TEACHERS' STRESS AND BURNOUT INTERVENTION PROGRAM AS A TOOL FOR THE PRINCIPAL

Abdallah Hajajreh

PhD student in Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar" at the Department of "Psychology", Bulgaria

Abstract: This article is part of a much wider study which aimed to examine the impact of the principals' leadership style on wellbeing of teachers. As part of this study an intervention program was built and examined. The intervention program was conducted to improve the teachers' stress and burnout levels. The intervention program was conducted by the school principals. The total sample for intervention program was 70 teachers (14 teachers per school). The goal of the intervention program was to increase teachers' resilience and awareness in order to manage and lower teachers' stress and burnout levels in the primary schools. The principals conducted three sessions for the intervention program for a period of three weeks. The main results were the intervention program in schools targeting teachers can improve teacher wellbeing. In this study the principals themselves did the sessions for their teachers who participated in the intervention program, and the changes and improvement in teacher stress and burnout happened accordingly. In this regard, it can be recommended that the Israeli education office should put this into consideration and develop a policy for principals to conduct sessions with teachers on a regular basis to improve their wellbeing.

Key words: intervention program, Stress, Burnout, Coping Strategies, wellbeing

Introduction:

The teaching profession at different stages of education i.e. elementary, secondary and tertiary gives a set of challenges in which teachers demonstrate or display emotions while they may not actually feel.

School setting is important for both teachers and students. Building the wellbeing of students can be difficult without the wellbeing of teachers. Buluc and Gunes (2014) noted that community, including its functionality such as information, social support, leadership, organization and work management), is a critical component

of occupational wellbeing of the school teachers. In the opinion of Sagie et al. (2002), other factors are also involved such as working conditions, professional competence and health of workers. Principal leadership that is successful includes supporting the teachers' initiatives and ideas and developing structures that encourage the participation of teachers in decision making in school matters.

In this article I present a tool that the school principal can use as a leader to help teachers deal with the level of stress and burnout which they may suffer from during their career.

The Theoretical Part
Stress and Burnout among teachers:
Factors that Affect Stress in Teachers

Sprenger (2010) defined teacher's stress as any characteristic of the school environment that poses a threat to the teacher. Nevertheless, due to the difference in the definition of teacher stress is influenced by how that person is affected by their job demands, and their ability to cope with these demands. There are two main types of teacher's stress that can ultimately affect teachers. The first is task-based stress, such as dealing with disruptive students, refers to problems that are associated with a variety of specific tasks that teachers must perform in their teaching role. The second is role based stress, such as an absence of sufficient resources to perform adequately, refers to how teachers' expectations of their role fit in with the actual work-related responsibilities needed to fulfill their role (Sprenger ,2010).

Hasan (2014) argued that despite the fact the teaching as a profession used to be been regarded as low stress occupation but during the past two decades the situation has changed. He mentioned some of the factors that make teaching more challenging and stressful as a profession. These factors are more paper work, more bureaucracy, more unruly classes, increasing complexities of work and its divergent demand, the individual characteristics of the person or related to his/her environment and the type of school: "Private school teachers face more stress than the government teachers be due to low salary and more burden of work in the private schools" (Hasan 2014, p. 13).

Ncube and Tshabalala (2013) mention another factor for the stress among teachers; they claim that as a result of the competitive era we live in nowadays, there is a competition between the different educational institutions. Each one is setting new goals to compete not only at the local level but also at the global level. Consequently,

the teacher is "at the crux of an education system has to bear the responsibility to prepare the young generations to build a nation with purpose and tackle the challenges of tomorrow" (Ncube & Tshabalala ,2013). Ncube and Tshabalala also recognize additional factors, among them are role ambiguity, poor working conditions, overcrowded classes, uncongenial working environment, scarcity of resources, conflicting peer relations, frequency changing curriculum, assessment and evaluation, fatigue, boredom and many more. More factors were presented by Anandasayanan and Subramaniam (2013), such as teaching pupils who lack motivation, maintaining discipline, self-esteem and status. In addition, they also refer to biographical factors with regard to job stress. For example, there are significant differences between men and women. Male teachers reported more stress than their female teachers did. There are also significant differences between teachers of different ages

The Effects of Stress on Teachers

Khan, Aqeel & Riaz (2014) argued that job stress has a significant impact on job attitudes, self-confidence, dissatisfaction with life and the upswing in turnover intentions. Moreover, they claimed that stress is related to some psychological problems such as anxiety, low self-esteem and motivation, mood variations. Which consequently decline the job performance; job satisfaction and turnover intentions. High amount of stress results dissatisfaction with the job and low job performance (Khan, Aqeel & Riaz ,2014).

Hussian (2010) referred to stress as an 'occupational hazard' for professionals including teachers. He also argues that the effects of stress in general result in three ways – physical effects psychological effects and behavioral effects. Therefore, he addressed teacher stress problems like extra-organizational issues which have a wide range of impacts on teaches such as anger, increased heart rate, feelings of panic, insomnia, staff frustration, irritability, increased, depression, anxiety and apathy. In addition, major emotional impact which include the inability to concentrate and high levels of unproductivity along with psychosomatic reactions like stomach upset, pain and skin disorders. All of these impacts may be followed by wanting to leave the school, apathy, and displaced aggression on children or colleagues. Moreover, stress was found to have impact on teachers' health, well-being and performance (Hussain, 2010).

Teacher's Responses to Stress

As was mentioned before, the response to stress is related to the individual himself. Therefore, teachers have varied responses to stress. Steyn & Kamper (2006) have presented various models for responses to stress. The first model was the *Stimulus-based model of stress*: According to this model stress is an external condition of the environment which has a disruptive influence on the individual. Moreover, the load or demand placed upon the individuals (i.e. stressors) exceeds his/ her ability to cope or adapt to it. Teachers are viewed as passive recipients (Steyn& Kamper ,2006).

Figure : Stimulus-based model of stress
adpated from: Steyn, G. M. & Kamper, G. D. (2006)

The second model was the response-based model of stress: according to this model stress is defined in term of the individual's response to a threatening or disturbing stimulus. The main focus in this model is on physiological, psychological and behavioral responses to stress. According to this model teachers are passive recipients who are pressurized by resulting stress (Steyn& Kamper ,2006).
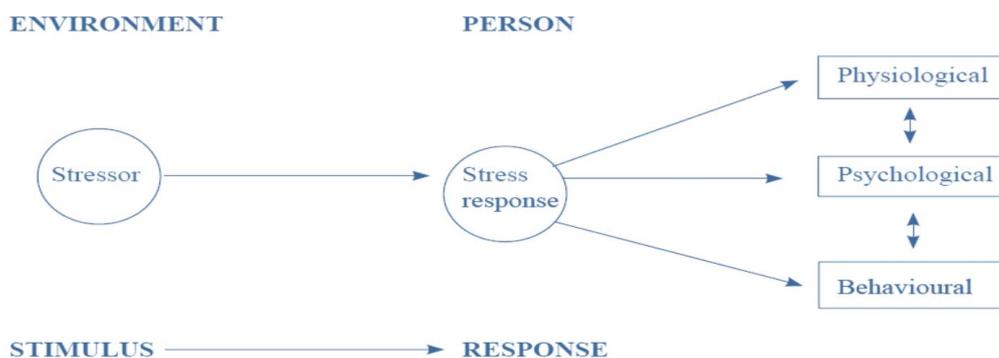

Figure: Response-based model of stress
adpated from: Steyn, G. M. & Kamper, G. D. (2006)

The third model was the interactional and transactional models of stress: According to this model, stress is an individual phenomenon which is both interactive and situational. This means that different people respond differently to the same situation. According to this approach, stress is embedded in the interrelationship

between stressor, the individual's perception of the situation and the individual's subjective responses. The individual in this approach is active, he /she determines the coping resources (Steyn & Kamper,2006).
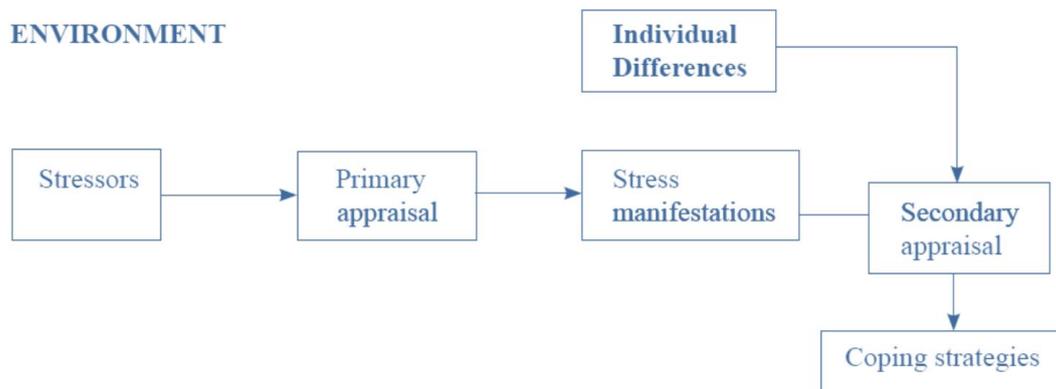
Figure: Interactional and transactional models of stress
adpated from: Steyn, G. M. & Kamper, G. D. (2006)

Coping Strategies

Zedan and Bitar (2013) defined coping as "the effort to control situations of harm or any kind of challenge when automatic reaction is not possible. Coping does not require success but only effort, and forms the link between environmental stress and adjustment of the individual. "In order to deal with the stressful nature of the teacher's job, which does not end when they come home, they have to adopt strategies of coping and adjustment. If the ability to cope is low or dependent only on basic and not well-developed coping strategies, this might lead to negative emotional reactions and burnout among teachers.

Zedan and Bitar suggested some useful coping strategies on the individual level. They claimed that the best way to overcome stress is to adopt coping strategies such as ensuring a healthy family life, supportive individuals, ensuring a good understanding of the material one has have to teach, learning how to control one's emotions, seeing the humor in the situation and resting after work (Zedan & Bitar ,2013).On the organizational level, they have also suggested means that the schools and authorities should take, according to the views of the teachers. These are lessening the workload, acquiring professional advice and raising salaries.

Zedan and Bitar (2013) also mentioned two categories of coping strategies. The first is active coping strategies which includes cognitive strategies (such as changes in perspective, imposing self-control and rational distancing of oneself), behavioral strategies (such as determining borderlines to the job, requesting advice from others

and engaging in relaxation exercises) and emotional strategies (such as remaining calm and quiet and thinking positively). The second is passive coping strategies such as resignation, drinking, wishful thinking, and avoidance, which are characterized by a lack of engagement with the stressful event (Zedan & Bitar ,2013).

The intervention programs:

A mindfulness-based intervention program was developed for school teachers in this study and was implemented by five school principals themselves by conducting sessions for teachers in the intervention group in each school. The total sample for intervention program was 70 teachers (14 teachers per school). The goal of the intervention program was to increase teachers' resilience and awareness in order to manage and lower teachers' stress and burnout levels in the primary schools. The principals conducted three sessions for the intervention program for a period of three weeks and the topics covered included skills on emotional instruction, practices on stress reduction, and compassion practices. The intervention program areas and timeline were adopted from Mahfouz (2018).

Sessions for the intervention program were conducted after the involvement of teachers in the survey where data on their baseline level of teacher stress and burnout were measured. After the intervention program, their level of teacher stress and burnout was examined and tests conducted to compare baseline teacher stress and burnout levels at the beginning of the study before the intervention program. The school teachers from the schools involved in the intervention program were classified as members of the intervention group. On the other hand, the school teachers whose schools were not involved in the intervention program were classified as members of the control group.

Impact of intervention program on teachers' wellbeing

The impact of the intervention program was tested among those who received the intervention and among those who did not receive the intervention to find out whether teachers' stress and burnout levels had decreased after attending sessions on resilience and awareness during the intervention. Outcomes of the test was interpreted to address the fourth research question:

RQ4: Is there a significant difference between teachers' tress and burnout levels before and after the intervention program?

In particular, hypothesis 1 was developed in line with this research question as follows:

H1o: There is no difference in the mean of teachers' tress and burnout levels among the Arab Israeli teachers in secular government primary schools before the intervention and after the intervention program

H1a: There is a significant difference in the mean of teachers' tress and burnout level among the Arab Israeli teachers in secular government primary schools before the intervention and after the intervention program

Teachers' stress and burnout levels at pretest and posttest among intervention group (n = 70)

Results from the paired sample t-tests reveal that the mean of teacher stress and burnout levels among Arab Israeli teachers in the intervention group before the intervention was 4.3036 (Std. Deviation =.655) which significantly reduced to 2.889 (Std. Deviation = .8739) after the intervention, t (69) = 24.394, p<0.00 (Table 33 and 34). The null hypothesis that there is no difference in the mean of teachers' tress and burnout levels among the Arab Israeli teachers in secular government primary schools before the intervention and after the intervention program was rejected.

Table: Paired Samples Statistics for intervention group (pretest and posttest)

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Before intervention	4.3036	70	.65510	.07830
	After Intervention	2.8893	70	.87398	.10446

Table: Paired Samples Test for intervention group (pretest and posttest)

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences							Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error Mean	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	t	df	
Pair 1 Before intervention - After Intervention	1.41429	.48508	.05798	1.29862	1.52995	24.394	69	<.001

Teachers' stress and burnout levels at pretest and posttest among control group (n = 71)

Results from the paired sample t-tests reveal that the mean of teacher stress and burnout levels among Arab Israeli teachers in the control group before the intervention was 4.4507 (Std. Deviation =.6500) did not significantly reduce after the intervention (mean = 4.295 (Std. Deviation = .928), t(70) = 1.597, p = .115 (Table 35 and 36).

Table: Paired Samples Statistics for control group (pretest and posttest)

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Before intervention	4.4507	71	.65003	.07714
	After Intervention	4.2958	71	.92805	.11014

Table: Paired Samples Test, control group (pretest and posttest)

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Before intervention - After Intervention	.15493	.81763	.09703	-.03860	.34846	1.597	70	.115

Discussion:

The objective was to determine whether conducting an intervention program increased or reduced teachers' tress and burnout levels. To achieve this objective, FDGs with teachers was conducted and signals from the qualitative results suggested that teachers were overloaded, have high workload and generally having high teacher stress and burnout. High stress levels were also confirmed by the quantitative results which conform to the reports in past studies by Saaranen et al. (2007) that teaching profession is characterized by high stress levels. Furthermore, stress experienced by teachers has detrimental impacts on teachers' psychological and physical health. Any mismatch

between school values and teacher's core values can result in stress among teachers and burnout. Another reason for high stress among teachers is that regulations from government may incorporate their unrealistic expectations in such school regulations. Secondly, principals are held responsible by the school board for implementing government regulations as well as local school expectations. Such increased responsibilities and complexity for principals can result in stress that they can pass to teachers and other school personnel by overworking them to achieve the unrealistic expectations. The wellbeing of the teachers can hence be negatively affected.

In addition, an intervention program was developed and sessions conducted by school principals in their respective schools then teacher stress and burnout measured after the intervention and compared to levels before intervention program. Among the intervention group (n = 70), teacher stress and burnout levels before the intervention was 4.3036 which significantly reduced to 2.889 after the intervention (p<0.00). These results led to rejection of null hypothesis that there is no difference in the mean of teachers' tress and burnout levels among the Arab Israeli teachers in secular government primary schools before the intervention and after the intervention program. The intervention program can hence be adopted in the schools to improve the wellbeing among teachers.

Finally, the study findings provide very significant and important information on ways that Arab Israeli teachers' wellbeing can be improved in the secular government primary schools in Israel through leadership styles and intervention program. Hence, school principals must work towards improving teacher wellbeing. Policy makers can use the findings that intervention program can lower school teachers' tress and burnout levels. The study contributes to literature on teacher wellbeing and principal leadership.

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