

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of related literature and is organized in the following order :

- 2.1 The Effects of Stress on Work Performance.
- 2.2 Work Stress and the School Administrator.
- 2.3 Stressors of School Administrators.
- 2.4 Dimensions of Work Stress among School Administrators.
- 2.5 Variability of Work Stress Levels Among School Administrators.
 - i) Level of administrator's authority.
 - ii) Years of administrator's experience.
 - iii) School enrolment size.
 - iv) Staff size.

2.1 The Effects of Stress on Work Performance.

Feitler & Tokar (1986) attributed the principal as the key to an effective or successful school. They said that principals, as the school head, exhibit common attitudes and leader behaviors, like supportiveness, tolerance and tender strength. Principals must spend time in classrooms, interact frequently with teachers, and have an ability to come up with alternatives. These descriptions fit administrators who are either under a

low level of perceived stress or have developed efficient coping mechanisms.

The research findings of Feitler & Tokar (1986) also indicated that the degree of stress faced by principals can either be helpful or a hindrance to administrative functioning. They suggested high stress levels could lead to diminished work performance in two ways. The first was through physiological (health) disorders like chronic headache, ulcers and hypertension. The second had to do with producing psychological symptoms such as losing touch with reality including forms of neuroses, psychoses and pathological behaviors.

Gmelch (1988a) found that administrators who failed to alleviate some stressors or learn to cope, suffered from serious mental, behavioral and physical illness. This in turn was found to cause negative effects on work performance.

Gmelch & Gates (1998) expanded on Maslach & Jackson's study, and found that burnout was a consequence of prolonged stress. They said that there were three dimensions of burnout : emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low personal accomplishment.

Emotional exhaustion is the aspect of burnout identifying with low levels of energy and the feeling of being drained. Depersonalization is the dimension of burnout connected with feelings of lost identity and meaningfulness. Lastly, low personal accomplishment is the aspect of burnout where individuals feel dissatisfied with their accomplishments. All

these dimensions of burnout were found to be clearly associated with unsatisfactory work performance. Studies that have indicated the above include Blix et al (1994), Gmelch et al (1984) and Keller (1975) - as cited by Gmelch and Gates (1998).

2.2 Work Stress and the School Administrator

Many publications from other parts of the world indicate that school administrators experience a considerable amount of work stress.

Jack Lam (1988) says,

Confronted with more social and technological changes than in any other decade in the twentieth century, public school administrators apparently have experienced more conflict, more pressure and a higher degree of stress and burnout than ever before.

Savery and Detiuk (1986) carried out a study of stress among primary and secondary principals in Western Australia. They found that 30.2 per cent of the 288 respondents frequently experienced stress. Their findings also indicated that primary principals exhibited the greatest levels of stress, with 36.5 per cent indicating that they frequently suffered excessive stress compared to 29.9 per cent of the secondary school principals.

In a survey conducted by Knutton and Mycroft (1986) on all secondary school deputies in one large metropolitan education district in England, 25 per cent of the 154 respondents reported that they found their work as deputy heads either very stressful or extremely stressful.

Downton (1987) conducted a study of stress among 77 primary head teachers in England. Respondents were asked to indicate what percentage of their life stress they attributed to their work. They indicated that the median percentage of life stress attributed to work was 66 per cent. Male head teachers reported 75.5 per cent while female head teachers reported 56.5 per cent.

Wilson and Otto (1988) surveyed 122 primary principals and deputies in Melbourne, out of which 36 per cent were found to have a "high" stress score. A study of 97 head teachers and 53 deputy heads of primary and secondary heads was conducted in Malta by Borg and Riding (1993). The important finding was that one in five Maltese school administrators reported that they experience a relatively high level of job stress.

In a study by Cooper, Sieverding and Muth (1988), the heart-rate of twelve male secondary school principals were measured continuously over a period of time on the job. The heart rate was an indication of the physiological stress experienced by these principals. The outcome of this study was that these principals were found to be working under extreme stress, for long hours, and that certain activities were more physiologically stressful than others.

The main body of literature concerning stress among educators indicates that it is a profession marked by many distressful encounters, and that educators are not faring well in their environment. While the studies mentioned are not directly comparable, (owing to the fact that

different methodologies were used and also because of the role that cultural factors play in the perception and experience of stress), they do show that quite an alarming number of principals and their deputies find their work as administrators to be particularly stressful.

2.3 Stressors of School Administrators

Researchers have investigated major sources of stress (stressors) to determine what causes stress for school administrators. The findings were that most of the major causes of stress were similar, despite the fact that they were being carried out in different countries.

Downtown (1987) in his study of 77 primary head teachers in England, found three major sources of stress :

1. "Feeling that I have too heavy a workload, and that I do not have enough time to complete tasks during the normal working day".
2. "Knowing that I am not properly fulfilling all the roles demanded of me".
3. "Not having sufficient staff or expertise to fulfill curriculum demands".

Spooner (1984) - cited by Borg and Riding (1993) - carried out a survey on 296 primary head teachers in England. The five top sources of work stress were attributed to "reprimanding staff", "dealing with staff under stress/tension", "responsibility of position", "maintaining standards and values" and "quality of work in the school".

A survey of Tennessee school administrators by Brimm (1981) (cited by Borg and Riding, 1993) found that rules compliance (complying with state, federal, rules and policies), decision making that involved students and colleagues, evaluation of staff members and attempts to resolve parent-school conflict among the five most stressful aspects of administrative jobs.

Borg and Riding's (1993) Maltese study on school administrators found the five most stressful aspects were: frequent interruptions (telephone calls, people who want to talk); too much paper work; lack of or inadequate school equipment and resources; lack of or poor maintenance of schools; and shortage of ancillary staff.

Abu Omar's (1996) study on 91 primary school administrators in Selangor found the main sources of high administrative stress to be inadequate salary, excessive and unrealistic expectations from the state department and too much paper work such as filling forms, drawing up reports, and letter and memo writing.

2.4 Dimensions of Work Stress among School Administrators

Dimensions of school administrator stress refer to the grouping of individual stressors into common categories. The term dimensions was found to be used interchangeably with the term factors (Borg and Riding, 1993), or sources (Gmelch and Gates, 1998) or types (Jack Lam, 1988) or clusters (Vikneasvari, 1997).

Borg and Riding (1993) identified four factors for the 22 sources of stress in their study. The description of the four factors are as follows :-

- a) Lack of support and resolving conflict is made up of items dealing with various aspects of social support such as lack of support or cooperation from teachers and parents, including challenges to one's authority. Another aspect is resolving conflict among teachers, parents, pupils and ancillary staff.
- b) Inadequate resources groups together items dealing with lack of, or inadequate, material resources (school equipment and maintenance) and human resources (shortage of teachers and ancillary staff). It also includes items relating to the lack of support from, and complying with the rules and policies of, the Department of Education.
- c) Workload includes items relating to excessive work such as paperwork, seeing to a number of things at the same time, too much work to complete during school hours, attending meetings, and too much responsibility.
- d) Work conditions and responsibilities bring together items having to do with organizational environment, benefits and salary, as well

as responsibility for maintaining school discipline and organizing transport.

A large study of work stress among school heads and higher education principals/directors in the United Kingdom, Kelly (1988) - as mentioned by Borg and Riding, 1993, - extracted six factors (dimensions) of work stress. They are work overload, handling staff relationships and those with other adults, resources and the market approach, the demands and constraints of LEAs, handling inadequate staff and feeling undervalued.

Wilson and Otto (1988) - as cited by Borg and Riding (1993) - determined the following 8 factors from the responses in their study : responsibility for others, lack of recognition, ministerial control and lack of support, staff conflict, workload pressures, inter-role conflict, authoritative actions and material resources.

2.5 Variability of Work Stress Levels Among School Administrators

Studies on work stress levels always includes the determination of whether there exists significant differences in work stress levels among selected characteristics (or demographic variables) of secondary school administrators. This would enable the researcher to come up with a profile of a highly stressed school administrator. Some of the variables that have been studied are sex, age, level of education, level of authority and years of experience of the administrator. Other variables include type of school, size of enrolment and number of staff under the administrator's control.

This study, however, examined work stress levels for the following variables: level of administrator's authority, number of years of administrator's experience, school enrolment size and staff size under the administrator's control.

i) Level of administrators authority

Generally, studies have shown that principals suffer from higher levels of work stress than their deputies. Savery and Detiuk (1986) found that principals, particularly primary school heads experienced higher level of work stress as compared to assistant school principals. Borg and Riding (1993) also found this to be true, and especially so for the more experienced principals. Studies by Bergin and Solman (1988) and Koch, Gmelch and Tung (1982) are two other studies that confirmed this fact.

However, other studies have conflicting conclusions. Knutton and Mycraft (1986) found that the level of work stress, especially in the dimensions to do with responsibility, correlated negatively with the level of the administrators authority. That is to say, principals experienced less stress than deputies. This can be attributed to the fact that principals have assistant administrators and logistic support from their staff.

Gmelch (1977) found that middle level school administrators were more prone to 'administrative disease' or in other words, higher stress levels than other groups. Similar findings were also reported by Albrecht (1979) and Louise (1990)- as cited by Abu Omar (1996).

Locally, Abu Omar (1996) also reported that deputy heads suffer greater administrative stress than school heads in virtually all dimensions of stress, especially that of maintaining external school affairs.

ii) Years of administrative experience

Generally, studies on work stress among school administrators indicate that senior administrators experienced a higher level of stress than their assistants. This was especially so for the dimensions or factors pertaining to work load (Borg and Riding, 1993) and higher expectations of teachers and ancillary staff (Savery and Detiuk, 1986).

Sarros (1988) found that school administrators with more than 15 years of administrative experience were more prone to higher levels of work stress than their other counterparts.

Studies by Knutton & Mycroft (1986), Downton (1987), Wilson & Otto (1988) and Jack Lam (1988) however, indicated that there was no significant relationship between the administrator's years of experience and their stress level. The findings of Abu Omar's (1996) study also supported this fact.

iii) Size of School Enrolment Under Administrators Control

Ellison (1990) claims that most administrators spend a lot of time on paper work and other routine jobs pertaining to the daily running of the school. More important tasks like long-term planning, teacher instruction and building rapport with teachers and other staff members are often neglected. Stress levels are exacerbated when the enrolment size is large. A large student population per school results in shortage of classrooms, shortage of resources and funding, more discipline problems, greater parental involvement, and more routine tasks to complete.

Studies undertaken by Lynne (1982) and Jo Beth (1991) - cited by Abu Omar (1996) - both indicate a significant relationship between enrolment size and school administrator stress, especially in the dimension of workload. Abu Omar (1996) also reported that administrators from schools that have a high pupil enrolment experience greater level of administrative stress than administrators from schools with lower pupil enrolment.

Jack Lam (1988), however, reports that enrolment size has not much effect on the perceived stress of school administrators. He says that this is because administrators have to cope with the same tasks and responsibilities irrespective of school size. Studies by Oscar (1990), Lee (1988) and Francis (1987) indicate that school enrolment size does not influence the level of school administrator stress.

iv) Staff Size Under Administrators Control

The case of administrators having to manage people as opposed to things has been discussed. Administrators have to keep their staff motivated, on track and committed at all times (Cooper, Sieverding & Muth, 1988). Therefore, the task of managing large and diverse groups of people while maintaining harmony and managing conflict would serve to increase work stress levels of these administrators. These facts are consistent with the finding that jobs with high responsibility towards people such as an administrator's health problems are more likely to lead to coronary heart disease than jobs with high responsibility of appliances or machines (Breslow & Buell, 1980).