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The Effect of Stress on Teacher Performance in Selected Secondary Schools, Uganda

Donozio Ntambi¹, Dr. Shira Tendo Namagero²

Budaka Universal College, Budaka, Uganda¹

Faculty of Science and Education, Busitema University, Uganda²

ABSTRACT: There have been a lot of studies done on the causes of stress but little has been done on its effect on the teacher. This study set out to investigate the effects of stress on teacher performance in secondary schools. Data was collected using structured self-administered questionnaires, structured interviews and focused group discussions. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were utilized. A cross sectional research design established that stress greatly affected the performance of Secondary teachers through effects like burn out, late coming and absenteeism which undermine the overall quality of education offered to learners. Without the necessary stress management practices by stakeholders in the education sector, stress amongst teachers is likely to have devastating effects on their performance.

KEY WORDS: Stress, Teacher Performance

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress

There is a lack of consensus from various scholars on the definition of stress. Some defined work-related stress as the emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological reaction to aversive and noxious aspects of work, work environments and work organizations; and that it is characterized by high levels of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping. (C.L.Cooper and M.Kelly, 1993)

In Ireland, the Irish Health and Safety Authority defines stress as arising from the demands of the job and the working environment on a person exceeds their capacity to meet them (R.T. Pithers, and R.Soden, 1998). Others have described stress as a state which is accompanied by physical, psychological or social complaints or dysfunctions and which results from individuals feeling unable to bridge a gap with the requirements or expectations placed on them. (R.T.Pithers, and G.J.Fogarty, 1995)

Recent scholars (M.J. Borg, 2010) and (F. Eres, F., T. Atanasoska., 2011) agreed on the definition of work-related stress in respect to teaching as the negative adaptive reactions such as anxiety, anger, frustration or depression experienced by a teacher due to new, threatening or over demanding aspects of his/her work as a teacher which is beyond his/her abilities, resources, control or needs thus affecting his/her physical, emotional and/or behavioural health, performance and quality of life. (M.J. Fimian, 1988) Almost all dimensions of the organization including physical environment, structure, roles, policies and relationships can cause stress.

From the definitions suggested above it is apparent that there are a number of elements incorporated within the meaning of stress including; the individual, the demands or stressors, coping and the outcomes. In addition, stressors can very often vary depending on the occupation. Furthermore, stress has been described as a subjective concept and can depend on the individual including the outcome and coping element. What may be a stressful experience for one individual may be a challenge for another. Therefore, it can produce both positive and negative outcomes. In fact many believe that an element of stress is necessary in the workplace in order to challenge and motivate employees. These variations are not only dependent on personality but also on physical capability and general health.

Too much stress can contribute to health problems and can also reduce the ability to perform at the high levels (D.W.Chan, 1998). The negative health effects of stress as reported by (R.S. Guglielmi and K.Tatrow, 1998) include: increased heartbeat, release of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline which slow or stop digestion, causing the brain to be more reactive/less thoughtful; increased perspiration and reduced immune system responses, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, poor habit control, over-eating, low energy, impaired communication and poor



performance, among others are all characteristic effects of stress. All these negatively affect the health and performance of a teacher. Commenting on factors that impact on teachers' effectiveness, Prof Dylan William of the Institute of Education, University of London and also a senior education consultant to UNESCO confirmed that there were no magical ways to improve teacher performance except by eliminating causal factors of stress amongst teachers especially those that are work-related known as job stressors (UNESCO, 2010).

Teacher performance

According to (M.G. Borg, and J.M. Falzon, 2010) Teacher performance entails the effectiveness of the teacher based on students' performance results, teacher's attendance to school, communication skills, syllabus coverage, professionalism, decision making, interpersonal skills and classroom management. He further argues that Teaching is always marked as vital significant profession of the whole world as all the professions take their roots and nourishment from the said profession.

Performance Indicators are used to assess the performance and progress of teachers. It consists of performance standards, specific standards and performance indicators. They define Performance standards as the areas in which teachers perform their tasks and responsibilities. Under performance standards there are some specific tasks which are expected to be performed by the teachers. These are termed as specific standards. From specific standards, performance indicators can be derived.

The following performance standards were identified.

- Designing Learning Experiences for Children
- Knowledge and Understanding of Subject Matter
- Strategies for Facilitating Learning
- Interpersonal Relationship
- Professional Development
- School Development
- Teacher Attendance

II. RELATED WORK

A research study conducted among European Union countries on teacher and managerial stress in schools between 2006 and 2008 found out that increasing rates of workplace stress and burnout are posing a significant challenge to well-being and performance of teachers and institutions at large (M.J. Borg, 2010). The highest levels of teacher stress were reported in Greece (55%) and Slovenia (38%), whereas the highest levels of managerial stress were reported in the United Kingdom-UK (12%) and Germany (16%) (Milczarek. M., Schneider. E. and González. E., 2009). The teachers in Greece reported too much workload and tight deadlines within which to accomplish much work as the leading stressors and that those greatly affected their performance in class coupled with several other stressors. They found out that at least 30% of the teachers interviewed have considered leaving the teaching profession as a result of stress for other activities. This created a labour vacuum in the Teaching Service of European Union countries and has escalated labour export costs in those countries.

In Hong Kong, it was demonstrated that work-related stress was generally high among teachers (O.L.Siu and I. Donald, 1996). A study among college teachers by a group of British academics showed that Hong Kong is the most stressful workplace to teach from in the world. They identified six sources of stress among 1000 college principals in Hong Kong: these were; strict supervision by managers, too many responsibilities on teachers, poor working environment, lack of promotions, job-value conflicts and role ambiguity. Each of them was rated to respondents 3 self-reports of physical health, depending on their gender, age and experience in managerial position. The report indicated that top college principals (head teachers) reported more stress related illnesses and burn out (45%) than lower heads of Sections (25%). This was attributed to too much workload on the side of the College Principals and role ambiguity especially balancing school and external correspondences (L.Sin and D. Cheng, 1995).

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work conducted a survey among 260 schools and health institutions in 60 African countries and reported that stress was most common in education and health-related professions (up to 28.5%) as compared with other job sectors (Milczarek. M., Schneider. E. and González. E., 2009). Indeed working conditions and health-related issues of the teaching profession have been investigated over the past 30 years, mainly due to the high levels of teacher stress reported.).



However, rates greatly differ from country to country; for instance, a study of occupational stress among Moroccan and South African teachers found mild stress levels in the Moroccan sample and moderate stress levels in South African sample (F. Eres, F., T. Atanasoska., 2011) The major cause of teacher stress in such countries like Nigeria has been pointed out to be the high student-teacher ratio, as a result of congestion of learners in classrooms in such a highly populated African nation. The congested learners pose a great threat of indiscipline which makes teachers frustrated while in class (Huberman, 1993).

III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a cross section survey with both qualitative and quantitative techniques for data collection and analysis. The research design helped in examining relationships among the variables to obtain a representative sample of the population. Surveys are designed to provide a snapshot of how things are at a specific time. In a survey research independent and dependent variables were used to define the scope of the stud. Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) for quantitative data and a thematic approach was used to analyze qualitative data where themes, categories and patterns were identified.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Stress

In Uganda the introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2005 lead to an influx of learners into secondary schools. Without the necessary interventions of increasing the number of teachers to match the required ratios in schools, absence of enough scholastic materials, poor infrastructures and dismal payments, a lot of pressure was mounted on teachers in secondary schools in a bid to deliver quality education amidst challenges. This has led to high levels of job dissatisfaction amongst teachers as evidenced by high teacher turn over in secondary schools, (noted at 28.6% in Government schools and 49.7% in private schools per annum), continued absenteeism and poor teacher-student relationship as the report further suggests. All these according to (C.Kyriacou, 2001), are indicators of managerial and teacher stress.

Distribution of respondents by locality and gender in Table 1 below shows the number of respondents by locality and gender.

Table 1: Sex of the Respondents

| Municipal division | Female | Male | Total |
|--------------------|--------|------|-------|
| East | 75 | 18 | 93 |
| West | 79 | 26 | 105 |
| South | 50 | 27 | 77 |
| Bazaar | 21 | 17 | 38 |

Source: Survey data; Number of Respondents (N) = 313

Among the respondent's majority came from west division 105 [33.5%] followed by East 93 [29.7%] and South 77 [24.6%] respectively. This is because the West Division has many teachers than the rest of the Divisions.

The study also sought to find out the relationship between long working hours and gender. The findings indicated that there were more male than female teachers that strongly agreed 236 [75.4%] that long working hours are a key stressor to them than their female counterparts. This may be attributed to economic and domestic obligations that accrue to males than females in life, in which case males desire to have more time to do other things than females who may not mind doing the same thing for a long time.

Effects of Stress on Teachers' Performance in Schools

This analysis was set to determine whether there was any relationship between stress and performance in teaching. Below we have a comparison of responses between various effects of stress. The study sought to compare and contrast the effects of stress on the performance of the teacher. The results were indicated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Comparison of Responses among Various Effects of Stress.

| Effect of stress on performance | Disagree | Undecided | Agreed |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------|
| Burn out | 126 | 00 | 187 |
| Inactivity | 101 | 15 | 197 |
| Feel like not teaching | 100 | 59 | 154 |
| Comes late | 113 | 10 | 190 |
| Moods change | 69 | 30 | 214 |
| Isolation | 99 | 59 | 155 |
| Inadequate preparation for lessons | 98 | 56 | 160 |

Source: Survey data; Number of Respondents (N) = 313

In table 2 above, more respondents agreed to having experienced or knew someone who had experienced the effects of stress.

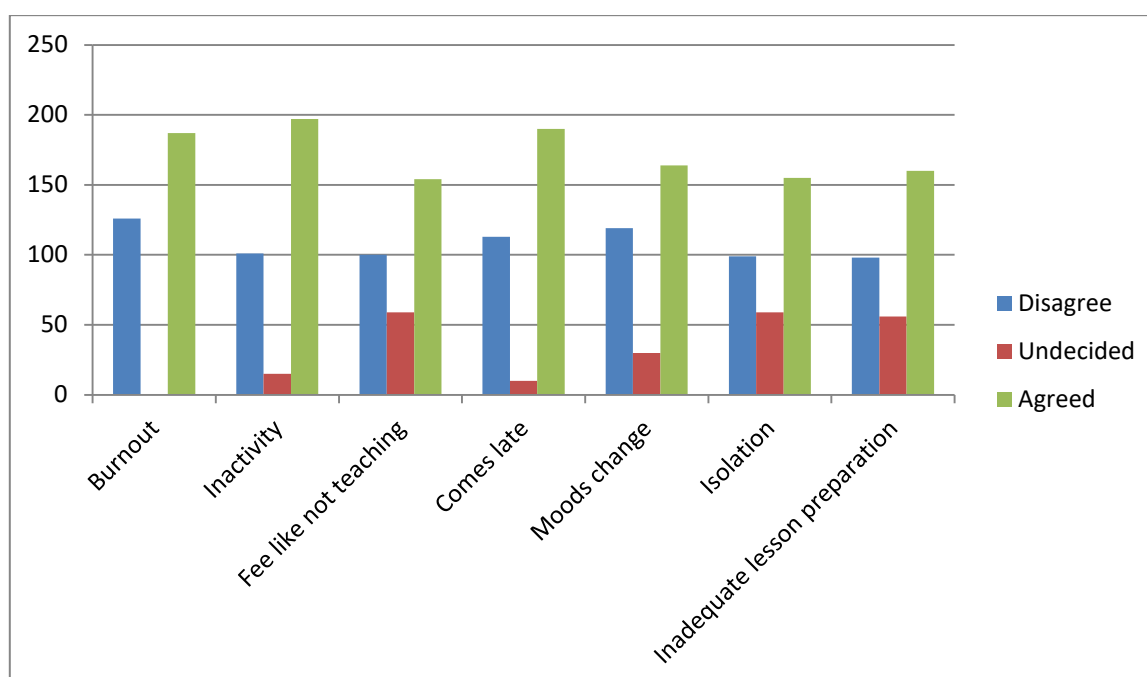


Fig. 1 Effects of stress on performance

All the respondents had ever experienced at least one effect of stress. This means that all the teachers felt the weight of the causes of stress but the difference in the effect felt lay in their individual levels of resilience. Of the 313 respondents, 187 had experienced burnout which is 60% and 127 had not yet. 197 had had periods of inactivity where they simply sit back and do nothing and these made up 63% of the respondents. 154 respondents agreed to having seasons when they felt like not teaching, which stands for 49% teachers who participated in the survey. 190 respondents agreed to deliberately going late to school because of stress meaning that 61% of teachers had not reported to school on time for their lessons and it has a ripple effect of learners missing the lesson from 61% of the respondents. 214 respondents agreed to having experienced mood changes, these make up 69% of the interviewed teachers and could account for the sudden outbursts which were witnessed either in the staffroom, compound and on rare occasions in the classroom.. This is a dangerous state because these teachers are walking time bombs and when they explode someone is bound to be hurt and it might be students. 155 respondents (49%) sometimes isolated themselves from other people. When asked why they did so, some said they felt inferior to the people around them, while others said that they felt sad and didn't feel like talking to anyone. 160 respondents (51%) did not make adequate preparation for their lessons. Many were observed in the staffroom and on the compound reading through what they were going to teach in the next 2 or 3 minutes. When asked in interviews most said that they had previously prepared for their lessons



but by the time of the interview they felt it was not worth putting in so much effort because the reward was not commensurate to the labour.

Feelings of overstrain, tiredness, and fatigue, resulted from long-term involvement in an over-demanding work situation and it was common among private school teachers. During interview sessions respondents commented that if no clear parameters or expectations for the performance of the learner have been set, or if the teacher has misunderstood them it leads to stress and poor performance.

The findings during the face to face interviews indicated that as a result of stress suffered at school and at home, teachers' time management became very poor and they tended to come late to school compared to times when they are not stressed. One respondent gave an example of the period during intense marking of learners' examinations where majority teachers tend to report to work/school very late as a result of much workload due to stress.

These results also suggest that there is a risk of burnout when a discrepancy prevails between the expectations of a motivated teacher and the reality of an unfavourable work situation. This discrepancy progresses towards burnout via dysfunctional ways of coping. This severe burnout is related to performance deficits, mental disorders, and physical illnesses among the teachers and head teachers. During the Focus Group Discussion, the respondents clearly revealed that, this was related to a higher risk of having no pay in case of sickness, absence from work and disability pension in some schools.

The expectations and demands that were placed upon teachers by the employers in schools caused exhaustion. The great expectations from the school governance, parents and the Ministry of Education puts more pressure on teachers and caused the burn out and low performance. As one of the respondent, explained, —"if someone feels overburdened by a large, impossible workload – they can soon become disillusioned, burnout stressed and lose motivation."

. Findings from structured interviews and Focused Group Discussion also tallied with the results above, where majority respondents mentioned sickness and burn out as effects of stress. They deliberated that as a result of stress, they have developed sicknesses like hypertension especially during seasons of intense learners' indiscipline especially during sports. One female teacher confessed to have developed chronic headache and depends on pain killers as a result of too much pressure for results and tight deadlines faced in a competitive government school and it had affected her overall performance.

Other effects of stress including late coming and failure to teach affected the overall performance of a teacher and also the quality of education at large. Additionally, as a result of dismal payments, one respondent was quoted saying; "you cannot be earning peanuts and you stay in the same workplace, you have to find survival somewhere else". This comment was a result of financial stress suffered by teachers who earn dismal wages and they resorted to absenteeism from work to find extra income. This absenteeism from work affected the general performance of the teacher and the learner.

From the questionnaire results in table 2, burn out, resorting to inactivity, failure to teach, late coming and low job performance were the major effects of stress on teachers' performance and they had the largest number of respondents agreeing to them. Burn out is a state of extreme fatigue and exhaustion, to a point that an individual cannot perform the task set before them. In reference to teaching this means that a teacher cannot effectively deliver as expected and may suffer illnesses that grossly undermine his performance the quality of education offered to learners.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Stress has a multiplier effect where one person can influence a group negatively and it should be given the attention it deserves. If no interventions are made by stakeholders, the quality of education offered by stressed teachers will go down.

The issue of stress needs to be handled at government level by instituting counselling centres for teachers near to the school or inside the schools and quarterly talks for teachers to encourage them.

There is need by Government to re-institute benefits for teachers like half medical fees in hospitals at presentation of their staff identity cards to reinforce respect for the profession that has been greatly ridiculed.

Schools should incorporate and adapt stress management practices and policies for teachers to help curb stress.



School administrators should try to offer support to teachers suffering from extreme effects of stress like burn out and absenteeism to ensure quick and adequate recovery from such syndromes.

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