

TEACHERS' WORK RELATED STRESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

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Abstract

Teachers most times are over stretched due to increase in their daily responsibilities, high work demands and nature of the school environment. This might lead to a feeling of negative stress or work related stress which usually increases when they believe the demands of a situation are greater than they could deal with. Under this condition, some teachers might find it hard to concentrate, make decisions, and feel confident. Many might experience physical sensations like sweating, a racing heart, or tense muscles. This paper focused on teachers' work related stress: implications for educational administrators. It examined the concept of work related stress, symptoms of work-related stress, common causes of work related stress, steps individuals could take to manage work related stress, how to support someone who is stressed, organizational interventions for reducing work related stress, and benefits of preventing work related stress. Finally some recommendations made would enable teachers cope and manage the ugly conditions of work related stress.

Key words: Stress, work related stress, teacher, educational administrators

Introduction

In today's world, work related stress has become a phenomenon, which occurs in various forms in every workplace. In the educational institutions, teachers are generally working for longer hours, as the rising levels of responsibilities required them to exert themselves even more strenuously to meet rising expectations about work performance (Dwamena, 2012).

The success or failure of any educational process depends to a large extent upon the quality and efficiency of teachers engaged in that process. In addition, it depends upon the effectiveness with which they carry out their responsibilities (Godwin, 2016).

It is factual to state that without teaching, educational objectives might not be realized. Indeed, government may establish new schools, effect changes on the curriculum, recommend and prescribe teaching methods and aids, but in the end, the teacher would be responsible for applying them. The teacher is the one that could translate educational objectives into knowledge and skills and transfer them to students in the classroom. Accordingly, the teacher improves the physical conditions of the classroom through orderliness, discipline and control and makes

diagnoses of students' feelings and attitudes inferred from their behaviours and responses in the classroom (Achuonye, 2008)..

Apart from classroom teaching, there are other functions which teachers are required to perform. Some of the non-teaching statutory activities which teachers are required to perform include; preparation of scheme of work, writing of lesson notes, filing of diary of work done, design and construction of instructional materials, marking of students' examination and test scripts etc (Awotua-Efebo, 2008). If a teacher after teaching fails to perform these other responsibilities, his services would almost be termed meaningless (Ebong, 2008).

Therefore for any teacher to carry out his/her duties effectively and efficiently, it is imperative that such teacher is physically, psychologically and mentally fit (Chandola, 2010). Nevertheless work related stress is a silent, and often-neglected factor which impairs not only the teacher's physical, psychological and mental wellbeing but also contributes significantly to a decline in the overall success of the educational system (Michie, 2019). That was why Omolara (2008) described work related stress as the adverse psychological and physical reactions that occur in individuals as a result of their being unable to cope with the demands being made on them. It arises where work demands of various types and combinations exceed the individuals' capacity and capability to cope. It becomes aggravated when individuals find out that they have or can exercise little control over it. Work-related stress can be a significant cause of illness and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness, absence, anxiety, burnout, depression, staff turnover and other issues such as more errors Claussen, (2011). In order to create a healthier, safer, and more productive work atmosphere, teachers and educational managers should endeavour to tackle this worrisome concern.

Work Related Stress

Arnold and Feldman (2000) defined work related stress as "the reactions of individuals to new or threatening factors in their work environment". Since our work environments often contain new situations, this definition suggests that stress is inevitable. This definition also highlights the fact that reactions to stressful situations are individualized and can result in emotional, perceptual, behavioural and physiological changes.

According to Bowin and Harvey (2001), work related stress occurs with the interaction between an individual and the environment, which produces emotional strain affecting a person's physical and mental condition. Stress is caused by stressors, which are events that create a state of disequilibrium within an individual. Robbins (2004), noted that work related stress is a dynamic condition

in which an individual is confronted with opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. Blumenthal (2003) viewed work related stress as anything that upsets peoples' ability to maintain critical variables (which can be social, psychological, spiritual or biological in nature) within acceptable limits. The experience of work related stress involves an event that is demanding or resources as well as the subjective feeling of distress experienced in its face. An event could be experienced as stressful if people appraised it as distressing. Whether an event is experienced as stressful depends on a person's psychosocial orientation with things like culture, spirituality, values, beliefs and past experiences influencing the appraisal.

As can be seen above, work related stress has been defined in different ways over the years. Originally, it was conceived of as pressure from the environment, then as strain within the person. The generally accepted definition today is one of interaction between the situation and the individual (Stranks, 2015). It is the psychological and physical state that results when the resources of the individual are not sufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of the situation. Thus, work related stress is more likely in some situations than others and in some individuals than others. Work related stress can undermine the achievement of goals, both for individuals and for organizations (Michie, 2019).

Work-related stress is a growing problem around the world that affects not only the health and well-being of employees, but also their output in the organization they found themselves.

What one person might perceive as stressful is what another might view as challenging. Whether a person experiences work related stress depends on the job, the person's psychological make-up, and other factors (such as personal life and general health). Work-related stress arises where work demands of various types and combinations exceed the person's capacity and capability to cope (Dwamena, 2012).

Symptoms of Work Related Stress

The signs or symptoms of work-related stress according to Michie (2019) could be physical, psychological and behavioural.

Physical Symptoms Include:

- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Sleeping difficulties, such as insomnia

- Gastrointestinal upsets, such as diarrhoea or constipation
- Dermatological disorders.
- Muscle tension or pain
- Chest pains
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Weakened immune system

Psychological Symptoms Include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Discouragement
- Irritability
- Pessimism
- Feelings of being overwhelmed and unable to cope
- Cognitive difficulties, such as a reduced ability to concentrate or make decisions.
- Increasing forgetfulness, restlessness, irritability, defensiveness.

Behavioural Symptoms Include:

- An increase in sick days or absenteeism
 - Aggression
 - Diminished creativity and initiative
 - A drop in work performance
 - Problems with interpersonal relationships
 - Mood swings and irritability
 - Lower tolerance of frustration and impatience
 - Disinterest
 - Isolation.
- (Michie,, 2019).

Common Causes of Work Related Stress.

Some of the factors that commonly cause work-related stress according to Claussen(2011) and the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), (2007) include:

- **Task Design:** Heavy workload, long work hours, infrequent breaks, routine tasks, work patterns or boring work, tight deadlines, pace, variety, meaningfulness of work, adequate time to complete a task, autonomy (e.g., the ability to make your own decisions about our own job or about specific tasks), skills / abilities do not match job demands, isolation at the workplace (emotional or working alone).
- **Management Style:** Little participation in making decisions, poor communication, lack of friendly policies, little recognition for good job

performance, encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organization, Changes within the organization, changes to duties, over supervision, lack of training and or preparation (technical and social), lack of appreciation, lack of systems in workplace available to respond to concerns, not engaging employees when undergoing organizational change, lack of perceived fairness (who gets what, when, and the processes through which decisions are made).

- **Interpersonal Relationships:** Poor social environment and lack of support from colleagues or administrators, prejudice or discrimination because of race, religion, gender or age, harassment, threat of violence, lack of trust, lack of systems in workplace available to report and deal with unacceptable behaviour etc.
- **Work Roles:** Conflicting or uncertain job expectations, too much responsibility, insufficient skills or knowledge for the job, role conflict (conflicting job demands, too many roles), multiple supervisors/Heads), uncertain job expectations/role ambiguity (lack of clarity about responsibilities), level of responsibility etc.
- **Career Concerns:** Job insecurity; lack of opportunity for growth, advancement or promotion
- **Environmental Concerns:** Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions such as crowding, noise, air pollution, ergonomic issues, inadequate infrastructures such as offices, lavatories etc, crisis incidents, such as an armed hold-up or workplace death.

“Also, many times, the issues of stress at work are really not issues with work per se,” Claussen, (2011) said. Not only can an employee’s personal life impact one’s levels of work related stress, but “it has to do with other things that impact on work like, traffic. By the time the person gets there, their level of stress has gone up considerably, so it just takes a few more things on the job to really trigger some unfortunate kinds of reactions”.

Steps Individuals Can Take to Manage Work Related Stress

According to Better Health Channel (2021), persons suffering from work-related stress can help themselves in a number of ways, including:

- Develop a strong social support system in the workplace. Think about the changes you need to make at work in order to reduce your stress levels and then take action. Some changes you can manage yourself, while others will need the cooperation of others.

- Take a break to avoid “burn out”. Even something as brief as a work around the block can help clear your head and distance you from stressors, enabling you to return to the job with a fresh outlook.
- Set realistic expectations for the amount of work you can complete in the time you have available. Do not attempt to take on more than you can reasonably handle.
- Recognize you are not perfect and every minor detail in your work will not be perfect either.
- Keep your work area free of clutter, which could also add to stress.
- Make sure you are well organised. List your tasks in order of priority. Schedule the most difficult tasks of each day for times when you are fresh, such as first thing in the morning.
- Avoid negativity and negative people, try to maintain a positive attitude about your work and your colleagues.
- Take care of yourself. Eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.
- Make sure you have enough free time to yourself every week.
- Don’t take out your stress on loved ones. Instead, tell them about your work problems and ask for their support and suggestions.
- Drugs, such as alcohol and tobacco, won’t alleviate stress and can cause additional health problems. Avoid excessive drinking and smoking.
- Seek professional counselling from a psychologist when necessary.

How to Support Someone Who is Stressed

As identified by the Chartered Accountants Benevolent Association (2020), supporting someone who is undergoing work related stress involves the followings steps:

1. Help them to recognize there is a Problem

It's easier to spot signs of stress in other people than it is to see them in one's self. Often people don't want to admit, even to themselves, that they're starting to struggle. Unfortunately, this meant many people plough on, despite the warning signs until they could no longer cope. If one notices changes in someone's behaviour that suggests the individual is feeling stressed, reach out to them. Let them know that they do not seem quite normal.

2. Listen

Talking things through openly with an individual we trusted could help to see things differently and find new solutions. Even just knowing that somebody is there to listen could make a huge difference. Giving someone who is feeling stressed one's time and undivided attention is one of the best things one could do to support someone that is stressed.

3. Offer Reassurance

When you're feeling overwhelmed, it could be difficult to see a way out of a problem. Reminding and reassuring someone that this won't last forever and that the situation could improve, would help him/her keep things in perspective.

4. Help the Stressed Individual Identify his/her Triggers

Your independent observations of someone's behaviour can help him/her identify patterns that he/she hadn't noticed before. This can be a sensitive topic, as it will mean drawing attention to negative thoughts or feelings, so remaining calm, objective and non-judgmental is important. In the same way, one could also help someone identify situations and activities that help him/her to feel less stressed and more in control. For example getting outside for a walk, taking a relaxing bath or reading a book.

5. Offer Practical Support

If there's a specific issue that's causing someone to feel stressed such as money worries, job loss or relationship problems, one might be able to help the individual find practical solutions that would make the situation easier.

6. Try Calming Techniques

Techniques such as meditation or mindful breathing exercises can help one stay calm. When practised regularly, an individual can improve and strengthen his/her response to pressure. Regular practice is easier to stick to when you've got someone to practice with. Help your friend take back control by encouraging them to take mindful pauses whenever they start to feel overwhelmed. 10-minute body scan is a good place to start.

7. Support Them to Seek Professional Help

If their stress and anxiety is impacting their day-to-day life, it might be time to seek some professional help. Encourage them to contact a professional such as a counsellor or a psychologist (Chartered Accountants Benevolent Association, 2020),

Organizational Interventions for Reducing Work - Related Stress

Work related stress is preventable and identifying the potential sources of stress to employees in an organization is the first step in addressing them. Effective interventions for reducing work related stress can be classified as primary, secondary, and tertiary according to Corporate Wellness Magazine, (2021).

Primary Interventions involve proactive measures to prevent stress by removing or reducing potential stressors. This level of intervention focuses on the sources of physical and psychosocial stress in the workplace. Examples of primary interventions include:

- Redesigning the work environment
- Providing breaks and nap-times for employees
- Increasing employee participation in decision-making and work planning
- Increasing time and resources for completing specific job tasks
- Matching job description with employees' skills and qualifications
- Creating clear promotion and reward pathways
- Eliminating physical hazards
- Substituting with safer equipment and technology
- Establishing control measures to reduce workers' exposure to occupational hazards
- Promoting the use of personal protective equipment

Secondary Interventions are corrective and are focused on altering the ways individuals perceive and respond to stressors. These interventions aim at improving employee's ability to cope with stress and detect stress-induced symptoms early. Examples of secondary interventions include:

- Training and education of employees
- Cognitive behavioural therapy training for employees
- Routine health surveillance - screening for high blood pressure and stress symptoms

Tertiary Interventions are forms of control at the level of the illness. These are initiated for individuals who are already experiencing stress. Tertiary interventions involve providing treatment, compensation plans, rehabilitation programmes, and return to work programmes for affected individuals. Tertiary interventions include:

- Providing medical care and employee assistance programmes to affected individuals
- Return-to-work plans including modification and redesign of work (Corporate Wellness Magazine, 2021).

Benefits of Preventing Work Related Stress

Better Health Channel, (2021) identified the followings as some of the benefits of preventing work related stress:

- Reduced symptoms of poor mental and physical health
- Fewer injuries, less illness and lost time

- Reduced sick leave usage, absences and staff turnover
- Increased employees' effectiveness
- Greater job satisfaction
- Increased work engagement
- Reduced costs to the Organization
- Improved employees' health and community wellbeing.

Implications to Educational Administrators

The above discussions have serious implications to educational administrators who are regarded as facilitators of the educational process. Educational administrators (including Vice Chancellors of Universities, Provosts of Colleges of Education, Rectors of Polytechnics, Principals of Secondary Schools, Head Masters of Primary Schools etc) have the obligation to:

- Ensure a safe working environment for teachers by providing adequate teaching and learning facilities among others.
- Ensure that teachers are encouraged to attain proficiency in their subject areas and that they remain professionally relevant by sponsoring teachers to conferences, seminars and workshops.
- De-stigmatise work-related stress by openly recognising it as a genuine problem.
- Discuss issues and grievances with teachers, and take appropriate action when possible.
- Devise a work related stress management policy in consultation with teachers.
- Take into account the personal lives of teachers and recognise that the demands of home will sometimes clash with the demands of work.
- Increase teachers' participation in decision-making and work planning
- Increase time and resources for completing specific job tasks
- Match teachers' job description with their skills and qualifications
- Create clear promotion and reward pathways
- Provide medical care and employees' assistance programmes to affected individuals

Conclusion

The teacher is no doubt a very vital component of the educational system. He plays very critical and sensitive roles in the school to ensure that educational goals are achieved. The teacher must therefore be adequately equipped to carry out his/her duties effectively and in doing so, his psychological, physical and mental wellbeing must always be taken into serious consideration by all educational stakeholders concerned. This is in order not to give any room to the awful condition of 'work related stress' for the teacher as he strives to cope with his huge task burdens and heavy work pressures coupled with other family burdens, for this

will not only impair the efficiency and effectiveness of the teacher but may at the long run lead to a decline in the overall success of the organization and the educational system in general.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, it is therefore recommended that:

- Teachers should endeavour to set realistic expectations for the amount of work they can complete in the time they have available.
- Teachers should list their daily tasks in order of priority. Schedule the most difficult tasks of each day for times when they are fresh, such as first thing in the morning.
- Try to maintain a positive attitude about their work and their colleagues.
- Take care of themselves. Eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.
- Make sure they have enough free time to themselves every week.
- Teachers should not take out their stress on loved ones. Instead, they should tell their loved ones about their work problems and ask for their support and suggestions.
- Teachers should seek professional counselling from a psychologist when necessary.

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