

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter consists of a summary of the study's findings, the implications of the findings, suggestions for further study and the conclusion.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study aimed to determine the level of stress experienced by secondary school administrators in Petaling Jaya. It was found that a high stress level was self-reported by these administrators, as was their stress level when measured by the ASI.

Specifically, 40% of administrators self-reported high to extreme stress levels while 47% of them registered high to extreme stress levels as measured by the ASI. This means that almost half the number of secondary school administrators in Petaling Jaya were highly stressed by their jobs.

This finding, that a high level of work stress was prevalent among school administrators is supported by numerous studies, such as Feitler & Tokar (1986), Savery & Detiuk (1986), Knutton & Mycroft (1986), Downton

(1987), Wilson & Otto (1988), Cooper, Sieverding and Muth (1988), Borg & Riding (1993) and Abu Omar (1996).

The study also attempted to determine which aspects of the Petaling Jaya secondary school administrator's job stressed them the most. The three major stressors reported were 'completing reports/paperwork on time', 'gaining public approval/funds for school programs', and 'making decisions that affect the lives of colleagues, staff and students'.

'Completing reports/paperwork on time' was also found to be a major stressor in these studies; Downtown (1987); Borg & Riding (1993) and Abu Omar (1996). Brimm (1981) – as cited by Borg & Riding (1993) also found 'decision making that involved students and colleagues' to be a major stressor as was determined in this study. Only 'gaining public approval/fund for school programs' was a major stressor found to be unique to this study.

Finally, various analysis were carried out to determine whether there were significant differences in the levels of work stress between these groups of secondary school administrators in Petaling Jaya : principals and assistant administrators, between administrators with different staff sizes, among administrators with varying years of administrative experience and among administrators with varying size of school enrolment. Only work stress levels among administrators with varying years of administrative experience was found to be significantly different. The results indicated that stress levels decrease with length of

administrative experience. This was in contradiction with the findings of other studies such as, Borg & riding (1993); Savery & Detiuk (1986), and Sarros (1988). However, studies by Knutton & Mycroft (1986), Downton (1987), Wilson & Otto (1988), Jack Lam (1988) and Abu Omar (1996) indicated no significant relationship between the administrator's years of experience and their work stress level.

5.2 Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study most importantly implies that the case of work stress among secondary school administrators must be taken seriously, because of the high level of stress that these administrators report. It is should not be dismissed as a case of exaggeration or overstating as some educators namely, Milstein and Farkas(1988) believe it to be.

Secondly, the findings also imply that secondary school administrators, particularly those that are new to the job seem more susceptible to the phenomena of work stress than their more senior counterparts. This is probably largely due to the fact that, from being ordinary teachers, they are elected to their administrative posts without any formal training. They learn on-the-job what their work entails. High levels of stress will be experienced by those who cannot cope.

The findings also indicated that these administrators found their work stressful because it seemed to be taking up too much of their time. This implied that they would benefit from learning stress coping strategies such as, time management and prioritizing. The scope of their duties and whether there are some forms of documentation that serve no real purpose, should be looked into by the Education Ministry. Positive steps to alleviate stress in this area, such as has been done for teachers recently – the abolishment of writing weekly lessons plans, must be implemented soon.

The administrators were also found to be stressed from having to constantly deal with and decide on the fate of their staff and students. Skills in interpersonal relationships, decision making and conflict management would enable them to carry out those functions effectively, hence, reducing the resultant stress.

Lastly, is the conclusion that there are certain aspects of work that are perceived by administrators to be more stressful than others. This implies that efforts to reduce overall stress levels can easily be done by addressing those particular aspects.

5.3 Suggestions From the Findings

The findings indicate that the problem of secondary school administrator stress is an area that requires immediate remedial attention by the proper authorities. The Education Ministry has to determine how it

can alleviate some of the burden that it has placed on these administrators. School administrator training facilities, like the Aminuddin Baki Institute must include the teaching of coping strategies like prioritizing, delegating, human relations and time management.

Also, because this study has shown that the administrators with less administrative experience are those who experience higher stress levels, it shows that these administrators have to be given the necessary training before they can be expected to carry out their duties. Currently, when administrators are promoted to be administrators from their teaching posts, the change in function could prove quite drastic if the individual is unprepared. The Education Ministry's recent decision to properly train individuals via a Masters in Education or Management program seems to be a step in the right direction.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Study

To verify and/or support this study, research can be done on a wider scale and include secondary schools from various states in the country. Research into the effects of location of the secondary school can also be undertaken, for example, urban and rural or effects of type of student population, that is, urban residential and urban slum. The type of school, whether single gender or mixed, or whether residential or non-residential should also be looked into.

While the perception(psychological effects) of work stress among administrators can mostly be determined employing questionnaires as was the case in this study, it would also be desirable to evaluate the physiological effects work stress of administrators to see if the findings are concurring. Cooper, Sieverding and Muth (1988) for example, used pulse rate to investigate administrators' reactions to different managerial functions.

Studies on the coping strategies of these administrators should also be looked into. This would provide valuable insight into how successful administrators cope with stress emanating from their work.

5.5 Conclusion

As Owens (1995) puts it:

Members of a organization constitute extremely valuable resources – rich in ideas, knowledge, creativity, and an astonishing level of human energy – that are available to the organization in the pursuit of goals and purposes that the members accept as their own.

That is to say, for a school's success, it's human resource (administrators, teachers and ancillary staff) must be provided with a climate that gives rise to motivation and job satisfaction, such that goals and purposes (of the school) are achieved.

Administrator stress and burnout which has been linked to teacher stress and burnout (Borg and Riding, 1993) needless to say, would be extremely detrimental to a school's and by extension, the nation's

success. The principal and other key administrators of the school are the front-liners responsible for providing the right kind of leadership are obviously not those suffering from high stress levels and burnout.

Owing to difficult and challenging times, the school administrator's position seems to be less and less appealing, as it is viewed by many as burnout positions. Also, there is a growing body of evidence that links the effects of burnout to low job satisfaction, low performance and ill-health (Blix et. al., 1994, Gmelch et. al 1984 and Keller, 1975 – as cited by Gmelch and Gates, 1998).

Insights gained from studies like this can provide a guide for work stress remediation among school administrators, that should be undertaken at both organizational and personal levels. Sarros (1988) suggests that an administrative "mindset" can be taught to these administrators that can help them with the rigors, intense interaction and split-second decision making. Others claim that previous experience, a sense of timing, the relative importance of events, temperament and a sense of humour act as filters of administrative stress (Gmelch, 1988). For, as Gmelch (1988) says, stress can be the spice of life, if we handle it right.