



Sex Differences in Stress and Coping Strategies Among Teachers in MBALE Municipality

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Abstract

This study investigated the various paradigms of stress based on demographic variables and the attendant coping mechanisms employed by the secondary school teachers in Mbale Municipality. Descriptive survey research design was used. The total samples used for the study was 196. A well validated questionnaire was used to collect data from the teachers. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, means and standard deviations were used to analyze the data on the research questions. Inferential statistics of t-test for independent samples was also used to analyze the data at 0.05 level of significance. Specifically the result showed that male teachers have slightly high level of stress than female teachers which might be premised on various paradigms such as unstandardized class size, students' indiscipline and poor working environments with low salaries among secondary school teachers. However, the teachers cope with their stress using mechanisms such as critical analysis of problem for better appraisal, clubbing, watching Television, films and video, avoiding unnecessary thinking. Thus the following recommendations were made, a) teachers' salary should be increased to meet the demand of the teachers and should be paid promptly b) incentives to be given to them, c) class size to be standardized, d) and counselling service should be stepped up in secondary schools in Mbale Municipality.

Keywords: Stress; Coping; Strategies.



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1. Introduction

The work of a teacher is physically and mentally challenging. A teacher needs to use a lot of energy in his daily chores in the classroom coupled with his personal and family commitments. This trend which is a routine for a teacher forwards a lot of stress to the teacher. More than ever before, work is not seen as the root of infinite satisfaction and fulfilment, but more of a source of stress, discontentment and humiliation. This seems to be in line with [Olagunju \(2010\)](#) who describes stress as a prolonged complex emotional state characterized by anxiety and various nervous and mental disorders. Stress is a commonly used term to describe psychological feelings of time pressure and work overload, resulting in a feeling of inadequacy in meeting the current demands which a person is experiencing. Stress among teachers is inevitable because they are under pressure to do more in the classroom all the time. They have much to do in less time while under scrutiny. This is supported by [Delisio \(2001\)](#) who states that stress levels among teachers are very high because expectations are high and demands are much higher. The [National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education \(2013\)](#) found that teachers in England had severe pressures on them. However, it is important to note that there are a wide variety of demands and challenges that teachers experience, although not everyone views the same list of demands and challenges as being stressful. Because teachers are the backbone of education in many societies, a number of studies on teacher stress have been done. For example, [Travers and Cooper \(1997\)](#) surveyed teachers in England and France about stress; [Dussault et al. \(1999\)](#) studied stress among Canadian teachers; [Pithers and Soden \(1998\)](#) looked at stress among Australian and Scottish teachers while [Van Dick et al. \(1999\)](#) questioned teachers about stress across Germany. Researchers like [Nhundu \(2000\)](#) and [Zindi \(2002\)](#) have looked at the sources and nature of occupational stress among teachers and headmasters in Zimbabwe and the paradigms underlying stress among secondary school teachers In Zimbabwe respectively.

Stress is found everywhere, that is, at home, with friends, in the office, in school, in the classroom. It is just around the corner. It simply cannot be avoided because it is part of being human. In fact, a lot of people experience stress every day. It could be brought about by many factors. The causes and levels of stress may vary from one person to the other. No person is free from stress, regardless of how privileged, reasonable, clever, and intelligent he may be. Every person will be challenged at times by frustrations, losses, changes and conflicts.

According to [Colangelo \(2004\)](#) defined teacher stress as an unpleasant feeling that teachers experience as a result of their work. Teacher stress can also involve a negative emotional experience associated with the level of pressure and demands made on an individual, as well as the degree of mismatch between these demands and his/her ability to cope with those demands.

The school is one place where a lot of people converge on regular basis. It is fact that when people come together; stress is bound to happen one way or the other. The administration may be stressed with the low turnout of enrolment or the need to generate more funds to finance important capital outlays. The causes of stress for teachers vary, such as lack of preparation, family and financial problems, absentee and student misbehaviour, lack of instructional materials among others.

In school setting male and female teachers are affected differently by the many forms of stress which eventually affect their output in the form of performance, the performance of other school related activities such as extracurricular activities that lead to proper growth of the students.

It is thus important to note that the existing working conditions of teachers in schools in Uganda seems not conducive for both primary and secondary schools teachers. Teachers for example embarked on nationwide strike action against the merge monthly pay and the miserable budgetary increment of (25000-50000), in their salaries in 2013/2014 (New vision, September 18th).

Teachers in secondary schools in Uganda only make an estimated 430,000 Ugandan shillings a month and are often not paid on time, forcing many to undertake farming and other part-time work. Similarly some teachers were reported in the east of the country sneaking out of class to drive motorbike taxis or bodabodas. Therefore as result of engaging in part time job, the teacher may not be able to provide the students with quality education, which may lead to mass failure in their examinations.

Moreso, overworking teachers is a reality in most Ugandan secondary schools. In most schools, a teacher is not only expected to teach a good number of classes with a different students, but also to cater for individual differences amongst students, which is coupled with making constant research and revision, marking scripts plus a number of other school duties after school. Added to the above, the students' discipline in many schools contributes to the pile of stress the Ugandan teacher faces. Some students not only nickname teachers but also participate in drug abuse, theft, constant use of vulgar language, burning schools and the beating up of teachers. This therefore calls for creative approaches geared towards making the school environment more comfortable for teachers, which may include constant counselling among others.

In psychology, coping is expending conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to master, minimize or tolerate stress or conflict (Weiten and Lloyd, 2008). The effectiveness of the coping efforts depend on the type of stress and/or conflict, the particular individual, and the circumstances.

Other stressors that interfere with teacher efforts can be student apathy, student disruption or indiscipline, poor student attendance, low achievement, large number of students in a class, heavy paper or prep work, indifferent attitude of colleagues, obtrusive administrator, ineffective leadership of principals, denial of opportunities for professional development, low salary, unsatisfactory relationships with students, non-involvement in decision making, accountability of student progress, fatigue, frustration, helplessness, stagnation, boredom, and loss of motivation or enthusiasm and unsupportive parents, this becomes observable due to increase absenteeism among teachers, late arrival and early departures, decreasing commitment and dedication to work, increasing complaints from within and outside the schools, abuse of office, that constitute manifestations of stress in the schools thus affecting service delivery (Source: Mbale Municipality Council Commission of inquiry, 2009).

The profession of teaching also comes in this broad spectrum of stress. Teachers are expected not only to work as pedagogues but they also need to perform duties of an administrator, resources person, innovator, counselor, facilitator and manager of knowledge which leads to high level of stress.

Mbale Municipality council introduced stress management strategies as a coping mechanisms having realized that employee performance was being affected by stress (personal manual, 2009) the strategies include stress management training and development training and staff counselling among others (minutes for staff annual review meeting 2011). Therefore in line with the above the researcher intend to determine stress and coping mechanisms among secondary school teachers in Mbale Municipality Uganda.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

A stress free teacher can teach effectively in the class room and can provide better quality of environment to make schools a challenging and interesting centre for the students.

Teachers are the most important factor in determining the quality of education that children receive in schools (Dike, 2009; Gwaradzimba and Shumba, 2010; International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006; Ololube, 2006). The work of a teacher is to effect proper learning among his /her students and they are always judged or graded by the performance of their students.

It is on record that teachers in secondary schools in Uganda only earn an estimated 430,000 Ugandan shillings a month and are often not paid as at when due, forcing many to undertake farming and other part-time work. Similarly some teachers were reported in the east of the country sneaking out of class to drive motorbike taxis or bodabodas. Therefore as result of engaging in part time job, the teacher may not be able to provide the students with quality education, which may lead to mass failure in their examinations.

Moreso, personal observation revealed that overworking teachers is a reality in most Ugandan secondary schools. In most schools, a teacher is not only expected to teach a good number of classes with a different students, but also to cater for individual differences amongst students, which is coupled with making constant research and revision, marking scripts plus a number of other school duties after school. Added to the above, the students' discipline in many schools contributes to the pile of stress the Ugandan teacher faces. Some students not only nickname teachers but also participate in drug abuse, theft, constant use of vulgar language, burning schools and the beating up of teachers. This therefore calls for creative approaches geared towards making the school environment more comfortable for teachers, which may include constant counselling among others. (Source: Panorama (2011)). Therefore this research aimed at finding out paradigms of stress and how the teachers both male and female cope with stress.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is premised on identifying the various causes of stress. Precisely to determine the difference in the level of stress among male and female teachers. It will also dwell copying on the mechanism of teachers.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions were therefore formulated to proffer solution to the problem as follows:

1. What is the significant difference in the level of stress between male and female secondary school teachers in Mbale Municipality?
2. What is the frequency and percentage of stress reduction mechanisms applied by secondary school teachers in Mbale Municipality?

1.4. Research Method

The research design used was descriptive survey which allowed the researcher to use large number of respondents to describe their experience regarding causes of stress, level of stress and coping mechanisms adopted. The target population for this study was teachers in secondary schools in Mbale municipality. The researchers used simple random and stratified sampling techniques to select their samples.

To select schools to be used the names of 20 secondary schools were written on small pieces of paper which were later folded and the researchers closed their eyes and picked five papers using simple random sampling. So five picked papers represent the schools where the research was conducted. This enabled the researcher to obtain responses that represent the views of all the secondary school teachers in Mbale Municipality. A self-developed questionnaire named Stress and Coping Mechanisms Questionnaire (SCMQ) was designed and administered for the study. The questionnaire consists of three sections: Section A consists of items on demographic variables (Gender, academic qualification, working experiences); Section B consists of items on causes of stress, and Section C level of stress and Section D consists of items on coping mechanisms adopted by teachers in managing their stress. The constructed questionnaire was given to experts in the field of study to go through for necessary corrections in order to give it facial validity. In this study the researcher used test retest method. Some respondents for the study who are not part of the actual sample but within the target population. This instrument was administered to the same group of respondents after two weeks and Chronbatch alpha was used to correlate the two results the computed value was 0.738, therefore the instrument was considered reliable. The researchers visited the selected respondents within the study area, the questionnaires were administered by a direct method, that is, questionnaires were distributed directly to the respondents. At the preliminary session the researcher reassured respondents of confidentiality. Instructions was then read out clearly and clarifications made promptly. The completed questionnaires were later handed in and checked for errors. Data from questionnaires were analysed using frequency, percentagies and t-test.

2. Results

Research Question 1; What is the significant difference in the level of stress between male and female secondary school teachers in Mbale Municipality?

Table-1. t-test analysis showing difference in stress level based on Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Std. Error Mean
Stress	Male	137	2.5784	.30433	194	.03962
	Female	59	2.435	.30544		.02610

Source: Field data (2015)

Table-2. Showing the frequency and percentage of the methods used by teachers to reduce stress

Methods	Frequency	Percentage
Analyse problem to understand it better	31	15.8
Avoid unnecessary thinking	25	12.8
Receiving professional advise	16	8.2
Drinking alcohol and smoking	19	9.7
Physical exercise	20	10.2
Drugs and medication	15	7.7
Peer advice	22	11.2
Avoiding people	12	6.1
Clubbing	10	5.1
Watching Television & social media	26	13.3
Total	196	100

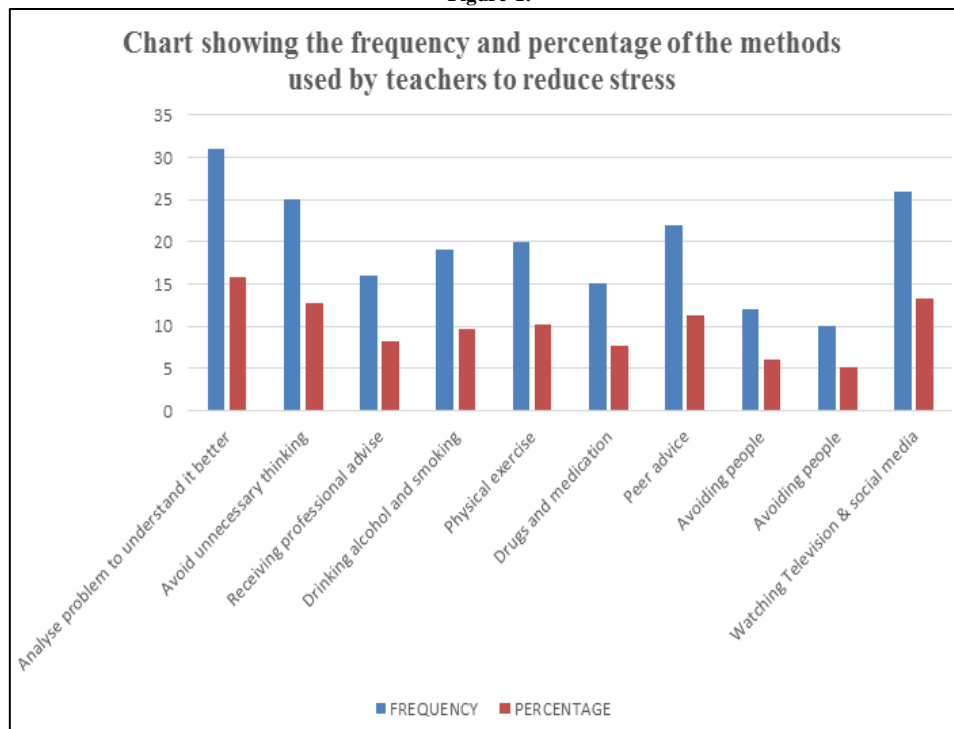
Table revealed the total number of responses based on the gender difference and the mean of the stress level. There are 137(69.9%) and 59(30.1%) female teachers.

Based on the information presented in [table, 1](#), an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the level of stress between male and female teachers. There was a statistical significant difference in the level of stress of male teachers [M=2.5, SD=0.3; t (194) =2.63, p=.009] and female teachers (M=2.4, SD=0.31). The magnitude of the

differences in the means (eta squared = 0.01) indicated that the difference between male and female teachers is small. These findings suggest that male teachers in Mbale Municipality have stress level slightly high than female teachers.

2. What is the frequency and percentage of coping mechanisms that secondary school teachers use in order to reduce stress?

Figure-1.



The findings as revealed in table 2 figure 1 above indicated that analysing problem to understand it better (15.8) is the most applied method used by Teachers, while watching Television and social media follows (13.3), the next is avoiding unnecessary thinking (12.8), close to this is peer advise (11.2), physical exercise (10.2) took its turn, teachers using alcohol and smoking (9.7) takes turn and followed by teachers receiving professional counselling help (8.2). those who belief in using drug and medication (7.7) were not much, avoiding people (6.1) and the lowest used method is clubbing (5.1).

3. Discussion of the Findings

The above findings concurred with the findings of Jackson (2010) who found a significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of their level of stress. This is supported by Mondal *et al.* (2011) who also found a significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of their psychological and physical stress. According to Mondal *et al.* (2011), male teachers are more insecure and emphasized financial worries while Rosenblatt *et al.* (1999) revealed that female teachers express worries about intrinsic facets of their jobs.

This studies noted that there is a significant difference between male teachers and female teachers in terms of their level of stress. Male teachers were observe to have higher stress level than female teachers. This could be attributed to the reason while male teachers were seen engaging in ‘bodaboda’ business, home lesson, and farming and so on to make ends meet. It was also discovered that analysing problem for better understanding is the best adopted method of stress reduction. They also indulge in relaxation method in managing stress as teachers were glued to television and hanging around in joints and clubbing. This could be explain by the submission of Davidson and Futedon (1999) that coping with stress is complex, highly dynamic and is directed toward physical, social and emotional functioning.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Basing on the finding of this study, it can be concluded that the teachers experience stress at all angles and that teachers of secondary schools in Mbale municipality experience different levels of stress. Specifically, male teachers slightly develop stress than female teachers. To round it up teachers use different coping mechanisms in reducing stress, this generally concludes the fact that stress is inevitable in teaching as a profession and as a result of this, effective coping mechanisms is needed to deal with the stress. Based on the above conclusion, the following recommendations were made; Government or stakeholder should pay teachers their salary on time to avoid high expectation which may lead to stress. Incentives should be given to teachers as source of motivation and stress reduction. More competent teachers should be recruited on full time to compensate the work of old teachers. Teachers should be engaged in stress management induction training. Introduce counselling services for teachers and Involvement of teachers in social activities such as clubs, sports etc.

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