Correlating Demographic Variables with Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies of Pre-School Educators: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT The present study draws from an on-going study on the effects of demographic variables on work stimulated stressors and coping strategies among pre-school educators. The initial findings suggested that no study was found to have jointly taken-up the relationship between the demographic variables and work-related stressors. Findings also suggested that no attention is being given to the events of stress among pre-school educators in South Africa. The researchers contend that without jointly investigating the association between stress and teachers' race, age, marital status, gender, qualifications and location of school, discussions on how these variables impact the psychosocial wellbeing of teachers would remain speculative. The current research expected to obtain empirical evidences relevant to impact policies on the psychosocial wellbeing of preschool educators in South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The surge in interest on early childhood development (ECD) offers an opportune time to comprehensively reflect on the impact of fundamental work-related variables on the provisioning of early childhood education (ECE) within a specific context in South Africa. ECE refers to the centre-based services and programs that offer developmentally important educational motivation to groups of young children mainly between the ages of 0 to 6 years in preparation for formal schooling (DoE 2001, 2005). Teacher stress can have significant impact on this preparation as their psychosocial state may have significant influence on the quality of their relationship with children at particular centres. Research appears suggesting that children learn best when they feel psychologically safe and secure within a given environment (Coetzee et al. 2009; Bharti and Sidana 2012; Brown 2012; Okeke and Dlamini 2013; Dlamini et al. 2014). It is argued that the psychosocial state of teachers may have significant influence on the quality of the relationship they will provide to the children under their care.

There has been a growing interest in research on teachers, and occupational stress in general

world-wide (Ngidi and Sibaya 2002; Copeland-Linder 2006; Lazuras 2006; Jackson et al. 2010; Kerr et al. 2011; Hung 2011; ETUCE/CSEE 2012; Mapfumo et al. 2012; Sarmah and Baruah 2012). Despite this growing interest, it would appear that information on a comprehensive and well articulated knowledge about events of stress associated with the teachers' race, age, marital status, gender, qualifications and location of school remains very scanty. No empirical study was, however, found to have jointly taken-up these variables in a single study. Most importantly, and to the extent that the preliminary review of the current study has covered, no empirical study suggested that attention is being given to the events of stress among pre-school educators in South Africa notwithstanding the growing emphasis on early childhood development in the country. The known consequences of stressful situations on teachers and the unique characteristics of children provide researchers with the opportunity to investigate a deep-seated stress process among pre-school teachers in South Africa.

Although, there is plethora of literature on stress coping strategies among teachers (Austin et al. 2005; Milner and Khoza 2008; Lambert et al. 2009; Coetzee et al. 2009; Lhospital and Gregory 2009; Klassen 2010; Malik and Ajmal 2010; Hung 2011; Okeke and Dlamini 2013; Dlamini et al. 2014), given the uniqueness of ECE environment, it would be doubtful whether any general understanding exist on pre-school teachers' strategies for coping with stress. Without

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comprehensively investigating teachers' demographic variables in a single study, it would be difficult to cogitate on how these variables put impact on particular preschool teachers' abilities to handle stressful events at work.

THE CONCEPT OF STRESS

Stress is one of the main problems affecting teachers these days all over the world. Although, this phenomenon is well-known and has also received huge research attention, it nonetheless, remains very difficult to define. According to Onchwari (2009) stress is the non-specific response of a human body to any demand made upon it. Stress must be understood as that unavoidable aspect of our everyday work life and even the individual's domestic situations. Austin et al. (2005) contended that stress is the totality of the responses to the individual's environmental demands and pressures. Stress is also a combination of physiological and psychological reactions that negatively affect individuals as a result of the conditions in their environment (Okeke and Dlamini 2013; Dlamini et al. 2014). However, not all stressful situations produce negative outcome. Studies suggest that the body often requires a response to certain kinds of stressful conditions to be able to perform efficiently (Al-Mohannadi and Capel 2007; Akhlaq et al. 2010).

TEACHER STRESS

Today's South African teachers are confronted with numerous challenges given the relatively transitional state of education at all levels. Post-1994 educational developments in South Africa have come with numerous challenges and demands on the average teacher. Some of these developments may implicate stress on the part of the teacher. Teaching is a very emotional, difficult and complex work (Burchielli and Bartram 2006). Over the years, South African contemporary teachers have had to contend with an increasingly work and multiple roles situations that appear to be negatively impacting their social and psychological wellbeing (Olivier and Venter 2003; Bantwini 2010).

The complexities of teaching within the preschool and foundation phase, suggested that teachers within these categories may be experiencing stress that requires to be investigated. A study by Mintz (2007), noted that teaching ranks among the most stressful occupation in the world. Studies equally show that teaching experiences stress more frequently than any other profession (Froeschle and Crews 2010). Research suggested that teacher stress can have significant effect on the teacher performance and can equally impact on the learners' performance (Schaubman et al. 2011). Teacher stress can also impact on teacher collegial relationship (Mintz 2007; de Witt and Leasing 2013). Teacher stress when left unattended may significantly impact the health of the teacher (Burchielli and Bartram 2006). However, numerous attempts have been made to establish the causes of teacher stress.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND WORK-RELATED EDUCATORS' STRESS

Studies have found links between demographic variables and work-related stress experienced by teachers in general (Jackson et al. 2010; Aftab and Khatoon 2012). Stress is caused by the existence of pressurizing factors, the personality type and demographic variables of the individual and the availability and quality to utilize the coping mechanism (Aftab and Khatoon 2012). Jackson et al. (2010) established that there was a significant relationship between the prevalence of teaching stress and the demographic variables of gender, age and teacher qualifications. For instance, there is a link between gender and teacher work related stress. A study by Mondal et al. (2011) found that there is significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of their psychological and physical stress. Male teachers were revealed to be more insecure and emphasized financial worries whilst in Rosenblatt et al. (1999) study; females expressed worries about intrinsic facets of their jobs. Observations were that males had higher stress and anxiety than females. Females tended to complain more about burnout than male teachers. In contrast Samad et al. (2010) revealed that female teachers had poorer mental health than male teachers and hence were more susceptible to stress than their counterparts.

Studies also indicate that age of a teacher has a relationship with teacher work related stress. Darmordy and Smyth (2010) found that teachers in their forties had higher stress levels than younger age groups. However, a study by Holeyannavar and Itagi (2012) found out that

older teachers showed less stress than the younger ones. The reason proffered for this assertion in Aftab and Khatoon (2012) is that the older teachers are more experienced and adaptable to the environment and more ready to cope with stress. It would be interesting to research an ECE/ECD situation to establish the relationship between age and work stress against the backdrop of the above contrasting scenarios.

In the South African context policies are in place to enable all ECE/ECD practitioners to reach their full potential through in-service programs and other paths of life-long learning (DoE 2005). However, Seleti (2009) argued that although, the policies for ECD qualification systems were in place, there was need for appropriately trained staff in ECD centres; provision of on-going in-service training and supportive and continuous supervision. The researchers wonder what the qualification requirements mean for South African ECD educators who do not possess the appropriate qualifications; hence the current study.

Studies also indicated a relationship between marital status and teacher stress. Stress was high for those who were widowed, divorced and separated. Aftab and Khatoon (2012) found that unmarried teachers too had a higher stress level than married teachers. This is however, in contrast with Parveen (2009) study that noted that work-related stress was higher among married working women than in unmarried working women. This was due to traditional role designation trends, demands of society, more roles and responsibilities assigned to them as mothers, wives and homemakers. However, in Aftab and Khatoon's (2012) study there was no significant association between the occupational stress of teachers and marital status. The current study would seek to find out what the situation is in the case of ECD teachers in South Africa and more specifically in the East London District.

Bashir et al. (2013) in their study found that the teaching environment was the stress provoking factor that caused stress in teachers who took part in their study. This revelation may, thus, imply that location may also be a source for stress. Location of school determines the type of facilities in the classrooms, multimedia, class sizes, classroom space, economic status of the children and interruptions such as noise from outside. The environment has a physical dimension as highlighted by Wu et al. (2006) that classroom size and location can also have a theoreti-

cal dimension. For instance, the mention of the apartheid era denoted an environment that was fraught with inequalities on racial grounds. Jackson et al. (2010: 460) posit that resource inequality in South Africa persists to this day as "many Africans continue to live on the outskirts of urban areas-the least developed sections of the city." These areas are marked with informal settlements where there is lack of electricity and running water. The shortages may serve as sources of stress as the ripple effect may be felt by all operating in the environment.

Causes of Teacher Stress

The School Climate

The nature of the school climate can be a source of stress for the teacher. Hoy et al. (2002) argued that a healthy school climate is characterized by positive relations among teachers, school administrators, learners and parents. On the contrary, an unhealthy school climate is marked by bad and poor relations and this becomes a source of stress. Rovai et al. (2005: 363) define school climate as "the internal characteristics that distinguishes one school from another and influences the behaviour of people". While healthy school climate influences teachers' behaviour positively, an unhealthy climate influences negatively and becomes a source of stress to teachers.

Learners' Discipline

Saptoe (2000) noted that lack of discipline in schools can contribute to a rise in the stress levels of teachers. Misbehaviour by students in classrooms means that teachers spend a lot of time and energy managing disruptive students and this causes problems for teachers. Time and energy that should be spent on enhancing teaching and learning will now be spent on attending disciplinary issues. If this becomes daily routine, teachers become tired and frustrated with their teaching responsibilities. In view of disruptive behaviour, Salem Al-Amarat (2011) stated that learners' disruptive behavior can pose disciplinary problems for teachers and other learners in the classroom, and this can have enormous negative effects on students' achievement. This has been a major source of teacher stress.

The fact that no meaningful learning can take place where there is disruptive behaviour cannot be overemphasised and managing such environments become stressful for teacher. De Witt and Lessing (2013) argued that learner disciplinary problems have an effect on the working life of teachers in schools including teachers' emotional life. De Witt and Leasing (2013) also stated that learners' disciplinary problems cause emotional problems in teachers as they make excessive demands on teachers' tempers and also cause aggression. It becomes clear, that indiscipline in schools does not only negatively affect teaching and learning but takes a toll on the very lives of teachers.

School Management Practices

Schools management practices may also cause stress on teachers. Kyriacou and Chien (2004) study, established that the way schools were managed by heads or principals could result in teacher stress. A typical example is a situation where the head of school places excessive demands on teachers. Teachers may end up failing to cope with the demands and this can result in feelings of frustration and depression. In a related study, Hunnur et al. (2013) found that a significant number of respondents in the study indicated that they felt stressed by the harsh behaviour of their school principal. In an earlier study, Torrington et al. (2005) observed that poor human resource management practices de-motivate employees. Where management styles are authoritarian with limited participation, delegation and communication; teachers tend to be negatively affected; this results in stress. This, therefore, suggests that heads of schools should be properly trained in management in order to minimise cases of management-induced stress among teachers.

High Workload

Excessive workload is found to be a major cause of teacher stress (Kaur 2011). The author went on to define occupational stress as "the discrepancy between the demands of the environment/workplace and the individual's ability to carry out and complete these demands" (Kaur 2011: 153). It becomes clear that inability to cope with job demands is a source of stress; with increased workload evidenced by large classes,

a lot of paper work and assessment of learners, teachers often fail to cope. In most developing countries teachers have to deal with large classes in all levels of educational institutions. In a study on teacher motivation in Uganda, Aacha (2010) found that primary school teachers were overwhelmed with large classes and the number of learners was not consistent with the number of teachers. In a study related to school principals' stress and coping mechanisms, Van der Merwe and Parsotam (2011) established that among the many stressors that affected school principals was the issue of work overload.

Resource Constraints

It is stressful when teachers find themselves operating under conditions of severe shortages of both human and material resources. Taylor (2008) noted how reading is affected in lower grades in South African schools due to lack of adequate textbooks. Teachers may be committed to doing their best to teach reading but their efforts may be rendered futile in situations where there is lack of the most important resources necessary for teaching and learning. Khan et al. (2012) allude to the fact that lack of resources is a cause of stress in schools. It is often frustrating for teachers to work without basic resources that are required to ensure effective teaching and learning. For instance, schools in the rural areas of Eastern Cape Province, teaching and learning are hampered by lack of tables and chairs in the classrooms. Situations in which teachers have to perform their professional duties with little or no resources or to perform the tasks meant for three teachers can be very stressful indeed.

Redeployment of Teachers

The issue of teacher redeployment, in South African and elsewhere, is also a source of stress among teachers. In a study on teacher redeployment in Port Elizabeth, Zokufa (2007) found that the exercise was stressful on the part of affected teachers. In some instances teachers were redeployed to schools with difficulties in transport and accommodation and in some cases where the basic school infrastructure was deplorable. It really becomes a cause of anger and frustration for a teacher to leave a well-established school to work in a school with poor living con-

ditions and no resources for teaching and learning. It is; therefore, clear that the process of moving teachers from schools where they would have served for a considerable length of time can be a source of stress for such teachers.

Low Remuneration

Bennel and Akyeampong (2007), stated that in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, teachers' salaries are very low and this often de-motivates teachers to perform their best. Teachers do not just look after their immediate family members but also have extended family members to take care of, and this really burdens them. Regarding teachers' salaries in some African countries, Bennel and Akyeampong (2007: viii) stated that "pay is so low that teachers, like many of their students, do not eat properly before coming to school". The issue of poor salaries becomes a very serious stressor in instances where teachers go hungry, yet, they are supposed to offer best services to learners. Similarly, earlier study by Smit (2000: 96) found that "the highest levels of teacher stress were found to be those arising from lack of rewards and recognition". Without addressing the issue of teachers' low remuneration in South Africa, it is doubtful whether stress resulting from this variable would ever be addressed.

Low Status of the Teaching Profession

Teaching used to be regarded as a very high status profession with teachers commanding a lot of respect in society. Bennel and Akyeampong (2007) established that teachers have been undervalued by society and the teaching profession itself was taken as employment of the last resort. This causes serious challenges to teachers resulting in stress as they will not be valued by society despite their great work as educators. Ingersoll and Perda (2008) advanced the view that teaching is a mass profession where entry into the profession is not regulated. In this view, the professional cannot observe and uphold professional standards as done in closely regulated professions. Ejere (2010) observed that teachers in the teaching profession in Nigeria are looked down upon in comparison to other professionals such as Accountants, Medical Doctors, Engineers and Lawyers. The holding of the profession on low esteem causes

frustration and hopelessness among teachers. Such views compound the teachers' misery adding to stress.

Other Causes of Stress among Teachers

Interpersonal conflicts can be a source of teachers' stress. Teachers in a school are generally expected to relate well as professionals. High levels of collegiality assist in teachers' development as professionals. However, there are instances where relationships may not be smooth. Lazuras (2006) posited that interpersonal conflicts at the workplace are very high predictors of teacher stress. To achieve the collective goals of an institution, there is need for unity as marked by sound interpersonal relations among team members. For instance, Frone (2000) and Fox et al. (2001) argued that conflict between and among colleagues at the workplace leads to decreased job satisfaction, lower organizational commitment, higher turnover intentions, and increased counterproductive work behaviour. All this is not good for the organisation and for individuals.

Besides, changes in curricula and the resultant new skills required in dealing with new curricula are a source of stress for teachers. In the South African contexts, for instance, numerous demands have been placed on teachers due to constant curriculum changes and the Outcome Based Education curriculum caused a lot of stress on teachers. Dealing with changes is problematic in most cases. It is, therefore, sensible to think that adequate preparation is necessary to ensure that teachers understand and appreciate the new changes.

Effects of Teacher Stress

From the preceding discussions, it is obvious that teacher stress can have numerous effects; some of which have been outlined below.

Effect of Stress on Teachers

The effects of stress on teachers can be physiological, psychological or behavioural (Cooper and Dewe 2004; Okeke and Dlamini 2013). Physiological effects of stress are evidenced by stomach-ache, headache, tiredness, digestion and ulcer problems, physical exhaustion, increased heart rate, sweating, chest pain, back ache, and

being out of breath (Cooper and Dewe 2004). Besides, Bradley (2004) as well as Dlamini et al. (2014) stated that the psychological and emotional effects of stress are marked by anxiety, anger, depression, boredom, frustration, job dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, feelings of inadequacy, among other feelings. In this view, a teacher's character or personality often changes for the worse. This could be evident in changes in attitudes towards learners, school managers, colleagues and the job itself. Relationships with colleagues may also be severely affected as one may become aggressive, withdrawn or easily irritable (Black 2003).

Effect of Stress on Teacher Performance

Caprara et al. (2006) advanced the view that teachers can only positively influence learning if they are committed and satisfied with the job. It therefore means that since stress reduces job commitment and satisfaction, teachers who suffer from occupational stress have higher chances of not performing well in their teaching and learning duties. Similarly, Klassen and Chiu (2010) argued that teacher stress has a negative effect on teacher self-efficacy. Through stress teachers feel inadequate and incapable of executing their duties to the best of their abilities and this, inevitably, negatively affects their performance. A teacher stressed by learners' disruptive behaviours may consider him/her self unable to deal with disciplinary issues and this belief only serves to worsen disciplinary problems in the classroom.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) noted that the teacher's self-efficacy influences the way he/she teaches, motivates students and ultimately impact learner attainment. Khan et al. (2012) stated that teacher performance is of very important concern in educational institutions, yet performance is negatively affected by stressors that come from different and many sources. Khan et al. (2012) further noted that teacher performance affected by stress in turn results in negative effects for learners and institutions. Learners do not learn well and achieve desired outcomes because the facilitators for learning will not be in their best frames of mind to ensure quality facilitation of learning. This is why Tahir (2011) had earlier noted that stress often results in poor teaching quality. To this end, institutions will also not be able to meet their set targets and goals. Teacher stress can also exact some influence on the learners. The next sub-heading will briefly look at some of these influences.

Effect on Learners

Stress may result in teachers changing their personality to one that may not be very positive in promoting effective teaching and learning. Khan et al. (2012: 24) observed that "teachers' personality has a significant role in the success or failure of students". It is, therefore, clear that once the teacher's personality changes for the worse due to stress; it has a negative effect on learners as some personality traits exhibited by teachers will not assist them to learn better. Stress may cause teachers to be frequently absent from work and this affects the way learners learn. Mwamwenda (1995: 85) noted that "a lack of job satisfaction leads to frequent absence from work; behaving aggressively; inclination to quit one's job; and psychological withdrawal from work". Also Reddy et al. (2010) noted the general trend of abuse of the leave system in public schools and state that teacher absenteeism results in absolute loss of teaching time and negatively affects learner attainment. In showing the magnitude of the effects of teacher absenteeism, Ejere (2010: 115) stated that "it is apparent that teacher absenteeism when excessive will impact negatively on student academic achievement as student learning is disrupted when a teacher is repeatedly absent from the classroom". In this view, the serious negative effects of teacher absenteeism, which itself could be a symptom of teacher stress, cannot be overemphasised. Teacher stress is also a contributor to teacher attrition. The issue of teacher attrition is a cause for concern because it is mostly the disadvantaged schools in remote areas which are affected by teacher shortage. Pitsoe and Machaisa (2012) also advanced the view that poor working conditions lead to teachers quitting the profession.

Strategies for Coping with Stress

Literature indicates that there are quite a number of strategies that may be used to cope with stress. In this present literature review, the researchers categorise these strategies as follows:

Problem-focused Coping Strategy

Coetzee et al. (2009) referred to problem-focused strategy as cognitive resource that concerns the extent to which the individuals maintain a positive sense of self-worth, a positive outlook towards others and optimism about life in general. Within the frame of the problem-focused strategy, the person obtains information about what to do and acts accordingly to change the situation. This is a coping behaviour that may be directed at managing or altering the problem that is causing the distress (Steyn and Kamper 2006). In addition, this is a confrontational and problem-solving strategy that involves defining the problem and generating alternative solutions. Besides, it is also about making plans and coming up with different solutions to the same problem and concentrating on what to do next.

Emotion-focused Coping Strategy

Steyn and Kamper (2006) noted that the emotion focused strategy is aimed at controlling the emotions linked with the stress situation. Richards 2012) noted that individuals will use emotion-focused coping strategy when they believe that nothing can be done to modify environmental conditions. These consist of positive reappraisal and positive comparison as well as defensive strategies such as avoidance, minimisation, and distancing. These help ameliorate long-term negative consequences of stress (Steyn and Kamper 2006).

Direct Action Techniques

These are the things that the teachers can do that eliminate the sources of stress. Restorative coping experiences refer to teachers being able to release stress in places away from the school environment. Places chosen by teachers reflect qualities that are helpful in offsetting the effects of the source of stress. The places teachers choose most often that make them feel better when stressed include home, nature related outdoor places, places in the city, churches, and cafes. These environments are helpful in relieving stress because they provide teachers with sensory conditions, social contact, props, and nature related environmental features, which can help teachers alleviate stress (Sprenger 2011).

Social and Community Support

Sprenger's (2011), explored that social support can reduce the impact of stressors on teachers' psychosocial wellbeing. Teachers seek support from family, friends, and colleagues in order to receive advice, discuss feelings, get emotional support, get sympathy and understanding, and to talk about their feelings. Teachers who have more support within their personal lives tend to experience less stress in the workplace. Richards (2012), notes that teachers who successfully cope with the stresses of teaching rely on strong relationships with supportive family and friends. Mapfumo and Chireshe (2012) also note that forming of support networks and developing of interpersonal skills are effective in reducing stress. Nayak's (2008) study on factors affecting teacher stress and strategies to cope indicates that the level of social support and networking ranked as the highest strategy in coping with stress among participants. Similarly in Richard's (2012) study, family and friends support was identified as a top strategy for coping with stress.

Physical Coping Strategies

Steyn and Kamper (2006: 174) believed that these concern the "degree to which individuals enact the health-promoting behaviours believed to contribute to increased physical wellbeing, which is thought to decrease the level of negative response to stress". Mapfumo and Chireshe (2012) also supported that physical strategies that help cope with stress include: exercising, eating, relaxing and drinking. However, drinking has been identified as a non-effective strategy as one does not really engage with the stressors (Richards 2012). Secondly, such habit may lead to such professionally maladaptive behaviours such as absenteeism, and lack of productivity (Mapfumo and Chireshe 2012). Teachers use common positive strategies to alleviate stress that includes exercise, social resources, avoidance, reading, hobbies, movement, and meditation (Mapfumo and Chireshe 2012; Richards 2012; Steyn Kamper 2006).

As a common course, teachers may invoke inward or outward coping strategies when dealing with stress. Inward strategies, such as concentrating on something narrow in the field of stimuli around oneself, include seeking stillness

and focus (Sprenger, 2011). However, given the nature of their work and their workplace; without researching preschool educators it would be extremely laborious to suggest any form of intervention toolkit for such categories of educators. The researchers, therefore, thought it plausible to research the effects of demographic variables, on work stimulated stressors and coping strategies among early childhood educators. The researchers also thought that such research endeavour would assist in developing more inclusive stress management and stress avoidance policies for preschool educators.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted a multi-methods literature search approach to ensure a wider coverage in researching for literature sources as well as in obtaining a wide variety of literatures. The university online subscription databases were the most significant sources of the variety of literature that were obtained and reviewed. Other sources of literature search and review were the Google.com search engine as well as hard copy materials obtained from the university library. Review of literature covered materials published in the later part of 1990s to the year 2014.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After extensively reviewing a massive body of literature, the following findings were made.

Dearth of Research on Stress amongst ECE/ECD teachers in South Africa

To the extent that the preliminary review of the on-going study has covered, the researchers noted with profound interest that no empirical study suggested that attention is being given to the events of stress among pre-school educators in South Africa. In spite of the growing emphasis on early childhood development in the country, it was surprising that not much attention is being given to teacher stress within ECE/ECD sector. The known consequences of stressful situations on teachers and the unique characteristics of children provide researchers with the opportunity to investigate a deep-seated stress process among pre-school teachers in South Africa. This particular finding served as a

very strong motivator for the current research agenda.

Lack of Well-articulated Study on Relationship of Stress and Demographic Variables

The literature review also noted with interest that information on a comprehensive and well articulated knowledge about events of stress associated with the teachers' race, age, marital status, gender, qualifications and location of school remains very scanty in the Republic. Although, the numerous studies appear to exist on teacher stress, however, the current review of stress literature appears to suggest that studies have singled out the effects of such demographic variables on work stimulated stressors.

For instance, Coetzee et al. (2009) study found a link between stressors and personality among some classroom teachers in South Africa. Similarly, Jackson et al. (2010) explored the relationship between race and psychological distress and found that access to socioeconomic resources helps explain differences in non-specific distress between Africans and Whites. An earlier study by Copeland-Linder (2006) study had found a relationship between race and stress among South African black women. In addition, Hines and Paulson (2006) study on parents' and teachers perceptions of stress found a relationship between parenting style and stress. In addition, Sliskovic and Sersic (2011) found relationship between gender and positions differences among males and females in their study.

However, one unique characteristic of these studies (and there could be many more of such studies) is that each appears to have taken-up one or two aspects of the demographic variables. As a result, no empirical study was found to have jointly taken-up these variables in a single study; an existing gap the current study intends to fill.

Shortage of Studies on Stress Coping Mechanism amongst Preschool Educators

Extensive review suggested that plethora of literature exists on stress coping strategies among teachers (see for instance, Austin et al. 2005; Milner and Khoza 2008; Lambert et al. 2009; Coetzee et al. 2009; Lhospital and Gregory

2009; Klassen 2010; Malik and Ajmal 2010; Hung 2011; Okeke and Dlamini 2013; Dlamini et al. 2014). However, no empirical data exists to suggest that stress coping strategies among preschool educators have been extensively explored. In fact, no empirical data exists to suggest that such information is available to the extent that the current literature review covered. It was, therefore, necessary to investigate stress coping strategies among preschool educators.

CONCLUSION

To reiterate, the current researchers argue that the known consequences of stressful situations on teachers and the unique characteristics of children provide researchers with the opportunity to begin to investigate a deep-seated stress process among pre-school teachers in South Africa. Without investigating the association between stress and teachers' race, age, marital status, gender, qualifications and location of school in a single study, discussions on how these variables and phenomena could impact the psychosocial wellbeing of the teacher would have remained remain speculative. Besides, the researchers reiterate again that any generalisations from the findings of such studies limited in scope may appear deceptive and inimical to intervention therapy for the affected teachers.

Again, without investigating the teachers' demographic variables of race, age, marital status, gender, qualifications and location of school in a single study, it would be difficult to cogitate on how these variables put together impact on how particular teachers may be coping with stressful events at work. The researchers also argued that studies that appear to have jointly taken up these demographic variables would offer more plausible intervention coping strategies to teachers.

IMPLICATIONS

The present study stands significant in more ways than one. It is expected that the study will provide insight into the causes as well as proffer some intervention strategies to work-related stress and adopted coping strategies employed by the early childhood educators.

The outcome of this study will also provide empirical evidences on everyday experiences of 0-6 year old educators who work within ECD centres. More so, the findings of this study generate realistic recommendations with solutions to stress problems to the Department of Education, school, society and educators in Eastern Cape and South Africa at large.

The study also bridges the gap between previous studies on stress and preferred coping strategies adopted by early childhood educators and other educators in general. The study also brings into lime light the effects of some demographic variables and exposes the one that predict stress most.

The study has implications on the Initial Teacher Education program with particular reference to the foundations phase curriculum. For instance, the outcome of the study is incorporated into the re-curriculation exercise in ways to enable effective preparation of pre-service teachers in the foundation phase. Hence, there will be opportunity for early childhood educators to be trained on the implementation of such curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research is necessary to understand stress conditions, stressors and coping strategies among preschool educators given the renewed attention on the early childhood education sector.

As per the study, it is necessary to investigate the effects of demographic variables on work stimulated stressors and coping strategies among pre-school childhood educators in East London education district.

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