



Sources of Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies among Teachers in Borstal Institutions in Kenya

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Abstract

Teaching has emerged as one of the most stressful professions in the last two decades. The need for knowledge for personal growth and national development puts pressure on the teachers to facilitate the achievement of these goals. Teachers in Borstal institutions are expected to teach and rehabilitate young convicts for re-integration into the society. The desire to find out sources of stress and coping strategies among teachers in Borstal institutions has necessitated an empirical study. The current study focuses on sources of occupational stress and coping strategies among teachers in Borstal institutions in Kenya. Phenomenology study design was used and purposive sampling in particular maximum variation was used to select the study participants. Results indicated that working conditions, living conditions and lack of resources were the main sources of stressors, while physical exercises, religious intervention, use of alcohol were among the coping strategies used. Lack of professional counseling services also emerged as a situation that lead to high stress levels.

Keywords: Stress, Coping strategies, Fitness and Health problems.

Introduction

Stress exists in many occupations due to the lack of congruence between expectations from employees, the ability of individuals and support systems available. Stress is a general term used for pressure that people are exposed to in life. Jepson and Forrest (2006) define stress as the individual harmony effort that a person displays against a stimulus which has excessive psychological and physical pressure on the person. Teaching has been lately identified as one of the professions with high stress levels in numerous studies (Fisher, 2011; Chona & Roxas, 2009). Teachers are expected to fill many roles in their daily tasks. These roles may include evaluator, planner, disciplinarian, information provider, role model, facilitator, and counselor. As a result of balancing these many roles, stress will always be a part of the teaching profession.

Knowing that stress will always be present, there is a need to assess stress and the different coping behaviors used by teachers in corrective institutions. Sources of stress among teachers may be summarized as low motivation in students, discipline problems, the pressure of time and the work load, colleague relationship, conflict and indefiniteness of roles, bad working conditions and self-respect, students' discipline problems, the inadequate support of colleagues, (Detert, Derosia, Caravella & Duquette, 2006). Research indicates that teachers of special populations are likely to be more stressed than other teachers (Ghani, Ahmed & Ibrahim, 2014). Teachers in Borstal institutions are therefore likely have high levels of stress. Borstal institutions are reformatory institutions for young or juvenile offenders. The fact that Borstal institutions accommodate young offenders makes it necessary to have methods of behavior modification as well as other rehabilitation

strategies to prepare the juveniles for re-integration into the society. In order to effectively rehabilitate the young offenders, teachers in Borstal institutions require coping with occupational stress. Coping with stressors can decrease the level of stress and lessen the negative effects of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There exist poor coping mechanisms as well as good coping mechanisms. Poor coping mechanisms have long been identified as a primary cause of stress (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Good coping skills include modifying thought processes, learning problem-focused strategies and emotional focused strategies like emotional release, physical exercises, talking or meditation. Common positive strategies teachers use to alleviate stress include exercise, social resources, avoidance, reading, hobbies, movement, and meditation (Gulwadi, 2006). Effectively coping with stress is the first step to preventing psychological distress and development of health problems. Some of the coping strategies known to work and enhance general wellbeing include talking with friends and family, exercising, praying, or actively addressing the causes of stress (Andre-Petersson, Hedblad, Janzon, & Ostergren, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The teaching profession was traditionally regarded as a low stress occupation according to French, Caplan and Harrison (1982). However, over the last two decades, the pressure for academic excellence has changed the status to one of the most stressful occupations (Olivier & Venter, 2003; Singla, 2006). Compared to the general population, teachers are at risk for higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of job satisfaction (Schonfield, 1990).



This necessitates studies on the sources of stress and coping strategies in order to arrest the situation since teachers play a key role in national development. A study by Okeke, Adu, Drake and Duku (2014) found that sources of stress among teachers include school climate, learner's discipline, management practices, high workload, resource constraints, low salaries and low professional status. Coping strategies used by teachers to deal with occupational stress include good time management, taking out time for leisure and rest, setting priorities, seeking counseling services, physical exercises, praying and taking drugs among others. The negative coping strategies may end up leading to self-harm among teachers and reducing effectiveness. Learners in correctional facilities, due to their criminal nature and history pose significant stress to their teachers (Okutoyi, 2013), the continued use of corporal punishment in Borstal institutions (UNICEF, 2013) is also an indication that a gap in behavior modification techniques exists. In the light of this, work related stress is more likely to be experienced more among teachers handling juvenile delinquents in correctional facilities. This study seeks to find out the sources of stress among teachers in Borstal institutions in Kenya and the coping strategies they use to deal with the stress.

Research Questions

- i. What are the sources of work related stressors among teachers in Borstal Institutions in Kenya?
- ii. How do teachers in Borstal Institutions in Kenya cope with occupational stress?

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. It is a framework for evaluating the processes of coping with stressful events. It was proposed by Dr Richard Lazarus (Lazarus, 1966). According to the theory, stressful experiences are believed to result from transactions between individuals and the environment. The transactions depend on the impact of the stressor which is mediated by the individual's appraisal of the stressor and available coping resources (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977). The level of stress involves a judgment about whether internal or external demands exceed resources and ability to cope when demands exceed resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) (Figure 1).

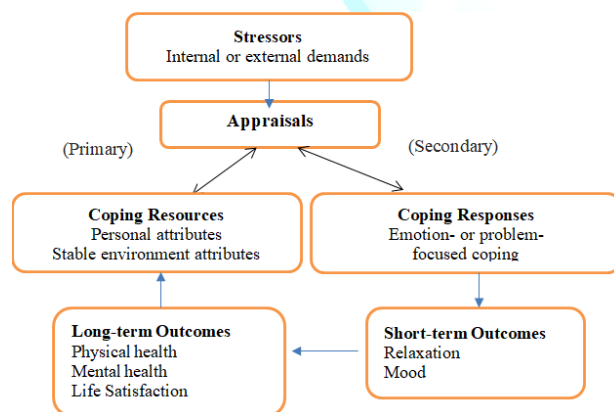


Figure 1: Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The theory depicts people as meaning-building creatures who constantly evaluate everything that happens and who use emotional cues from earlier experiences of stress, in the process of appraisal. Lazarus (1984) identified two cognitive appraisals which include primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. In primary appraisal, individuals question what they have at stake in a particular threatening

situation. The answer to the question influences the quality and intensity of their emotion. In secondary appraisal, individuals question what they can do in response to the perceived threat, that is, their options for coping and the answer to this question contributes to the types of coping strategies they will implement to manage the demands of the situation. Coping resources include personal attributes and environment, while coping responses are emotionally focused or problem focused which determine the short term and long term outcomes of the individual. The appraisal of work conditions and individual capabilities among teachers in Borstal institutions may lead to work related stress when there is no congruence. From emotional and cognitive resources, coping strategies are derived. Lack of emotional resources and avenues to seek help when overwhelmed is likely to lead to negative coping mechanisms that include absenteeism, taking alcohol among others. Availability of avenues to seek help like counseling services are likely to lead to positive coping mechanisms like problem solving, talking about individual struggles and reaching out for help from colleagues and administration.

Methodology

This study belongs to the qualitative paradigm which attempts to study the everyday life of different groups of people and communities in their natural setting. The approach helps researchers to understand people, and the social and cultural contexts within which they live (Myers, 2009). Phenomenology design was used to guide the research study. Creswell (1998) contends that a phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences of several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon. For this study, work related stress and coping strategies were the phenomena of interest. Target population included teachers in Borstal institutions who included teachers in the primary school section, secondary school section and those in vocational training. To collect data focused group discussions were conducted in two institutions while the open ended questions were administered in all institutions.

Participants of the focused groups were sampled purposefully and in particular maximum variation purposive sampling was used with the aim of capturing a heterogeneous sample (Merriam, 2009). Teachers sampled included both male and female in different ages, different teaching departments and diverse working experience. A focused group discussion guide and an open-ended questionnaire were used to collect data. Data was analyzed using summative content analysis and thematic analysis. Open ended questions were analysed using summative content analysis where responses were counted to determine which responses were most frequent. Analysis of focused group discussion was done through thematic analysis. This involved reading through the notes written several times to identify any patterns being guided by research questions. Patterns were derived from statements made by the focused group discussion participants.

Results and Discussion

The results from summative content analysis on open ended questions indicated that workload was the most common source of stress among teachers in Borstal institutions in Kenya and it was repeated 37 times from the 60 participants. Long working hours were also common and was repeated 31 times, inadequate materials were repeated 22 times, poor living conditions was repeated 18 times, low salaries was repeated 15 times, inadequate training was repeated 10 times, long chain of command was repeated 7 times, unfair promotions was repeated 8 times and lack of motivation was repeated 6 times. Other sources of stress included language barrier, boredom, learner engagement in other activities disrupting learning and inadequate working gear. Thematic analysis of focused group discussion gave rise to three themes which included working conditions, learning resources and teacher living conditions.



Participants expressed frustration in their attempts to balance family responsibilities and work expectations. They emphasized that family conflicts often arise due to lack of family quality time. The teachers shared how they are expected to work long hours and also attend night duties yet they are expected to teach in class during the day. Work load as they described was a combination of teaching and other duties as prison wardens. Besides issues affecting them directly, teachers expressed their frustration with being expected to teach learners who have no learning materials. From stationery to text books, the learners struggle to share and often end up borrowing pens, exercise books from the teachers. Learners are prisoners and they do not get materials from outside and so the problem is complex.

Source of Stress	Frequency out of 60 Respondents
Workload	37
Long working hours	31
Inadequate teaching materials	22
Poor living conditions	18
Low Salaries	15
Inadequate Training	10
Long chain of command	7
Unfair promotions	8
Lack of Motivation	6

Table 1: Sources of Stress among teachers.

On poor living conditions the teachers indicated that the staff houses within the Borstal institutions are few and in poor condition. Teachers are sometimes expected to share rooms with other prison wardens a situation that robs them of their privacy and dignity. These findings are similar to those by Betoret and Artiga (2010) who found work load, excessive work demands, and low pay among others as the most common sources of stress among teachers in Spain. When there is too much to accomplish exceeding capability and time constraints, stress level sour. Another study with similar findings was conducted by Wine field, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, and Hapuarachchi (2002). Sources of stress as reported by participants included diminishing resources, increased teaching loads and student/staff ratios, pressure to attract external funds, job insecurity, poor management and a lack of recognition and reward are some of the key factors driving the high level of stress.

In Borstal institutions in Kenya, resource provision is the responsibility of the government and lack of resources to a great extent impairs performance leading to low morale and a sense of helplessness. On coping strategies used by teachers in Borstal Institutions, physical activities emerged as the common coping strategy among the participants. 20 participants indicated walking, jogging, going to the gym or doing manual work in order to overcome stress. Sourcing for accommodation outside the institution was one way of dealing with poor living conditions within the institution. 10 participants indicated that they talk to colleagues about their struggles and 5 participants indicated that they turn to spirituality for mental rejuvenation by going to religious places, singing, praying, and meditating among others. Other coping strategies that were mentioned included visiting night clubs to drink, seeking psychological help and reading novels.

The findings in this study partly differ from other studies where teachers seek counseling services as a major method of coping with occupational stress. In a study by Okeke, Adu, Drake and Duku (2014), coping strategies used by teachers to deal with occupational stress included good time management, taking out time for leisure and rest, setting priorities, seeking counseling services, physical exercises, praying, taking drugs among others. This shows similarities in terms of physical exercises, using alcohol and praying.

Another study by Kimanzi (2014) has similarities with the current study and found that some of the coping strategies among the participants included practice of good time management, taking out time for leisure and rest, setting priorities, seeking counseling services, physical exercises, drinking water, taking sleeping pills and mood altering drugs, praying and bible reading. While some of the strategies were positive and likely to lead to increased effectiveness in teaching and rehabilitating the young offenders in Borstal institutions, other coping strategies like taking alcohol and mood altering drugs are negative and likely to impair teaching effectiveness and rehabilitation of young offenders.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers in Borstal institutions have high stress levels and sources of stress include workload, long hours of working, inadequate teaching materials, poor living conditions, low salaries, inadequate training among others. Coping strategies include physical activities like jogging, talking with family and friends, seeking alternative accommodation outside the institutions among others. While some of the coping strategies were positive, others were negative and likely to impair effectiveness in efforts to rehabilitate the young convicts. Noteworthy, the absence of counseling services for teachers in the institutions emerged as a major contributor to inability of teachers to cope with occupational stress. It is therefore necessary for institutions to improve the working conditions and living conditions of teachers by employing more teachers and building better houses and also providing avenues for dialogue to discuss problems. Professional Counseling services should be provided for the teachers to help them deal with their personal and work stress.

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