

Research Article

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This research study investigated the occupational stress and coping strategies among secondary school teachers in Mwingi Central Sub County. It looked at the impact of occupational stress on teachers' job performance. The research study employed a descriptive survey design and made use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to collect information. The target population of the study comprised the secondary school Principals and the subject teachers. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the study area, schools and principals who were involved in the study. Both simple random sampling and purposive sampling were used to select teachers. The sample population consisted of 10 Principals and 60 subject teachers. An interview schedule was used on the Principals and a questionnaire for teachers. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis where the data was presented by use of frequency tables and percentages. The study also identified various effects of occupational stress on job performance among secondary school teachers. These included; negligence of work related roles, time wastage, strained relations with staff, decrease in administration satisfaction and increased teacher turnover. The study concluded that since there were serious adverse effects of occupational stress among secondary school teachers, the policy makers and implementers should make efforts to moderate and if possible mitigate the effects of the work related stressors among secondary school teachers.

Keywords: OCCUPATIONAL STRESS; JOB PERFORMANCE.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Stress is part of people's daily lives in the current fast – paced and ever – changing environment all over the world. Within the education scene, stress has become a serious issue in recent years as school teachers attempt to cope with frequent changes in school environment. Global studies indicate that stress emanating from increased demand from parents, employers, students' indiscipline and families has been on the rise in the last few decades (Alizon, 2010). Stress in the teaching profession has also become a focus for teacher unions as they seek to support educators in their attempts to cope with work related stress. According to Gold and Roth (2013) from their study that sought to determine stress and satisfaction levels of middle level tertiary tutors, causes of their stress and professed coping strategies in Australia, it was found that stress comes as a result of family and work related demands which result to physical and emotional reactions. These results can either have positive or negative implications, depending on one's interpretations. There is general pressure exacted upon teachers in relation to academic performance which translates to work related stress. Despite these, teachers have multiple roles to play in secondary schools amongst them being running administrative roles in support of the school principals, supporting the schools through implementing the school's educational objectives, working with school principals to help interpret and communicate the educational policies to students, some of them being heads of departments have personnel to manage, management of physical facilities and equipment, implementation of the school curriculum, and evaluation of students' performance in addition to actual classroom teaching (MOE, 2016). Several factors have been advanced by different stakeholders as the underlying nature, root causes and effects of occupational stress among secondary school teachers. These include poor salaries, lack

of motivation, inadequate facilities, low students' entry behaviour in some schools, students' unrest and indiscipline, variation in enrolment rates, overloaded curriculum and inexperienced school principals (Alison 2017). O'brians (2012) observed that drug and substance abuse, poor living conditions in schools, lack of effective guidance and counseling services, pressure for excellent academic performance, abdication of parental responsibility, incompetent board of governors, culture of impunity in the society, adolescence identity crisis and mass media influence pose a lot of challenges to school management and administration. Occupational related stress in schools is a serious issue in most of the developed countries' education system (Green, Frank and Watson, 2015). High school teachers experience work related stress in health, welfare, financial and educational issues of academic achievement. Both the health of the principal and health of staff members may be negatively affected by a principal experiencing serious work – related stress (Wester, 2015). According to Brown (2010) work related occupational stress crosses over to teachers, from principals with whom they work together. A 'ping pong' effect also exists where the teachers then rebound into the principals, causing further stress. According to Harriet (2012) there was a negative correlation between stress and productivity, and that individuals experienced difficulties in using intellectual skills management and in dealing with subordinates. Brown (2014) observed that in Britain high school teachers' stress was contributing to an enormous rise in indirect financial costs associated with education. This occurs on account of high levels of stress-related to sick leaves for the principals as well as affected staff members, premature resignation, and subsequent training of new staff. The world of work of teaching fraternity has expanded in both complexity and quantity. The changing nature of school work requires more time, transparency and accountability in dealing with school related issues hence the occupational stress for teachers being on the rise. From this perspective, exploring the work characteristics of secondary school teachers in the context of how they manage time, develop and maintain relationships and handle a variety of curriculum implementation and other duties is valuable to the profession (Lame, 2015). According to the 2013 National Conference of state

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legislatives in a United States of America, high school teachers are dealing with a myriad of issues during the workday. They are navigating the bureaucracy of new federal and state legislation, while also completing core paper work than the job ever required in the past. Bruck and Grady (2015) observed that the complexities of school safety, public relations, curriculum reforms, student activities and so much more have created a job that appears to extend far beyond the normal work hours. According to O'brians (2015) in Australia, the pressures of high stakes testing, increased accountability, and societal demands makes teaching a challenging profession to choose. The time required for working with principals and students, reviewing curriculum and even serving parents in need have turned into a job with high demands hence occupational stress. According to Robbin (2014) in India for instance, tactical plans have been altered and the general structure for teaching and learning is being dictated by state mandates more than ever before. The emphasis on data driven decision making has shifted the idea of educational viewpoint in more practical and didactic direction. The passage of the federal "No child left Behind Act (NCLB) in U.S has led to enhanced focus on standards-based education and students educational attainment, especially as it pertains to students' performance, this has brought with it considerable amounts of stress to school principals. Moreover, studies from European countries such as England, Poland, and Greece indicate that the demands of evaluation and a decade ride with increased accountability have placed extra demands on teachers, hence occupational stress. Once the teachers are tired, their ability to work harder and keep the school at the top of its game and competitive against neighboring schools brings along economic and political stressors. The situation becomes worse for "workholic teachers who put in extensive time at work and lack focus or feeling for their health and relationships (Brukfark, 2012). Barkey (2014) observed that in South African, secondary school systems mandates school principals to learn to use and capitalize on the unique strength, talents and potential of their staff, just as the staff must continually reassess their capabilities, talents and potential contributions to their institutions if the schools are to achieve effective teaching learning outcomes.. They should device ways of creating structures that continuously support teaching and learning and enhance school adaptation, develop institutional culture and climate that is open to change and present vicious and illegitimate politics from displacing the legitimate activities of teaching and learning hence prevent occupational related stresses that emanate from such sources. According to Brown (2010) examining job related stress and burn out among school primary school teachers in Ghana, identified stress management strategies such as developing and maintaining good habits of nutrition and a balanced lifestyle including exercise. There was need to develop good habits of active and non active leisure activities and recognize that these are legitimate and appropriate activities in the management of stress. In Kenya, job related – occupational stress for teachers of both primary and secondary school has been both turbulent and rapid. However, there have been few investigations into the changing nature of the role of the teachers, which focus on the subject specialization and personal interests in co curricular activities in Kenyan schools (Alison, 2017). Over the last decade many secondary schools have suffered from strikes and poor academic performance most of which place principals and teachers in the spot light (Waithera, 2016). A recent study by Muimi (2017) highlights that the conditions under which some of secondary school teachers operate are unconducive and deplorable. Most of the schools for instance, lack physical structures, good and adequate buildings, library facilities, playing grounds, furniture, class rooms and staff rooms. These factors have contributed greatly towards secondary school teachers' work related stress. The conditions under which students learn militates against their holistic contributions to the achievement of set academic goals

which results to students' unrest. (Small, 2016). Working at schools under such conditions brings untold occupational stress to teachers hence calling for highly skilled stress management strategies in order to effectively and efficiently achieve the set educational goals. In Mwingi Central sub County, one of the biggest concerns expressed by the teaching staff is the increased amount of mandatory regulative and compliance work. In addition to their increased workload, secondary school teachers are also involved in the other administrative and co curricular activities. Due to workload pressures, teachers in turn express anger and frustration that adversely impacts on job performance as well as the students' academic outcome which also increases their work related stress (Mutinda, 2016). The escalating role multiplicity makes the teachers see their main role as classroom instruction. Some teachers especially in the recently established schools do not have enough teaching/learning facilities hence lack efficiency and effectiveness in under taking work roles and demands. There are also few trained teachers and a general shortfall of teaching and support staff in some schools leading to work overload. This kind of situation leads to leads to job dissatisfaction against too much expectation and responsibility put on the secondary school teachers (Mutai, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Occupational stress impacts greatly on teachers' retention and more often than not often leads to transfers and resignation. Teachers' occupational related stress is currently an issue of great concern among scholars. However, there is little consensus between different professional groups regarding its etiology, or how to tackle it based on a review of literature as stated in the background. There is reasonable understanding of the causes of occupational stress although little is documented in the literature reviewed on the impact of occupational stressors on teachers' daily routines. There are few studies on effective coping strategies and little is documented regarding on occupational stress and job performance especially in the area of study focused by the current researchers.

Objectives of the study

This study intended to:

1. Establish the nature of management related occupational stress among secondary school teachers in Mwingi Central Sub County
2. Examine the sources of management related stress among secondary school teachers in Mwingi Central Sub County
3. Analyze the occupational stressors and coping strategies among secondary school teachers in Mwingi Central Sub County

Summary of key findings of the study

The study established that the nature of occupational stress included Physical fatigue, psychological and emotional constrains. As well as mental disturbance were the most experienced type of occupational stress by the secondary school teachers. These stressors was directly or indirectly influenced teachers' social relations leading to strained poor job performance. The main sources of occupational stress among secondary school teachers were students' indiscipline, too much expectations and many responsibilities, financial constrains, curriculum supervision and implementation, political interferences, mandatory and compliant work, inadequate and unqualified administrative staff, inadequate and complex learner needs. The majority of the school teachers employed the following stress management techniques such as relaxation, music, prayer, and

recreation with the family play. Relaxation and playing were the most professed techniques among both the groups. Good time management, setting smart goals and priorities played a key role in helping secondary school teachers cope with management related occupational stress and enhanced job performance.

Conclusion

Since Kenya is very diverse, it is not possible to conclude that the nature and sources of occupational among secondary school teachers as well as the coping strategies apply uniformly across the country. Nonetheless, despite various efforts being made to equip secondary school teachers with skills to cope with their day to day job related occupational stress, there was great need to device more effective and efficient measures to enable secondary school teaches to cope with work related stressors. It is evident that occupational stressors negatively impact on teachers' daily job roles hence poor job performance, consequently leading to low academic attainment among students. It can therefore be concluded that poor occupational stress coping strategies lead to challenging situations hence poor job performance among teachers. Most of the respondents noted that stress coping strategies such as good time management, setting of priorities, taking rest and attending social gatherings, exercise and religious meditation, prayer and Bible reading among others help reduce occupational stress. It is therefore important to note that in order to enhance effective job performance among secondary school teachers, there is need to address issues related to the nature and sources of occupational stress as well as the proper occupational stress management techniques. It is further concluded that if this noble task is to be realized in Mwingi Central Sub County, all stakeholders must put efforts and play their roles maximumly on order to ensure occupational stress among teachers is well managed thus deliver the job related duties and achieve the national educational goal and the attainment of sustainable goals development goals.

Recommendations

In order to address the issues of occupational stress and job performance among secondary school teachers, this study recommends that; since there are various occupational stressors that hinder effective job performance among teachers, the government through the Ministry of Education should address the issues that cause occupational stress and hinder effective job performance and equip the teachers with the necessary stress coping strategies. The government should also allocate funds in the annual budgetary allocation to train teachers through seminars and workshops on occupational stress management. The occupational stress and job performance are closely inter-woven and interrelated hence need to be effectively and efficiently managed in order to achieve academic excellence. Secondary school teachers therefore, need professional training, moral and social support in order to ensure effective and efficient job performance. The work demands, inadequate resources, students' indiscipline, inadequate finances, political influences and lack of experience in handling occupational stress are delimiting factors to effective job performance. There is therefore need for government and policy makers to come up with school programmes that equip teachers with job related occupational stress. If this noble task is to be realized in Mwingi Central Sub County, all stakeholders in the area of the government, NGOs, religious bodies and education officers should team up and bid to support not only secondary school teachers but also all stakeholders in the education sector. The government and the private sector are critical in addressing the occupational stress that secondary school teachers face in their daily

work roles. Equally, when occupational stressors are effectively addressed, teachers should as well play their duties effectively and efficiently for the benefit of the society and the nation as a whole. This will hence improve academic performance consequently ensuring high educational attainment. Results from the study indicated that negligence of duty; job dissatisfaction and low academic standards were the main effects of occupational stress among secondary school teachers.

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