective strategies such as therapy to assist these teachers can be applied. Even learners are not safe at schools. Schools turn into battlefields as teachers and learners are killed.

Government needs to ensure that schools become safe place by providing security guards. For the new curriculum, Government should also ensure that teachers are trained in such a way that they are able to adjust themselves and to meet the challenges. Government should reward teachers as this can lead to a decrease in performance and long-term absence from work.

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