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## **A SELF – ASSESSMENT OF THE PROFESSIONAL STRESS AMONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the different sources of stress among elementary school teachers in Metro Manila. One hundred ninety one (191) teachers were randomly chosen both from the private and public schools. A survey questionnaire was developed to gather the respondents' answer on stress. Data were analysed using SPSS software. Percentages, Means, T-test, One-way ANOVA and Correlation, Post-Hoc tests were used. This study reports that of the four sources of stress identified, the pupils' behaviour and achievement recorded a significant difference in terms of age, gender, number of years of teaching experience and type of school (either public or private schools). It is recommended, therefore, for teachers to be given in-service trainings on behaviour management and classroom discipline of students. This would enable the teachers to be prepared in dealing with students' misbehaviour in their classes, and in turn be able to focus on class instruction to improve achievement. For future researches, a more objective measure is necessary to be used in this area to provide an objective parameter in measuring stress on elementary public school teachers rather than relying on self – assessment.

**Key words:** professional stress; elementary school teachers; self–assessment

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Professional stress is stress experienced at the place of work. Normally, it appears in all organization and affects all of its members. Currently, the work of teachers is considered as one of the high stress social profession since it involves close relationship with other people, requires speed in decision making, and the decisions taken might have a serious economic, social or other impact on the lives of those involved (Guglielmi and Tatrow 1998; Kantas 1995; Kyriacou 2001 cited in Papastylianou, et al., 2009). Since the working environment is usually stress-provoking (Sveindottir , 2007 in Samad, et al., 2011), teachers usually experience negative emotions such as fear and anxiety, which are related to various psychological, physiological, and behavioural factors and are caused by teachers' perception of their job situation (Papastylianou, Kaila, and Polychronopoulos, 2009). Oftentimes, the quantity of work rather than its quality had become a source of stress for teachers (Sliskovic and Sersic, 2011). Common causes as identified by Papastylianou, Kaila and Polychronopoulos (2009) would include work pressure job conditions, the ambiguities and conflicts of the educational role resulting from its complexity and from the administration's conflicting demands, pressure exercised by educational leadership, professional growth, lack of resources, poor professional

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relations with colleagues, low pay, unacceptable student behaviour, relations with the students' parents, teachers' expectations and lack of communication.

The concept of stress has its theoretical roots from the work of Holroyd and Lazarus (1982) in Fiedler, et al. (2007) who provided a commonly accepted definition of stress as a situation that exists when "environmental and /or internal demands tax or exceed the individual's resources for managing them." Hence, stress is considered as a relational concept, i.e., stress results out of the relationship between the individual and their environment.

For the purpose of this study, the main research question focus on sources of stress among elementary public school teachers. Specifically, the research aims to determine if there a significant difference in the sources of stress among elementary school teachers when classified according to factors of age, gender, number of years of teaching experience, educational qualifications and type of school (public or private education institutions).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

For this study the researchers developed a survey questionnaire which was given to elementary school teachers in Metro Manila both from the public and the private educational institutions. Of the 500 questionnaires sent out to be answered, only 191 questionnaires were returned.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of questions grouped around the socio – demographic profile of the respondents such as gender, age, marital status, years of teaching experience, educational attainment, and whether they teach in the public or private schools. The second part of the questionnaire included items related to teachers' professional stress. The research instrument was a five (5) point Likert – scale that measured teachers professional stress levels. The stress levels were divided into four (4) areas namely: Pupil's Behavior and Achievement, Professional Demands and Responsibility, School Management, and Time Pressure.

The score values converted into levels of stress were: 5 for Very Stressful (VS), 4 for Much Stressful (MuS), 3 for Moderately Stressful (MoS), 2 for Fairly Stressful (FS) and 1 for Not Stressful (NS). . The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field of special education. The scores were converted to mean scores and given the corresponding values as follows:

4.21-5.00	–	Very Stressful (VS)
3.41-4.20	–	Much Stressful (MuS)
2.61-3.40	–	Moderately Stressful (MoS)
1.80-2.60	–	Fairly Stressful (FS)
1.00-1.79	–	Not Stressful (NS)



The authors used SPSS software to analyse relationships and differences between variables. Specific descriptive analyses to provide descriptions of the data were utilized such as means and percentages. Inferential statistical tools used included *t* – Test, ANOVA and Correlation. Post hoc analysis was conducted using Tukey’s HSD test. For qualitative data analyses, themes and concepts were developed from the answers given by the respondents.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the demographic profiles of the respondents in the study. For gender, there were 160 (83.77%) female teachers and 31 (16.23%) males. Clearly, more females participated in the study than the male teachers. The disparity is a reflection of the reality that in the Philippines, teaching is a female dominated profession. As to the type of school of the respondents whether they teach in the public schools or private institutions, a total of 107 (56.02%) teachers teach in the public schools whereas 84 (43.98%) teach in the private educational institutions. Though the selection and the classification of schools into private and public were considered, little more teachers in the public schools participated in the study. However, the difference may not significantly affect the outcome of the study. As regards teaching experience, 52 (27.23%) of the respondents have been teaching from 1 to 4 years whereas, 71 (37.17%) of the respondents were teaching from 5 to 10 years already. Only 7 (3.66%) and 6 (3.14%) of the teacher – respondents had the teaching experience of between 21 to 30 years and over 31 years respectively. Finally, 139 (72.77%) of the respondents finished only a bachelor’s degree in education while 51 (26.70%) finished their master’s degree. Only 1 respondent (.53%) was able to finish her doctorate degree in education. This is also supported by her position being a master teacher in her assigned school.

Table 1. Study Participants

Demographic Factors	Subgroups	n	%
Gender	Males	31	16.23
	Females	160	83.77
Type of school	Private	84	43.98
	Public	107	56.02
No. of Years of Teaching Experience	1 – 4 years	52	27.23
	5 – 10	71	37.17
	11 -20	55	28.80
	21 – 30	7	3.66
	31 above	6	3.14
Educational Qualification	Bachelor’s degree	139	72.77
	MA	51	26.70
	PhD	1	0.53

As a whole teachers found themselves to be moderately stressful as shown in Table 2. However, of the four identified sources of stress, Professional Demands and Responsibility had the lowest mean score of 2.61, while Time Pressure had the highest mean score at 3.30.

Table 2. Levels of Stress of Teachers

Source of Stress	Mean	Description
Pupil's Behavior and Achievement	2.76	Moderately Stressful
Professional Demands and Responsibility	2.61	Moderately Stressful
School Management	2.82	Moderately Stressful
Time Pressure	3.30	Moderately Stressful
AVERAGE	2.88	Moderately Stressful

Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of the responses when classified according to values assigned. As reflected, most of the respondents experienced moderate stress both in Pupils' Behaviour and Achievement (42.93%) and Professional Demands and Responsibility (47.64%). On the other hand, in School Management, most of the teacher respondents experienced fairly stressful situations in their work, although its difference with those who experienced moderate stress is very minimal. Finally, most of the respondents experienced much stress in Time Pressure (42.40%). This implies that the workload given to teachers and the corresponding deadlines given provide stress to their profession.

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of the Corresponding Values of the Respondents

Sources of Stress	NS(%)	FS(%)	MoS(%)	MuS(%)	VS(5)
Pupil's Behavior and Achievement	12(6.28)	66(34.55)	82(42.93)	27(14.14)	4(2.10)
Professional Demands and Responsibility	19(9.95)	62(32.46)	91(47.64)	18(9.42)	1(0.52)
School Management	18(9.42)	63(32.98)	62(32.46)	44(23.04)	4(2.10)
Time Pressure	8(4.19)	30(15.71)	55(28.79)	81(42.40)	17(8.90)

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine the significant difference between age and the different identified sources of stress. Results of the findings indicate that age is statistically significant only for stress due to Pupils' Behaviour and Achievement,  $F(36, 128) = 2.288, p = .00$ . The results of the study is consistent to the findings of Samad, Hashim, Moin, and Abdullah (2010) which reported that student misbehaviour was a main stressor among teachers. Papastylianon, Kaila and Polychronopoulos (2009) also reported unacceptable student behaviour as a source of stress among teachers.

Furthermore, to test the relationship of variables, Age was subjected to Pearson Correlation Coefficient. There were negative correlations in all the identified sources of stress. Significant correlations were recorded for pupil's behaviour and achievement ( $r = -0.290, p < 0.01$ ) and for professional demands and responsibility ( $r = -0.172, p < 0.05$ ). These imply that as the pupil's misbehave in their classes, the younger teachers are more negatively affected than the older teachers. Similarly, younger teachers are also negatively affected by factors or situations arising from their professional demands and responsibility. Since professional demands and responsibility include categories on recognition of the teaching profession (e.g. "I feel stressed when people regard a low status to teaching profession"), the statistically significant result of the study validates the common belief that teachers regard their profession highly and feels insulted when other people look down on their profession.



Qualitative data gathered from the respondents support the result that students' behaviour is a source of stress among teachers. When the teachers were asked, "*What do you consider as the most stressful situation in your teaching profession?*" 82 of the 191 teacher – respondents stated that students' behaviour is their number source of stress. As mentioned by one respondent: "Maintaining class discipline especially among difficult students is a challenge." Another teacher is quoted saying: "what makes me stressed is when students do not listen to the teacher and are very impolite. In some instances they are busy playing with their cell phones."

Aside from students' behaviour, parents' participation in their children's education is also considered a stress among teachers. Given the same question stated above, 47 out of 191 teachers mentioned that dealing with uncooperative, demanding, or indifferent parents is a source of stress. As the following respondents said: "I fell stressed when parents blame the teachers for their child's failure, it is so difficult when parents are blind to their own faults and inadequacies; paying the tuition means leaving all the obligations of educating their children on the shoulders of the teachers." Another teacher commented: "The parents do not cooperate with school work. There are instances that some parents depends too much with the teachers. They do not support their child when it comes to after school work and does not show much concern with school activities." Finally, another teacher said: "Parents depend too much on the teachers. They don't cooperate and mostly leave the obligations to us."

T-test was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in the identified sources of stress with reference to gender. Statistical significant gender difference was recorded only for pupils' behaviour and achievement ( $p = 0.019$ ). This indicates the difference between male and female elementary school teachers' self-assessment of professional stress. This seem to support the findings of the study of Sliskovic and Sersic (2011) which revealed that women on average reported greater exposure to stress at work. Likewise, Sabanci (2011) revealed that women reported higher level stress than men.

Another one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine the relationship between the number of years of teaching experience and sources of stress. Results reveal statistical significant difference only in Pupil's Behavior and Achievement  $F(4,186) = 3.243, p = .013$ . Post hoc comparison using Tukey's HSD Test indicated that the significant differences were in the 1 – 4 years and 21 – 30 years of teaching experience respectively. The results indicate that the group 1 – 4 years needs more training in handling pupil's behaviour inside the classroom. This can be attributed to the lack of actual classroom experience as compared to any other groups in the study.

Furthermore, a correlation analysis was done to measure the relationship between the variable, the number of years of teaching experience and the sources of stress. Results of the study reveal that only the Pupil's Behaviour and Achievement had a statistically significant correlation with the length of teaching experiences of the respondents ( $r = -0.178, p < .05$ ). Again, the results reveal that respondents with less number of teaching experiences are negatively affected by their pupil's misbehaviour. This supports Sabanci's (2011) report that teachers with 11 to 15 years of work experience have higher levels of stress as compared to those who worked for 16 to 20 years and 21 years and more.



Results from a one-way ANOVA revealed no statistical significant differences between those respondents who obtained only baccalaureate degree or Master's degree or with a PhD. This means that the stress experienced by teachers is not influenced or affected by level of their education. The result is similar to the report of Samad, Hashim, Moin, and Abdullah (2010); Sabanci (2011) which revealed that there is no significant association between stress and educational level.

Finally, another T-test between sources of stress and the type of school was conducted. Statistically significant result was recorded only in Pupil's Behaviour and Achievement ( $p = 0.00$ ). This implies that public school and private school teachers' reaction of stress caused by the pupils' behaviour and achievement is statistically different. This may be caused by the fact that the social status of students in their classes influences the teachers' reaction. As observed, students in the private schools are socio – economically affluent and sometimes teachers are mandated by their schools as regards to their reaction on their students' behaviour. On the other hand, teachers in the public schools often have a free hand in imposing certain disciplinary actions to their students who misbehave in class. Oftentimes public school teachers' reaction to students' misbehaviour in class are only regulated by the law and not by the school itself unlike in private institutions.

The result about significant difference among public school teachers and private school teachers can be echoed in the following comments made by teachers: "I feel so stressed during PAASCU accreditation. The administration demands so much, and we have to submit a lot of paper works aside from teaching and disciplining our students." Another teacher said: "Parents in the private schools are so demanding that they are my cause of stress." Also another teacher said, "The paper works assigned to us are a cause of stress, I do not know if the public school teachers are also like us."

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This quantitative study indicates that students' behaviour and achievement is the primary source of stress among elementary public school teachers. This is affected by factors of age, gender, number of years of teaching experience and type of school.

If we are to reduce the stress experienced by teachers in their profession, it is necessary that they be provided with greater support. Support is needed in all aspects of their carrying of duties and obligations. Since it is very clear that the pupils' behaviour and achievement is the primary cause of stress among teachers it is but imperative that these teachers be given in – service trainings on behaviour management and classroom discipline of students. This would enable the teachers to be prepared in dealing with students' misbehaviour in their classes. Further, since stress is highly related to self-esteem (Wangberg, 1982), it is imperative that they be provided opportunities for professional growth. This can be done by providing them experiences that can improve their self – esteem either by improving their teaching competence, or by giving them some necessary administrative support in their

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performance of duties. Finally, teachers should also need to take time off. This would mean that aside from their primary role which is to teach, there should be a reduction of additional responsibility assigned to them. After all like any other professionals they also deserve a break.

For future researches, a more objective measure is necessary to be used in the future researches in this area to provide an objective parameter in measuring stress on elementary public school teachers rather than relying on self-assessment.

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