

Stressors in the professional lives of South African secondary school educators

Salomé Schulze and Trudie Steyn

schuls@unisa.ac.za; steyngm1@unisa.ac.za

We identify current stressors in the professional lives of South African secondary school educators. The study was exploratory, using a questionnaire, which listed 19 possible causes of stress and was completed by 987 educators from all racial groups and provinces in the country. South African educators in general currently experience the following as stressors: uninvolved parents, poor learner discipline, lack of learner motivation, learners' negative attitudes towards themselves, numerous changes inside and outside the school, and lack of self-esteem. Male and female educators differed significantly in their perceptions of some stressors. Educators with six to 15 years of experience and who were between 36 and 45 years old differed significantly from others on some issues.

Keywords: educator; models; secondary school; South Africa; stressors; stress

Introduction

As the demands on educators and schools increase, so does the incidence of stress in the teaching profession. We focus in this study on South African educators' perceptions of what causes stress in their professional lives. Although some pressure is necessary for people to perform effectively, excessive pressure may lead to distress, poor teaching, poor decision-making, lowered self-esteem, low job satisfaction and lack of commitment in terms of remaining in the profession (Champoux, 2000:303; Grobler, Wörnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2002:440; Schroeder, Akotia & Apekey, 2001:90). Stress manifests itself in many ways, including physical effects, psychological and behavioural changes (NUT Health & Safety briefing: Tackling stress, 1999:2). For the purpose of this study, educator stress is defined as the personal reaction of educators to extreme demands or other types of work pressure placed on them, resulting in unpleasant and negative emotions, such as frustration, anger, anxiety and depression (Kyriacou & Chien, 2004:86; Govender, 2002:10; NUT Health & Safety briefing, 1999:2).

Stress is seldom the result of a single cause, but is usually created by a number of stressors (Grobler *et al.*, 2002:12). In South Africa, previous studies have linked educator stress to, among other things, lack of discipline, unmotivated learners, redeployment and retrenchment of educators, large learner:educator ratios and new curriculum approaches (Saptoe, 2000:6). However, these research projects were limited by the fact that they were carried out in relatively small geographical areas. For example, Motseke (1998) investigated stress among educators in township secondary schools in the

Free State to identify organisational, personal, interpersonal, and environmental stressors; Jeena's (1998) study in Pietermaritzburg indicated high levels of stress for all respondents irrespective of age, gender and post level in comparison with other studies; Olivier and Venter (2003) investigated educator stressors in five secondary schools in the George region (southern Cape), to reveal that educators experienced moderate to high stress levels and that low salaries were a significant stressor. Other studies focused on certain cultural groups only. In one example Van Zyl and Petersen (1999) used 66 white, secondary school educators in two predominantly white schools and found that the educators' high stress levels were related to changes in the structures of teaching, retrenchments, syllabi and medium of instruction.

Apart from the limitations of previous studies mentioned above, the teaching context in post-apartheid South Africa is continuously transforming. Educator stress is therefore an ongoing important issue. Recent transformations include a change to an outcomes-based education (OBE) curriculum. New rules and policies enforce different structures of governing bodies for schools and ways of dealing with discipline. Among other things, corporal punishment has been abolished and alternative ways of dealing with disciplinary problems have had to be developed. In addition, inclusive education requires all educators to deal with children with learning difficulties in their classrooms. It is interesting to note that being a high-school educator is listed as one of the ten tough jobs (Miller *et al.* in Grobler *et al.*, 2002:440).

Models to explain stress

Various models have been developed to explain occupational stress. Each of these will be reviewed briefly.

- *The stimulus-based stress model:* This model views stress as a condition of the environment that is external to individuals and influences them in a disruptive way. Stress occurs when the demands made on a person exceed the "elastic limit" of that person's ability to cope or adapt. Situations such as working with learners with special needs or during probation may give rise to demands that are above educators' elastic limits. Although this model is useful for identifying stressors, it is limited by the fact that it does not take individual perceptions into account (Rout & Rout, 2002:20; Tosi, Mero & Rizzo, 2000:93; Wilson & Hall, 2002:176).
- *The response-based stress model:* This model describes stress in terms of the individual's response to a disturbing stimulus. The focus is on physiological, psychological and behavioural reactions to stress. However, these symptoms may also be attributed to other medical conditions. In addition, educators are seen as passive recipients of stimuli who necessarily experience stress when under pressure (Benmansour, 1998:15; Pelletier & Lutz, 1999:485; Rout & Rout, 2002:18; Wilson & Hall, 2002:177).
- *The interactive and transactional-based stress model:* It cannot be assumed that individuals will react similarly to the same pressures: for some individuals a pressure may be regarded as a stimulus and for others it

may lead to distress. This model views stress as an individual phenomenon that is both interactive and situational. It implies that different individuals, when confronted with the same situation, may well respond differently. Stress emanates neither from individuals nor from their environments, but from the interrelationships between stressors, individuals' perceptions of situations and their subjective responses. The role of self-appraisal in individuals' stress levels is therefore recognised. Stress occurs when individuals perceive situations as a threat to their goals and feel unable to meet certain demands. In a secondary appraisal, individuals determine their coping resources. This can lead to psychological well-being if the person can cope. If the person cannot cope, he or she will experience ill-health. The transactional model therefore acknowledges that, in order to cope, different educators experience stressors differently and react in diverse ways (Benmansour, 1998:15; Cooper, Dewe & O'Driscoll, 2001:11; Lazarus, 1999:13; Motseke, 1998:67; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1999:534; Rout & Rout, 2002:21; Wilson & Hall, 2002:177). Both contextual and personality factors should therefore be considered as contributing towards stress in the lives of educators.

Educator stressors: contextual factors

The following have been identified as stressors in the professional lives of educators.

Professional demands

A heavy workload with little time generally features as a stressor in studies with educators. They often do not have enough time to achieve the standards of teaching and learning they would like to, or to meet the needs of their learners (Collins & Parry-Jones, 2000:772; Conley & Wooseley, 2000:194; Cooper *et al.*, 2001:31; Govender, 2002:60&61; Harris & Hartman, 2002:403; Kinman & Jones, 2003:27; Moriarty, Edmonds, Blatchford & Martin, 2001:37; Motseke, 1998:83; Rout & Rout, 2002:27; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001:243; 258; Wilson & Hall, 2002:179). HIV/AIDS adds to the stress of South African educators as they try to care for orphaned learners or those with sick parents (Bhana, Morrell, Epstein & Moletsane, 2006; Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer & Zuma, 2005; Theron, 2005). However, if educators are supported by their principals, this can influence their perceptions of their workloads. Researchers have found that people who experience lack of support have more stress-related physical and psychological symptoms than those with support (Chaplain, 2001:208; Cooper *et al.*, 2001:143; Hawe *et al.*, 2000:203; Rout & Rout, 2002:52&55; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001:258).

Curriculum-related problems were specifically identified as a major source of educator stress. These include lack of resources, i.e. inadequate teaching materials, not enough desks and not enough textbooks. Linked to a curriculum such as OBE, the amount of paperwork educators are required to do is a major cause of stress (Benmansour, 1998:29; Cohen, 1997:30; Moriarty *et*

al., 2001:37; Schroeder *et al.*, 2001:92; Wilson & Hall, 2002:185). Other curriculum changes that cause stress include efforts to raise standards (Govender, 2002:60; Wilson & Hall, 2002:177).

Inadequate or irrelevant educator training programmes also influence the development of stress, because these fail to provide educators with the required skills to meet the demands of teaching. Inadequately trained educators lack self-confidence, doubt their ability to communicate effectively with learners and feel disempowered (Motseke, 1998:85; Moriarty *et al.*, 2001:37; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997:333).

The teaching profession, like other professions, requires staff performance appraisal. This in itself may lead to stress, especially if the outcome influences a person's salary (Rout & Rout, 2002:27). A threat of losing one's job or the possibility of demotion is also regarded as a source of stress (Cooper *et al.*, 2001:40).

Role-based stress

Role conflict occurs when the school provides information about the educators' role and responsibilities that conflict with the reality of daily professional life. For example, educators have to meet learners' needs, but also have to follow restrictive teaching methods (Conley & Wooseley, 2000:194; Kyriacou, 2001:29; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1999:541; Rout & Rout, 2002:34; Tosi *et al.*, 2000:203; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997:325).

Often educators feel they have too many roles to fulfil, for example, as counsellors, social workers, managers, examiners, secretaries and creative educators who are concerned with the performance of learners. Role ambiguity occurs when educators lack clarity about their responsibilities or work objectives (Conley & Wooseley, 2000:194; Cooper *et al.*, 2001:40; Harris & Hartman, 2002:403; Tosi *et al.*, 2000:203). The home-work interface is also a significant source of stress for both males and females, although twice as many females as males report this as a stressor. Although spouses may have similar attitudes towards work and family roles, in reality women (including female educators) carry a disproportionate share of household chores (Collins & Parry-Jones, 2000:786; Rout & Rout, 2002:37-39). Women therefore generally report significantly higher levels of work-related stress. This is especially true of married female educators. This is caused by domestic commitments in addition to teaching (Benmansour, 1998:28; Hawe *et al.*, 2000:204; McEwen & Thompson, 1997:63; Rout & Rout, 2002:59; Van Zyl & Petersen, 1999:77). However, not all studies find significant differences in stress between different genders (Chaplain, 1995).

Interpersonal relationships

Working with people can be a source of both support and stress. Supportive colleagues and satisfaction with the teaching environment are reasons for educators experiencing job satisfaction, while the lack of these two factors may lead to stress (Cooper *et al.*, 2001:40; Govender, 2002:60; Kyriacou,

2001:29; Locke & Taylor, 1991:153; Moriarty *et al.*, 2001:37; Rout & Rout, 2002:36).

Poor learner discipline is a common stressor (Kyriacou, 2001:29). Poor discipline includes disruptive behaviour, negative attitudes towards work, aggression and violence against educators (Motseke, 1998:89; Olivier & Venter, 2003:190). Lack of student motivation may lead to failure that reflects negatively on educators and thus causes stress (De Jesus & Conboy, 2001:4; Hawe, Tuck, Manthei, Adair & Moore, 2000:204; Schroeder *et al.*, 2001:92). This was confirmed by South African studies (Motseke, 1998:89; Olivier & Venter, 2003:190). Yoon's study (2002) revealed that educator stress, negative effects and a lack of self-efficacy in educators may have a further detrimental effect on the quality of learner-educator relationships.

Although not identified as the most stressful aspect of an educator's work, learners with special education needs may create stress for educators. Learners with emotional or behavioural difficulties may also cause stress (Chaplain, 1995:474; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997:336).

Working with parents and, in particular, lack of parental support is identified as a possible stressor. Educators often feel that they do not receive the necessary support and appreciation from parents and the community (McEwen & Thompson, 1997:62; Pawlas, 1997:43). Because of parental divorce and illness or death due to HIV/AIDS, educators often have to feed, counsel, and be a parent to learners (Bhana *et al.*, 2006; Motseke, 1998:90).

The interactive model of stress has indicated that different individuals, when confronted with the same situation, may well differ in how they experience the abovementioned stressors. This different response is caused by personality characteristics.

Personality factors influencing how stress is experienced

Personality characteristics that can influence an individual's reaction to stressors include certain attitudes, anxiety, tolerance and perceptual styles. People with type A personalities (driven and competitive people) respond with more agitation to stress than others. They often get aggressive, impatient and irritable if people interfere with their work and seem to be more at risk from stress-related illness (Harris & Hartman, 2002:400; Nhundu, 1999:257; Tosi *et al.*, 2000: 210; Rout & Rout, 2002:44). However, age may play a moderating role in the perception of stress. On the other hand, a mid-life crisis has the potential to increase a person's sensitivity to stress regardless of occupation (Rout & Rout, 2002:59). That said, not all studies find significant differences in stress between different age groups (Chaplain, 1995).

Self-efficacy refers to a person's ability to produce certain actions and the belief that he or she is able to perform a task or cope with stress. The relationship between self-esteem or self-efficacy and stress has been documented in many studies (Chaplain, 2001:202; Cooper *et al.*, 2001:129; De Jesus & Conboy, 2001:2; Monat & Lazarus, 1991:3; Tosi *et al.*, 2000:197; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001:243; Jaye, 2002:263). Tang's (2001) study reveals that in-

adequate self-efficacy among Chinese educators contributed to stress and burnout. People with high self-esteem are less prone to react with stress on negative environmental events than people with low self-esteem (Cooper *et al.*, 2001:129).

Aim and hypotheses

We investigated possible stressors in the lives of educators. More specifically, the following research question was posed:

What do South African educators perceive as the causes of stress in their professional lives?

In addition, it was hypothesised that there was no significant relationship between South African educators' gender, age or years of experience, and their perception of such stressors. The reason for exploring the possible influence of these variables in relation to stressors was as follows: the literature review indicated the possibility that females struggled more with stress due to conflict between their roles as educators and housekeepers. In addition, the literature revealed that stress caused educators to leave the profession. However, such a decision would probably be influenced by age, since it is obviously easier for a young educator to begin a new career. As indicated, South African studies have identified new curriculum approaches as a possible stressor. Educators who are set in their ways could find it more difficult to adapt to curriculum changes and new teaching approaches. Years of experience could therefore be an influencing factor on stress.

The research method and data analysis are now explained and the results presented and discussed. In conclusion, the limitations of the research and suggestions for future research are put forward.

Method

The researchers used a self-report stress questionnaire designed by Chaplain (1995). The items on the original questionnaire were generated from educators' phenomenological accounts of stressful or troublesome events in their lives, obtained in interviews. Regarding the stress scale, a total of 18 items was listed. These items were not grouped according to categories. Educators were asked to indicate the degree to which they found each of these aspects of their work stressful (Chaplain, 1995:100). In the light of the literature, the items seemed relevant. However, the questionnaire was piloted with a number of educators to confirm the content and face validity of the study on which we report. Minimal changes were required. One item in the original questionnaire, 'wanting parents and pupils to have positive attitudes towards education' was separated into two items, since this was a double-barrelled question. Such questions cause confusion and could be misinterpreted.

The first four questions of the questionnaire determined respondents' gender, age, years of teaching experience, and country of residence. The remainder of the questionnaire listed the 19 possible causes of educator stress, similar to the Chaplain (1995) questionnaire. Respondents had to indicate to

what degree they experienced each of the 19 factors listed as stressors by responding on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from no, definitely not, to yes, definitely. The participants in the study consisted of 192 students who acted as field-workers, to select 10 respondents each for the final sample as follows: The 192 students were enrolled for a Master's degree in Human Resource Management. These students were seen as a useful way of selecting respondents for the research, because they included all racial groups and came from a wide geographical area as follows: apart from 14 students from other parts of the world, 66 were from Northern Province (Limpopo), 37 from Kwa-Zulu Natal, 21 from the Eastern Cape, 21 from Gauteng, 17 from Mpumalanga, nine from the North West province and the remaining seven from the other provinces. Of the 192 students, 30 spoke European languages and the rest spoke African languages.

The students acted as field workers. They were requested to administer the above questionnaire to 10 randomly selected colleagues (the respondents) as part of an assignment. (The students themselves could also participate as one of the 10 respondents.) Therefore, the respondents were a non-probability sample, chosen on the basis of being a combination of convenience and random sampling. Out of a possible total of 1 920 questionnaires, 1 181 (62%) completed questionnaires were returned.

Data analysis

To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a co-variance matrix was used. The alpha reliability coefficient for the 19 items of the questionnaire was 0.897 (very good for this kind of questionnaire).

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each of the 19 items to identify significant stressors. Since this study was seen as an exploratory one to identify trends only, the two negative and the two positive responses were grouped together to simplify interpretation and facilitate discussion. Therefore, the responses are presented as: "No", "Somewhat", or "Yes".

A factor analysis confirmed that the 19 questionnaire items were not designed with a focus on selected factors, since one component explained 34% of the variance and four components explained 52% of the variance. Accordingly, no average scores were calculated and the hypotheses focused on the biographical data in relation to each of the 19 items. Therefore, the three hypotheses mentioned above were tested by means of the chi squared analysis. The results are presented in four tables in the next section.

Results

Biographical details of the South African respondents

Some missing values occurred. Apart from these, the biographical details of the sample were as follows: 424 (43%) were male and 555 (56.2%) were female; 331 (33.5%) were 35 years or younger; 451 (45.7%) were between 36 and 45 years, and 203 (20.6%) were 45 years or older; 167 (16.9%) had experience of five years or less, 442 (44.8%) six to 15 years, 187 (18.9%) be-

tween 16 and 20 years, and 191 (19.4%) 21 years and more. The fact that more than half of the group were female may have been influenced by the fact that most of the educators in secondary schools are female. In addition, females in the new dispensation in South Africa have a better chance of being promoted as educational managers. This explains their interest in management training.

Table 1 Stressors of South African secondary school educators

Stressor	No	Somewhat	Yes
Wanting parents to have positive attitudes towards education	180 (18.2%)	236 (23.9%)	571 (57.9%)
Controlling children's behaviour	222 (22.5%)	202 (20.5%)	563 (57%)
Wanting learners to have positive attitudes towards education	236 (23.9%)	202 (20.5%)	549 (55.6%)
Changing conditions outside schools to improve children's lives	256 (25.9%)	241 (24.4%)	490 (49.6%)
Changing conditions inside schools to improve children's learning	236 (23.9%)	285 (28.9%)	464 (47%)
Wanting learners to have positive attitudes towards themselves	307 (31.1%)	217 (22%)	463 (46.9%)
Motivating children to learn	356 (36.1%)	174 (17.6%)	457 (46.3%)
Improving learners' achievements	261 (26.4%)	307 (31.1%)	419 (42.5%)
Helping learners with their problems	363 (36.8%)	224 (22.7%)	400 (40.5%)
Supporting learners with special educational needs	323 (32.7%)	275 (27.9%)	389 (39.4%)
Providing appropriate learning materials for learners	330 (33.4%)	275 (27.9%)	382 (38.7%)
Lack of professional support	343 (34.8%)	270 (27.4%)	374 (37.9%)
Finding time to accomplish personal goals	321 (32.5%)	294 (29.8%)	372 (37.7%)
Feeling good about oneself as an educator	464 (47%)	166 (16.8%)	357 (36.2%)
Maintaining harmony with learners	426 (43.2%)	220 (22.3%)	341 (34.5%)
Getting professional tasks completed	397 (40.2%)	251 (25.4%)	337 (34.1%)
Feeling confident as a professional	473 (47.9%)	179 (18.1%)	335 (33.9%)
Accomplishing tasks essential to student learning	365 (37%)	291 (29.5%)	331 (33.5%)
Lacking the skills needed to enable children to learn	541 (54.8%)	210 (21.3%)	236 (23.9%)

Table 1 presents the responses of the South African educators to the 19 possible stressors listed. Educators were asked to indicate the degree to which

they found each of these aspects of their work stressful. The items are listed in rank order, from those that elicited most affirmative (“Yes”) responses as factors that were perceived stressors.

Table 1 shows that more than half of the South African educators perceived that the following (in rank order) were causes of stress: wanting parents to have positive attitudes towards education (59.9%), controlling children’s behaviour (57%) and wanting learners to have positive attitudes towards education (55.6%). More than 40% believed that they experienced stress from: changing conditions outside schools to improve children’s lives (49.6%), changing conditions inside schools to improve children’s learning (47%), wanting learners to have positive attitudes towards themselves (46.9%), motivating children to learn (46.3%), improving learners’ achievements (42.5%), and helping learners with their problems (40.5%).

In the light of relatively recent changes to OBE, it is important to note that ‘lacking the skills needed to enable learners to learn’ was last on the list as a perceived stressor — 54.8% indicated that this was not a cause of stress in their lives. Likewise, ‘feeling confident as a professional’ was not perceived as a stressor, as indicated by 47.9% of the respondents. Saptoe (2000) in the southern Cape found that the implementation of OBE caused significant educator stress because they were inadequately prepared for OBE. This apparent contradiction may have been influenced by the fact that the item does not specifically mention OBE and educators may have had other aspects of teaching in mind when they responded.

On some of the issues listed, respondents were somewhat divided. For example, in response to the items ‘accomplishing tasks essential to student learning’, ‘supporting learners with special educational needs’ and ‘finding time to accomplish personal goals’ the “No”, “Somewhat” and “Yes” responses were relatively equally divided. The results were therefore further investigated for the possible influence of gender, age and years of experience.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between South African educators’ gender and their perceptions of stressors in their professional lives.

The results indicated that male and female educators differed significantly in their responses to three of the questionnaire items (see Table 2).

According to Table 2, significantly more females than males (63.5% *vs* 36.5%) indicated ‘finding time to accomplish professional goals’ as stressors. More females than males also indicated ‘feeling confident as a professional’ as a stressor (58.9% *vs* 41.1%) or somewhat of a stressor (63.% *vs* 36.5%). On the other hand, significantly more females than males did not perceive ‘lacking professional support’ as a stressor (60.6% *vs* 39.4%).

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between South African educators’ age group and their perceptions of stressors. Significant relationships were calculated between age groups (35 years and

Table 2 Significance of relationships between gender and some stressors

Item	Male response	Female response	χ^2	<i>p</i> value
Finding time to accomplish goals	N: 148 (46.5%) S: 141 (48.5%) Y: 135 (36.5%)	N: 170 (53.5%) S: 150 (51.5%) Y: 235 (63.5%)	11.504	.003
Feeling confident as a professional	N: 223 (47.4%) S: 65 (36.5%) Y: 136 (41.1%)	N: 247 (52.6%) S: 113 (63.5%) Y: 195 (58.9%)	7.287	.026
Lacking professional support	N: 134 (39.4%) S: 110 (41.2%) Y: 180 (48.4%)	N: 206 (60.6%) S: 157 (58.5%) Y: 192 (52.6%)	6.495	.039

N = No; S = Somewhat; Y = Yes

younger; 36 to 45 years; older than 45 years) and nine variables, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3 reveals that ($p \leq 0.01$) more educators who were 36 to 45 years old, compared with the other age groups, experienced stress from: changing conditions outside classrooms to improve children's lives; helping learners with their problems and changing conditions inside schools to improve children's learning. Their responses to these items were more often "Yes" or "Somewhat" than those of the other age groups. For example, of the total number of educators who identified 'changing conditions outside classrooms to improve children's lives' as stressor, 47.4% who said "Yes" and 46.3% who said "Somewhat" were between 36 to 45 years old. This was in contrast to 27.8% and 34.2%, or 24.7% and 19.6%, of the other age groups.

On the level $p \leq 0.05$, more educators who were 36 to 45 years old, compared with the other age groups, experienced stress from: supporting learners with special educational needs; accomplishing tasks essential to student learning, feeling confident as a professional, feeling good about yourself as an educator, improving learners' achievements and wanting learners to have positive attitudes towards education.

For all nine items listed, educators older than 45 years indicated the least stress. Their "Yes" responses made up 22.7 % to 25.7% of the total of affirmative responses for each factor.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between years of experience as a South African educator and their perceptions of stressors.

Significant relationships were calculated between years of experience in four categories (less than five years; six to 15 years; 16 to 20 years; 21 years and longer) and six stressors, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 3 Significance of relationships between age group and some stressors

Item	35 years and younger	36 – 45 years	Older than 45 years	χ^2	p value
Changing conditions outside classrooms to improve children's lives	N: 113 (44.1%) S: 82 (34.2%) Y: 136 (27.8%)	N: 108 (42.2%) S: 111 (46.3%) Y: 232 (47.4%)	N: 35 (13.7%) S: 47 (19.6%) Y: 121 (24.7%)	24.55	.000
Helping learners with their problems	N: 133 (36.6%) S: 70 (31.3%) Y: 128 (32.2%)	N: 156 (43%) S: 126 (56.3%) Y: 169 (42.5%)	N: 74(20.4%) S: 28(12.5%) Y: 101(25.4%)	20.10	.000
Changing conditions inside classrooms to improve children's learning	N: 99 (41.9%) S: 93 (32.7%) Y: 139 (30%)	N: 88 (37.3%) S: 142 (50%) Y: 219 (47.3%)	N: 49 (20.8%) S: 49 (17.3%) Y: 105 (22.7%)	14.28	.006
Supporting learners with special educational needs	N: 129 (39.9%) S: 87 (31.8%) Y: 115 (29.6%)	N: 144 (44.6%) S: 127 (46.4%) Y: 180 (46.4%)	N: 50 (15.5%) S: 60 (21.9%) Y: 93 (24%)	12.57	.014
Accomplishing tasks essential to student learning	N: 125 (34.2%) S: 112 (38.8%) Y: 94 (28.4%)	N: 174 (47.7%) S: 125 (43.3%) Y: 152 (45.9%)	N: 66 (18.1%) S: 52 (18%) Y: 85 (25.7%)	11.91	.018
Feeling confident as a professional	N: 168 (35.5%) S: 60 (33.7%) Y: 103 (30.8%)	N: 210 (44.4%) S: 94 (52.8%) Y: 147 (44%)	N: 95 (20.1%) S: 24 (13.5%) Y: 84 (25.1%)	11.41	.022
Feeling good about yourself as an educator	N: 160 (34.6%) S: 65 (39.2%) Y: 106 (29.8%)	N: 220 (47.5%) S: 71 (42.8%) Y: 160 (44.9%)	N: 83 (17.9%) S: 30 (18.1%) Y: 90 (25.3%)	9.794	.044
Improving learners' achievements	N: 104 (39.8%) S: 105 (34.2%) Y: 122 (29.3%)	N: 111 (42.5%) S: 144 (46.9%) Y: 196 (47%)	N: 46 (17.6%) S: 58 (18.9%) Y: 99 (23.7%)	9.78	.044
Wanting learners to have positive attitudes towards education	N: 77 (32.6%) S: 85 (42.1%) Y: 169 (30.9%)	N: 114 (48.3%) S: 83 (41.1%) Y: 254 (46.4%)	N: 45 (19.1%) S: 34 (16.8%) Y: 124 (22.7%)	9.726	.045

N = No; S = Somewhat; Y = Yes

Table 4 Significance of relationships between years of experience and some stressors

Item	Five years	Six to 15 years	16 to 20 years	21 + years	χ^2	<i>p</i> value
Changing conditions outside classrooms to improve children's lives	N: 69 (27%)	N: 118 (46.1%)	N: 43 (16.8%)	N: 26 (10.2%)	40.489	.000
	S: 37 (15.4%)	S: 110 (45.6%)	S: 49 (20.3%)	S: 45 (18.7%)		
	Y: 61 (12.4%)	Y: 214 (43.7%)	Y: 95 (19.4%)	Y: 120 (24.5%)		
Helping learners with their problems	N: 71 (19.6%)	N: 150 (41.3%)	N: 69 (19%)	N: 73 (20.1%)	31.812	.000
	S: 24 (10.7%)	S: 125 (55.8%)	S: 52 (23.2%)	S: 23 (10.3%)		
	Y: 72 (18%)	Y: 167 (41.8%)	Y: 66 (16.5%)	Y: 95 (23.8%)		
Finding time to accomplish personal goals	N: 74 (23.1%)	N: 140 (43.6%)	N: 50 (15.6%)	N: 57 (17.8%)	18.303	.006
	S: 34 (11.6%)	S: 143 (48.6%)	S: 63 (21.4%)	S: 54 (18.4%)		
	Y: 59 (15.9%)	Y: 159 (42.7%)	Y: 74 (19.9%)	Y: 80 (21.5%)		
Supporting learners with special educational needs	N: 68 (21.1%)	N: 152 (47.1%)	N: 60 (18.6%)	N: 43 (13.3%)	16.559	.011
	S: 37 (13.5%)	S: 129 (46.9%)	S: 50 (18.2%)	S: 59 (21.5%)		
	Y: 62 (15.9%)	Y: 161 (41.4%)	Y: 77 (19.8%)	Y: 89 (22.9%)		
Lacking professional support	N: 70 (20.4%)	N: 153 (44.6%)	N: 48 (14%)	N: 72 (21%)	15.333	.018
	S: 49 (18.1%)	S: 112 (41.5%)	S: 57 (21.1%)	S: 52 (19.3%)		
	Y: 48 (12.8%)	Y: 177 (47.3%)	Y: 82 (21.9%)	Y: 67 (17.9%)		
Accomplishing tasks essential to student learning	N: 54 (14.8%)	N: 175 (47.9%)	N: 75 (20.5%)	N: 61 (16.7%)	13.499	.036
	S: 64 (22%)	S: 127 (43.6%)	S: 45 (15.5%)	S: 55 (18.9%)		
	Y: 49 (14.8%)	Y: 140 (42.3%)	Y: 67 (20.2%)	Y: 75 (22.7%)		

N = No; S = Somewhat; Y = Yes

Table 4 shows that educators with teaching experience of between six and 15 years, more than the other groups, experienced stress from: changing conditions outside schools to improve children's lives; helping learners with their problems and finding time to accomplish personal goals ($p \leq 0.01$). On the level $p \leq 0.05$, more educators with teaching experience of between six and 15 years experienced stress from supporting learners with special educational needs; lack of professional support and accomplishing tasks essential to student learning. Affirmative responses of this group made up 41.4% (supporting learners with special educational needs) to 47.3% (lacking professional support) of the total number of similar responses.

For all of the above, educators with five years or less experience each time indicated the least stress from these factors. For the six items listed, between 12.4% and 18% of the positive responses came from this group.

Discussion

According to the educators sampled, these educators experienced stress because of parents' and learners' poor attitudes towards learning; and because of disciplinary problems in school and changing conditions (in and out of school) that inhibited learning. These findings should be interpreted by considering South African history as well as the current context of the education system. Parent's poor attitudes to learning may be influenced by their own poor education during the previous dispensation. These attitudes, in turn, may negatively influence those of their children. In addition, unemployment in South Africa, even among those with matric qualifications, and the occurrence of HIV/AIDS, may well increase general negativity. Changes in school that could influence learners' behaviour include the abolishment of corporal punishment in the absence of other effective methods to handle discipline.

Female educators were more inclined than males to indicate 'finding time to accomplish goals' as a stressor. This confirms the results of some previous research projects (Benmansour, 1998; Hawe *et al.*, 2000; McEwen & Thompson, 1997; Rout & Rout, 2002; Van Zyl & Petersen, 1999). Females reported that their roles as educators, parents and house-keepers caused stress. Although spouses may have similar attitudes towards work and family roles, in reality women (including female educators) carry a disproportionate share of household chores (Collins & Parry-Jones, 2000:786; Rout & Rout, 2002: 37-39). This should be seen in the light of South African society, a society which is still relatively patriarchal. Placing greater demands on females may also explain why more female educators indicate 'lack of confidence as a professional' as a stressor or somewhat of a stressor.

Although not all studies found significant differences between different age groups in their perceptions of stressors (Chaplain, 1995), in this group, educators who were 36 to 45 years old differed significantly from the others. Their perceived stressors included changing conditions outside classrooms and in schools, and helping learners with their problems. As far as the changes in and outside schools are concerned, younger educators are less set in

their ways and thus may be more adaptable to change. On the other hand, the older educators are near retirement and may not be inclined to adapt. In addition, middle age may also play a moderating role in educators' experience of stress (Rout & Rout, 2002). The same arguments may apply to the other stressors listed in Table 3. The link of 'lack of confidence as a professional' with inadequate training should also be noted (Motseke, 1998; Moriarty *et al.*, 2001; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Educators who are 36 to 45 years old may find it especially hard to adapt to OBE and may need more continuous support if they are to implement OBE than younger educators, who can adapt more easily.

In this study, the educators with between six and 15 years' experience often differed significantly from the other groups in how stressors were perceived. More may be expected of educators in this group than of those with less experience or those who are older and more respected. Hence the perception that 'lack of time' and 'lack of professional support' are stressors. The arguments related to age (which is associated with years of experience) and adaptability to changing conditions, as explained in the previous paragraph, may also apply to this group.

Conclusions

The research was limited by the fact that the sample was not randomly selected and was therefore not representative of South African school educators. The results should therefore be treated with caution. Moreover, although the influence of moderator variables such as gender and age on perceptions of stressors was investigated, other moderator variables, such as personality characteristics, were not included. This is also seen as a limitation. However, the study has succeeded in answering the research questions by identifying a number of important trends.

The research identified possible factors that a group of South African educators from all geographical areas and cultures perceive as causes of stress. In other words, this study overcame the limitations of most previous South African studies. The stressors included the role of parents (their lack of involvement), learners (their lack of motivation, negative attitudes, poor discipline), the teaching context (numerous changes inside and outside the school) and aspects of the educators themselves (e.g. their lack of professional confidence). Regarding lack of confidence, the role of inadequate educator training programmes, perhaps with regard to OBE, should be noted and investigated further. Future studies on educator stress should aim to deepen our understanding of the relationship of the identified issues to stress and how this can be addressed.

The study also showed that how one perceives possible stressors is influenced by gender, age and years of experience. Educators in the age group 36 to 45 years old, and with between six and 15 years of teaching experience, seem to be particularly vulnerable. More in-depth research with these groups is needed to shed light on the phenomenon and to identify the best ways of

addressing it.

The above results also emphasise the usefulness of a transactional-based model of stress to indicate the responsibility of individual school management teams and the Department of Education for improving educators' working environment. The role that senior management teams in schools can play in reducing stress among staff members cannot be overemphasised and has been overlooked as a research topic. Examples include greater involvement of parents to improve their attitudes towards education, effective ways to handle school discipline, and identifying and changing conditions inside schools to improve children's learning. In addition, individual educators also have to accept the responsibility to acquire coping skills to handle the demands of the profession effectively. Relevant programmes need to be developed to support educators in developing coping skills.

The challenge for researchers, therefore, is to strive towards making significant and practical input into the health and well-being of educators in the education system in which they function. The unstable nature of teaching in South Africa will continually challenge educators and cause stress. High levels of educator stress may have destructive effects on the educators themselves and inhibit classroom teaching and learning. As such, this is a matter of concern that requires urgent attention.

References

- Benmansour N 1998. Job satisfaction, stress and coping strategies among Moroccan high school teachers. *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, 3:13-33.
- Bhana D, Morrell R, Epstein D & Moletsane R. 2006. The hidden work of caring: teachers and the maturing AIDS epidemic in diverse secondary schools in Durban. *Journal of Education*, 38:5-24.
- Chaplain RP 1995. Stress and job satisfaction: a study of English primary school teachers. *Educational Psychology*, 15:473-489.
- Chaplain RP 2001. Stress and job satisfaction among primary head teachers: a question of balance? *Educational Management and Administration*, 29:197-215.
- Champoux JE 2000. *Organizational behavior: Essential tenets for a millennium*. Scarborough, Ontario: South-Western College Publishing.
- Cohen D 1997. An educated stress. *Australian Educator*, 16:30-31.
- Collins S & Parry-Jones B 2000. Stress: the perceptions of social work lecturers in Britain. *British Journal of Social Work*, 30:769-794.
- Conley S & Wooseley SA 2000. Teacher stress, higher order needs and work outcomes. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 38:179-201.
- Cooper CL, Dewe PJ & O'Driscoll MP 2001. *Organizational stress. A review and critique of theory, research and applications*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- De Jesus SN & Conboy J 2001. A stress management course to prevent teacher stress. *The International Journal of Educational Administration*, 15:1-8.
- Govender M 2002. The role of the principal in the management of teacher stress in selected secondary schools in Chatsworth. Mini dissertation. Durban: Technikon Natal.
- Grobler PA, Wörnich S, Carrell MR, Elbert NF & Hatfield RD 2002. *Human resource management in South Africa*, 2nd edn. London: Thompson Learning.

- Hall E, Altman M, Nkomo N, Peltzer K & Zuma Z. 2005. *Potential attrition in Education. The impact of job satisfaction, morale, workload and HIV/AIDS*. Cape Town: HSRC.
- Harris OJ & Hartman SJ 2002. *Organizational behavior*. New York: Best Business Books.
- Hawe E, Tuck B, Manthei R, Adair V & Moore D 2000. Job satisfaction and stress in New Zealand primary teachers. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 3:193-205.
- Jaye JE 2002. Stress, uncertainty and tension: a self-management programme to enable secondary school teachers in South Africa to cope proactively. DPhil thesis. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Jeena M 1998. Teachers' mental health status, stress levels and incident of burnout during a period of change and reorganization within the South African education system. MA dissertation. Durban: University of Natal.
- Kyriacou C 2001. Teacher stress: directions for future research. *Educational review*, 53:27-35.
- Kyriacou C & Chien P-Y. 2004. Teacher stress in Taiwanese primary schools. *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 5:86-104.
- Kinman G & Jones F 2003. "Running up the down escalator": stressors and strains in the UK academics. *Quality in Higher Education*, 9:21-38.
- Lazarus RS 1999. *Stress and emotion: a new synthesis*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.
- Locke EA & Taylor MS 1991. Stress, coping and the meaning of work. In: A Monat & RS Lazarus (eds). *Stress and coping: an anthology*. 3rd edn. New York: Columbia University Press.
- McEwen A & Thompson W 1997. After the National Curriculum: teacher stress and morale. *Research in Education*, 57:57-66.
- Monat A & Lazarus RS (eds) 1991. *Stress and coping: an anthology*, 3rd edn. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Monat A & Lazarus RS 1991. Stress and coping: some current issues and controversies. In: A Monat & Lazarus RS (eds). *Stress and coping: an anthology*, 3rd edn. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Moriarty V, Edmonds S, Blatchford P & Martin C 2001. Teaching young children: perceived job satisfaction and stress. *Educational Research*, 43:33-46.
- Motseke MJ 1998. Factors contributing to teachers' stress in township secondary schools. Dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Nahavandi A & Malekzadeh AR 1999. *Organizational behavior: the person-organization fit*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Nhundu TJ 1999. Determinants and prevalence of occupational stress among Zimbabwean school administrators. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 37:256-272.
- NUT Health & Safety briefing 1999. *Tackling stress*, 1-15. Available at www.teachers.org.uk/story.php?pid=2023-33. Accessed 18 May 2006.
- Olivier MAJ & Venter DJL 2003. The extent and causes of stress in teachers in the George region. *South African Journal of Education*, 23:186-192.
- Pawlas GE 1997. Seven tips to reduce teacher stress. *High School Magazine*, 4:42-43.
- Pelletier KR & Lutz R 1999. Healthy people — healthy business: a critical review of stress management programmes in the workplace. In: A Monat & RS Lazarus (eds). *Stress and coping: an anthology*. 3rd edn. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Rout UR & Rout JK 2002. *Stress management for primary health professionals*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Saptoe CW 2000. Factors which cause stress to teachers in the Southern Cape. MEd dissertation. Port Elizabeth: University of Port Elizabeth.
- Schroeder RM, Akotia CS & Apekey AK 2001. Stress and coping among Ghanaian school teachers. *IFE Psychologia: An International Journal*, 9:89-98.
- Tang CS 2001. Mental health outcomes of job stress among Chinese teachers. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 22:887-910.
- Theron LC. 2005. Educator perception of educators' and learners' HIV status with a view to wellness promotion. *South African Journal of Education*, 25:56-60.
- Tosi HL, Mero NP & Rizzo JR 2000. *Managing organizational behavior*. 4th edition. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Business.
- Van Dick R & Wagner U 2001. Stress and strain in teachers: a structural approach. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71:243-259.
- Van Zyl E & Petersen C 1999. An investigation into stress experienced by a group of secondary school teachers. *South African Journal of Education*, 19:74-78.
- Wilson V & Hall J 2002. Running twice as fast? A review of literature on teachers' stress. *Scottish Educational Review*, 34:175-187.
- Wisniewski L & Gargiulo RM 1997. Occupational stress and burnout among special educators: a review of the literature. *The Journal of Special Education*, 31:325-346.
- Yoon JS 2002. Teacher characteristics as predictors of teacher-student relationships: stress, negative effect and self-efficacy. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 30:485-493.

Authors

Salomé Schulze is Professor in the Department of Further Teacher Education at the University of South Africa. She has published widely and her research interests are postgraduate supervision, research methodology and research in higher education.

Trudie Steyn is Professor in the Department of Further Teacher Education at the University of South Africa. She has published widely and her research focuses on human resource management in education and student-centred learning.