

Occupational Stress among School Head Teachers: A Case for Hwedza District Secondary Schools' Head Teachers

N. Wadesango*, E. Gudyanga and M. Mberewere****

***University of Fort Hare, East London Campus, RSA**

****Midlands State University, Faculty of Education, Zimbabwe**

KEYWORDS Stress. Conflict. Underperformance. Staff Turnover. Educators

ABSTRACT The purpose of this research study was to investigate the phenomenon of occupational stress amongst secondary schools in head teachers in Hwedza District. The descriptive survey research design was adopted using quantitative and qualitative methods. In this study, a total of thirty secondary school head teachers and thirty secondary school ordinary teachers were picked as participants using the purposive sampling approaches. A questionnaire for school heads and interviews for ordinary schoolteachers were used as instruments for data collection. Collected data was presented in tables and figures. The study findings showed that the phenomenon of occupational stress amongst school heads is a real international issue. It was found out that teachers in general are affected physiologically, psychologically and behaviorally. The study recommended that there be clear definitions of workers' roles and responsibilities for school head teachers. A continuing program by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education on the subject of coping with stress at workplaces could be organized for schools head teachers to benefit from.

INTRODUCTION

Is modern life stressful? It is a commonly held belief that it is and that stress of various kinds is responsible for accidents, mental breakdowns, crime, unhappiness, and poor performance at work and at school. No matter how resourceful one maybe in coping with problems, the circumstances of life inevitably involve stress. People's motives are not always easily satisfied, obstacles must be overcome, choices made and delays tolerated. Every person develops a characteristic way of responding when his/her attempts to reach a goal are blocked. To a large extent one's responses to frustrating situations determine how adequately one adjusts to life.

Background of the Study

Stress is a common feature that affects people's lives, especially as the pace of development increases. Suleyman (2012) argues that the past twenty-five years have seen researchers paying a great deal of interest in the phenomena of job satisfaction, stress and burnout. Jeyaraj (2013) also argues that the linkage among the type of job one does, job satisfaction and the job environment is critical to the study of work related stress. Work is a common term, which is applied to all sorts of occupations. It is also an

important component of human survival. Work is a major element of development of the individual as well as improving the economy of the nation. The word stress is defined by Friedman (2000) as a force or pressure caused by difficulties in life. Jeyaraj (2013) argues that occupational stress can be caused by too much or too little work, time pressure, deadlines and physical strain presented by the work environment. The researchers cited above defines occupational stress as any force that pushes psychological or physical factors beyond its range of stability within an individual.

The same researcher cited above Jeyaraj (2013) also argues that working in an organization not only provides individuals with life sustaining incomes but also exerts its pressures on them. Such pressures ultimately have negative consequences both for achieving the goals of the organization and meeting the needs of the individuals working in these organizations. It can be concluded that the working environment can be a source of social and psychological stress. Stress has harmful effects on the wellbeing of the employee. Stress in general and occupational stress in particular is universal and has frequently a disabling human phenomenon. Such stress arising at the work place has detrimental effects on the behavior of the employees. It ultimately results in personal and organizational inefficiency. Occupational stress results from

occupationally related factors, which interact with the worker to change (disrupt/enhance) his/her psychological or physical make up. Such conditions often cause an individual's mind and/or body to deviate from its normal way of functioning.

In educational settings, demands placed on supervisors often results in occupational stress (Suleyman 2012). Suleyman (2012) conducted a study on job related stress amongst supervisors working for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in North Cyprus. Twenty-nine out of thirty-four supervisors took part in the study. In this study, it was concluded that the levels of occupational stress among education supervisors was found to be moderate. Their emotional and burnout levels and personal accomplishments were found to be moderate. Also, their levels of depersonalization were found to be low amongst these supervisors. In another study, Barrack (1989) concluded that although studies of job efficiency and job satisfaction among teachers and principals provide meaningful data on job satisfaction, little is known about occupational stress among supervisors.

In India, in Madurai District, a study by Jeyaraj (2013) showed that local council schoolteacher supervisors had more occupational stress levels than government schoolteacher supervisors. Jeyaraj (2013) conducted a study to determine the occupational stress levels of government schoolteacher supervisors and local authority higher secondary schoolteacher supervisors living in different sociocultural and economic situations. One hundred and eighty-five local council school supervisors and one hundred and twenty government schoolteacher supervisors participated in the study. The results showed that teacher supervisors who reported greater stress levels were less satisfied with their work. They reported greater frequency of absences. Such supervisors showed low commitment to their work and had intentions to leave the teaching field for other private sectors. Jeyaraj (2013) argues that the teacher supervisors' occupational stress is a real international phenomenon and that high levels of this stress are readily associated with a range of factors. These factors include individual vulnerability and systematic influences. This research by Jeyaraj (2013) also revealed that teacher supervisors often hang on to a wrong job for the sole reason of making a living. One can only

conclude that such a situation only adds to occupational stress.

In South Africa, studies by Barkhuizen and Rothman (2011) show that discussions on occupational stress among educational supervisors have been a topical issue over the past four decades dating back to the early 1970s. Their argument is that supervisory work is a highly stressful occupation. Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2011) concluded that thirty percent of the teacher supervisors indicated that their workloads had increased significantly in the recent years resulting in evidence of stress among them. In addition, many teacher supervisors complain that the escalation in the demands of the job made it difficult for them to maintain firm boundaries between the workplace and their homes. Such a situation often becomes sources of occupational/work related stress. Sixty-seven percent of the teacher supervisors in the Barkhuizen and Rothman (2011) study agreed that work now encroached more on their homes lives than in the recent past.

Seventy-two percent of the participants in the above-cited study believed that their families suffered as a direct result of their stressful jobs. Barkhuizen and Rothman (2011) argue that teacher supervisors experience high levels of occupational stress relating to pay, work overload and work life imbalance.

In Zimbabwe, Nhundu (1999) reveals that the last two decades have witnessed a proliferation of research studies on occupational stress among educational personnel. Nhundu (1999) involved a sample of ninety-five head teachers in his study who showed that they experienced relatively high levels of administrative stress. Also the study revealed several demographic characteristics and school variables, which influence the perceptions of situations, which cause stress. Some among them include unsupportive communities, unethical professional conduct by teachers and poor academic performance by students. It therefore follows that occupational stress amongst school supervisors is an international phenomenon, which comes about as a result of various work stressors.

There is a need for the government to improve the provision of resources, the shortage of which the teachers as indicated in this section said was a top stressor for the two groups. There is also need for the governments to address the issues of large classes and the con-

comitant heavy workloads. For the teachers in Special Needs Education the issue of providing them with support staff to carry some of the workload is vital (Mapfumo et al. 2015).

Having discovered through literature that the concept of occupational stress obtains amongst educational supervisors in the world, the writers developed strong interest to find out whether the same concept applies to secondary school head teachers in Hwedza District.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted the descriptive survey research design, using the quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative method enabled the researchers to use methods and procedures that treated the variables as a whole since it is flexible. The quantitative methods enable the researchers to use numbers and statistics for analyzing data. The plans included the use of the questionnaire and the interview. The researchers used the descriptive survey method approach to collect data from a large sample within a short space of time. Descriptive survey research design is seen as realistic in that it investigates phenomena in their natural setting and enables the researcher to collect original data. In this case the researchers investigated the concept /phenomenon of occupational stress on school head teachers within their stations. Hence, the researchers are convinced that they got valid data. The researchers adopted the descriptive survey design because of its simplicity in presenting data and findings through figures and tables.

In view of the study on occupational stress on school head teachers, the population comprised of thirty (30) secondary school head teachers who constitute the total number of school head teachers in Hwedza district and thirty (30) secondary school teachers. One of the schools is a government high school and four (4) are mission boarding schools under the Methodist church, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Seventh Day Adventist churches, respectively. The rest of the schools are council-run day secondary schools. Latif and Maunganidze (2004, 2003) suggested that a sample is a representative group drawn from a specified population. A sample allows the researcher to draw conclusions to the whole population under study. The researchers adopted the purposive sampling

approach because he involved all thirty (30) head teachers of secondary schools in the district to respond to his questionnaire. A total of thirty (30) teachers were also picked by the researcher from the thirty (30) secondary schools. The ordinary teacher population constituted of fifteen (15) men and fifteen women (15) from the thirty secondary schools in the district. The two major data gathering instruments were the questionnaire and the interviews.

Data analysis involves examining data carefully in order to find something. The descriptive statistical analysis was used to interpret data. The descriptive statistical analysis used in this study consisted of the number (N) of respondents and corresponding percentages (%) of the respondents. The researchers studied the responses. Researchers sorted and analyzed the data for further processing. Latif and Maunganidze (2003) argue that qualitative and quantitative methods complement each other in presenting authentic results. Thus each graph, table or pie chart was followed by a detailed qualitative report describing the respondents' feelings about issues of occupational stress on secondary school head teachers in Hwedza District.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What are the Causes of Occupational Stress and Their Sources?

Table 1 illustrates findings with respect to sources of stress among secondary schools head teachers. Twenty-two (73.3%) of the secondary school head teachers said that the behavior of their subordinates cause them a great deal of stress. Nineteen (63.3%) showed that they are stressed by schoolteachers who report late for work almost on a daily basis, while 18 (60%) complained that they are stressed by teachers who do not take their work seriously. These head teachers complained that the teachers do not teach effectively, which impacts their own leadership skills when students fail. Fifteen (50%) acknowledge that they are stressed by teachers who do not bother to mark learners' written work and fail to give proper feedback for the benefit of the learner. Twenty-six (86.7%) expressed great concern about teachers who fall in love with learners because this has an impact on their own work as schools head teachers. Eighteen (60%) expressed concern about teachers who come to

Table 1: Sources of stress among schools head teachers (No. 30)

<i>Causative factors</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Number</i>
Teachers coming to work late	19 (63.3)	30 (100%)
Teachers not teaching effectively	18 (60%)	30 (100%)
Teachers not marking learners' work	15 (50%)	30 (100%)
Teachers having improper associations with learners	26 (86.7%)	30 (100%)
Teachers coming to work drunk	18 (60%)	30 (100%)
Teachers picking up quarrels among themselves and community	19 (63.3%)	30 (100%)
Abuse of work privileges by teachers	15 (50%)	30 (100%)
Teachers not wanting to volunteer	21 (70%)	30 (100%)

work drunk. The schools head teachers complained that teachers were coming to work drunk yet they (teachers) were aware of the Civil Service Commission regulations, which forbid them to come to work drunk. Relatedly 19(63.3%) reported that they get stressed because of school-teachers who pick up unnecessary quarrels amongst themselves and with the community members around the school, which could require the school head teacher's intervention. Fifteen (50%) of the head teachers expressed concern about teachers who abuse the privilege of sick leave, while 21 (70%) of the head teachers expressed concern that teachers do not want to show commitment to their work wholeheartedly.

These results agreed with the findings of Manethei and Solman (1988), Kasaira et al. (2004) and Henry and Evans (2008) who argued that teachers' unprofessional conduct is a potential source of occupational stress for secondary school head teachers.

What are the Probable Causes of Occupational Stress and Their Sources?

Table 2 demonstrates how administrative issues and workload increases the school head teachers' occupational stress. Thirty (100%) of the secondary school head teachers acknowledge that they are stressed due to administrative issues and their workload. Twenty-seven

(90%) reported that they have a teaching load and are supposed to mark students' written work and also attend to other workloads. Also, 28 (93.3%) said they have to supervise the teaching staff as well. Another 28 (93.3%) admitted that they host visitors of various categories who also need various levels of selected attention. Twenty-nine (96.7%) reported that they are stressed because of attending to learners' personal problems as well. Nineteen (63.3%) said they also attend to issues of school health standards, which often results in more stress on them. Another 19 (63.3%) of the respondents indicated that they have to monitor the work of the non-teaching staff at their stations, which cause them more stress. Twenty-six (86.7%) reported that they are stressed because they also supervise the handling of school funds at their respective schools since it is a responsibility they would be ultimately be accountable for in the event of funds being mishandled. Once again these findings agreed with Atkinson et al. (1993), Friedman (2000) who argue that heavy workloads and long working hours lead to serious sources of occupational stress.

How Should School Head Teachers be Helped to Manage Their Stress Levels?

Intervention strategies to curb or minimize the negative effects of occupational stress could include the following.

Table 2: How extra work load and responsibilities cause occupational stress (No. 30)

<i>Causative factors</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Total number returns</i>
Teaching and marking	27(90%)	30(100%)
Supervision of teaching staff	28(93.3%)	30(100%)
Hosting visitors	28(93.3%)	30(100%)
Attending to learner's problems	29(96.7%)	30(100%)
Monitoring the school's health standards	19(63.3%)	30(100%)
Supervision of non-teaching staff	19(63.3%)	30(100%)
Supervision of the handling of school funds and their uses in the school	26(86.7%)	30(100%)

Suggestions to curb the negative impact of occupational stress on secondary schools head teachers were presented by the interviewees. The interviewees said schools head teachers were more stressed because of lack of social activities amongst them after work. The interviewees' argument was that head teachers need time to relax after a hard day's work. For the relaxation to be effective the schools' head teachers need to be away from the school's physical environment. Their suggestions concurred with those, which were proffered by Haworth et al. (1981) when they argue that relief from stress may come by changing the actual demands inherent in the situation or by changing the person's view of them. The researchers argue that one way of reducing stress in the workplace/situation is by altering the physical reality of the person's environment. This may mean that head teachers need to be transferred from their stations after serving for a given period of time, like five to ten years.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the study revealed that occupational stress amongst head teachers in schools is a real phenomenon, which affects supervisory staff in education both in developed and undeveloped countries. Various forms of stressors were identified by researchers in a bid to explain whether stress effects affect one's performance. Questionnaire and interview findings showed that head teachers of secondary schools in Hwedza District were stressed. Many of them acknowledged that they have fallen prey to the physiological and psychological consequences of the impact of occupational stress. On the physiological consequences, all schools head teachers confirmed that each one of them is affected by either one or two of the stress symptoms. Some are blood pressure patients, some are diabetic, some have ulcers, some have developed heart complications and some suffer serious headaches. Psychologically, the head teachers admitted that they have had times when they feel anxious, bored, frustrated, depressed, guilt and shame and low in self-esteem. The impact of such feelings discussed above is inefficient and ineffective performance by head teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the findings of the study, the researcher proposed the following recommendations:

- ♦ There is a need for clear definitions of workers' roles and responsibilities. School head teachers mostly are affected by having too many roles and responsibilities.
- ♦ Schools head teachers should have opportunities for interaction with others after work to reduce workplace stress.
- ♦ Another strategy, which reduces occupational stress, is the adoption of a participative leadership style. The approach involves as many juniors as possible to resolve stress-producing problems. Such delegation of their work should reduce a lot of their stress.

NOTE

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