



Strategies to Cope with Teachers' Stress During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic: A South Africa Case Study

Thanduxolo Nomtshongwana¹ , Andrea Mqondiso Buka¹  and Nozuko Nqabeni¹ 

¹ Faculty of Educational Sciences, Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on how teachers are coping with stress in their schools during and after COVID-19. Teachers' work by nature is stressful having to deal with various aspects such as ensuring that lesson notes are completed, students are performing as they should, and handling paperwork. This is combined with the lack of necessary resources to work efficiently. In their line of duty, teachers also face the dilemma of handling problematic behaviours of certain learners and there is a lot of work that must be done to protect teachers. The study adopted an interpretivism paradigm using the Social Cognitive Theory in which thematically analysed data was collected through interviews from 15 purposely selected participants from Chris Hani East Education in South Africa (CHEDE). The analysis of data revealed that learners are using drugs, which leads to a change in their behaviour at school, something that negatively affects the learning process and the teachers themselves. It also emerged from the data analysis that teachers have a lot of paperwork to deal with, with insufficient resources, teachers can use, especially during the time of COVID-19. This study found that teachers used WhatsApp groups, church services, and family support to cope with stress during COVID-19. The article recommends that the Department of Basic Education employs security measures to handle safety and protect students and teachers from the effect of illicit drug usage on the premises of schools which increases the stress levels of teachers. New programmes and policies must be formulated to equip students with enough knowledge about the danger of using drugs. The Department of Basic Education must also supply all schools with devices that can be used by teachers for online teaching and learning to facilitate learning.

Correspondence

Thanduxolo Nomtshongwana

Email: thanduxolon1@gmail.com

Publication History

Received 22nd December, 2022

Accepted 6th March, 2023

Published online 17th May, 2023

Keywords: *Teachers' Stress, Stressors, Anxiety, Burnout, Alarm, and Frustration*

INTRODUCTION

There has been considerable anxiety about COVID-19 because of its highly infectious nature. During the month of January 2020, WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak an international public health emergency, and on March 11, 2020, it was declared a global pandemic. The number of confirmed cases had risen to 83.42 million by December 31, and the number of deaths had risen to 1.82 million across 191 nations and regions. Many countries experienced an impact on their educational systems as a result of the pandemic, resulting in the adoption of other methods of providing education. As a result, teachers were under stress under COVID-19, since they were afraid of contracting COVID-19 as any other

person. Generally, when a person is stressed they feel overwhelmed or unable to cope with emotional or mental pressure. Teachers are likely to be crippled by the demands, pressures, and conditions they work under daily.¹ This may lead them to be demotivated and stressed out. Those who enter the teaching profession have high expectations of fulfilling the mission of educating students. After arriving in the schools, however, they discover that there are cases of violence in schools, staff burnout, teen pregnancy, and drug abuse. This issue is beyond the capacity of South Africa's education system to deal with now and in the future. In their line of work, teachers must also operate each day as a multitude of protagonists.² In carrying out their duties, teachers are likely to encounter certain situations that can negatively affect their performance and ultimately lead to exhaustion. As COVID-19 emerged in 2020, the problem became more serious. COVID-19 has since modelled significant difficulties for individuals and societies.³ The severity of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa has abated and learning and teaching have been disrupted in certain ways and teachers are trying to find ways to make the academic calendar operate as it did before. Government, school heads and teachers are also making efforts to ensure that everyone is on guard to prevent a reoccurrence and this sometimes causes stress.

With the partnership agreement signed between United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Southern African Development Community, state members are assured that their students will continue to receive a quality education. Educational paradigms are shifting. However, due to a lack of training, teachers have to adapt their teaching methods to online instruction. To make sure that online teaching and learning are fully integrated into the curriculum, they need to be planned, designed, tested, and implemented insufficient time.⁴

The authors believe that in deep rural primary schools like CHEDE, it was very difficult to implement online teaching because of these factors, different disciplines have different teaching methods and there is often no electricity, and many families cannot afford to buy smartphones and tablets, while many teachers are unaware of how to use online resources. As a result, teachers felt the strain and became exhausted due to these factors, which resulted in a serious impact on teaching and learning. Furthermore, teachers have no time to plan, prepare, and have a team of support resources to implement all these aspects effectively. This view is supported by Kajiita; Nomngcoyiya, and Kang'ethe, who maintained that even those teachers who are experts in online teaching and learning and can deliver high-quality results were not expected to succeed in the current COVID-19 crisis.⁵

Teachers in South Africa were also instructed to keep an eye on social distances after school started in March 2020 and to make sure that all students wore musk clothes during class time. Socially excluded people are more likely to experience depression, hopelessness, tension, and stress.⁶ Talidong and Toquero, MacIntyre and Gregersen and Mercer maintain that these changes were stressful and especially for teachers.⁷ The authors support these views that the strategies used to prevent or reduce

¹ Andrea Mqondiso Buka and Jacob Maisha Molepo, "A Psycho-Pedagogic Approach for Inclusive Classes in Disadvantaged Rural Primary Schools in South Africa: Advancing Teaching Practices," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 12, no. 1 (January 25, 2016): 38–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2016.11890410>.

² Jeff Sprenger, *Stress and Coping Behaviors among Primary School Teachers* (East Carolina University, 2011).

³ Rebecca J. Collie, "Perceived Social-Emotional Competence: A Multidimensional Examination and Links with Social-Emotional Motivation and Behaviors," *Learning and Instruction* 82 (December 2022): 101656, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2022.101656>.

⁴ Charles B Hodges et al., "The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning," *Educational Review*, 2020.

⁵ Robert Mutemi Kajiita, Thanduxolo Nomtshongwana, and Simon Murote Kang'ethe, "The 'Revolution' on Teaching and Learning: Implications of COVID-19 on Social Work Education in Institutions of Higher Learning in Africa," *African Journal of Social Work* 10, no. 3 (2020): 25–33.

⁶ Cuiyan Wang et al., "Immediate Psychological Responses and Associated Factors during the Initial Stage of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Epidemic among the General Population in China," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 5 (March 6, 2020): 1729, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17051729>.

⁷ Karen Joy B Talidong and Cathy Mae D Toquero, "Philippine Teachers' Practices to Deal with Anxiety amid COVID-19," *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 25, no. 6–7 (2020): 573–79; Peter D MacIntyre, Tammy Gregersen, and Sarah Mercer, "Language Teachers' Coping Strategies during the Covid-19 Conversion to Online Teaching: Correlations with Stress, Wellbeing and Negative Emotions," *System* 94 (2020): 102352; Konrad Kulikowski, Sylwia Przytuła, and Łukasz

COVID-19 among teachers and students, significantly increased teacher stress. Teachers' health can be seriously affected by stress. Teachers should take measures to minimize their stress levels. As well as negatively affecting their own wellbeing, the stress they experience could also negatively impact the learning environment, their families, and their relatives. The experiences of teachers with stress have long been a source of concern in many schools, especially in the primary schools in CHEDE. To contribute to the growing literature, this article examines teachers' stress coping strategies during and after COVID-19, particularly in the CHEDE in South Africa (SA). There have been no studies conducted before or after COVID-19. This paper thus sought to examine how primary school teachers in South African schools in the CHEDE cope with stress. To accomplish this, the following objectives were addressed: to determine the causes of teachers' stress and to identify the coping mechanisms teachers used to cope with stress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of Ross's article, the environment in which learning occurs has an important influence on the student's education process, and a positive teaching and learning environment facilitates the process.⁸ Teachers are crucial to the success of a school. It has been noted that issues such as ill-discipline or inadequate structures, learning and teaching may be affected directly

As Mtika states, many schools do not have the necessary structure or discipline to provide quality education around the world.⁹ A school may become a war zone, a spot for street fights, or a murder scene due to unhealthy relationships.¹⁰ The change that has taken place in South African (SA) education might be causing teachers' stress. The authors contend that teachers need to be more equipped to handle stress in school. The causes of teacher stress and the strategies to curb these stressors are discussed in subsequent sections.

Causes of Teachers Stress

Stress among teachers refers to any factor within the school environment that threatens their health or safety. Insufficient time, job instability, student indiscipline, and unfavorable working conditions are some of the factors that influence teachers' performance and stress at work.¹¹

According to Makhubu and Khoza, "scorching schools" don't deliver a good educational foundation.¹² Violence in schools is one main factor that causes teacher stress. In one incident, a child lost an ear and had a sharp object lodged in his back at a city school due to a gang war. Angie Motshekga, the Minister of Basic Education, also revealed that bullying is a problem faced by most students in South African schools, and there have been about 1 345 incidents of school violence recorded across nine provinces.¹³ Teachers are often physically attacked by their students, and students possess weapons at school which include pangas, and other firearms. Some schools of thought believe that teachers do not discipline these students because they are scared to do so. Teachers are anxious about teaching these learners because they are always worried that they will be attacked at any time.

Sułkowski, "E-learning? Never Again! On the Unintended Consequences of COVID-19 Forced E-learning on Academic Teacher Motivational Job Characteristics," *Higher Education Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (2022): 174–89.

⁸ Michael L Ross, "What Have We Learned about the Resource Curse?," *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015): 239–59.

⁹ Peter Mtika, "Trainee Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Practicum: Issues, Challenges, and New Possibilities," *Africa Education Review* 8, no. 3 (2011): 551–67.

¹⁰ Guadalupe Francia and Silvia Edling, "Children's Rights and Violence: A Case Analysis at a Swedish Boarding School," *Childhood* 24, no. 1 (February 24, 2017): 51–67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568216634063>.

¹¹ Jeffrey A LePine, Marcie A LePine, and Christine L Jackson, "Challenge and Hindrance Stress: Relationships with Exhaustion, Motivation to Learn, and Learning Performance.," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89, no. 5 (2004): 883.

¹² Ntando Makhubu, "Gang War at Pretoria School," IOL, 2013, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/gang-war-at-pretoria-school-1590396>; Amanda Khoza, "Burning Schools Undermines Right to Basic Education," SAHRC | News24, 2016, <https://www.news24.com/News24/burning-schools-undermines-right-to-basic-education-sahrc-20160505>.

¹³ Edwin Naidu, "Motshekga Reveals 1345 Hot Spots for School Violence," 2019, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/motshekga-reveals-1345-hot-spots-for-school-violence-33013557>.

The numerous hurdles that teachers confront daily may cause them to endure psychological issues. The contribution of teachers is the foundation of educational systems all around the world. Nadeem, et.al opine that it is impossible to deliver dynamic teaching without dynamic teachers.¹⁴ Hence, teaching and learning environments can impact how effective teachers are and how energetic they can be. Teachers and students need conducive teaching and learning environments where all systems and structures are under control so that it does not disturb the education timetable, thus leading to better performance of both the teacher and the learner. For example, it often happens that a teacher comes to school early to prepare to finish his/her work, but unfortunately, the Department of Education phones them to submit something with immediate effect and that disturbs their plans for the day and consequently starts to feel the strain. However, teacher stress in this study is any trademark inside the school climate that represents a danger to the teachers. Teachers can be affected by a type of aspects like work conditions, workload, the shortage of resources, and time shortages that can act as a stressor and hinder their ability to teach.

Another problem authors argue is that the outbreak of Covid-19 also made teachers stressed. The principal and deputy principal of Noninzi Luzipho Number One School in Uitenhage died of Covid-19 three days apart, which affected 960 students and 25 teachers.¹⁵ The authors believe that the outbreak of Covid-19 and the high rate of death caused fear in teachers, and this increased their stress levels during the opening of the schools.

Strategies used to Control Teachers' Stress

Kipps-Vaughan states that providing teacher wellness programs in educational settings is a helpful way to decrease teachers' stress, burnout, and absenteeism. Additionally, teachers will be more competent, happier, and capable of attending to the needs of students since they will be more self-efficacious, more satisfied with their jobs, and more comfortable in their classrooms.¹⁶ According to Cooley and Yovanoff, who studied physiological stress management mechanisms, the following are recommended: aerobic exercise (any activity that raises the heart rate, such as swimming or jogging), biofeedback (measurement and control of mind-body processes, as well as muscle relaxation), and progressive self-regulatory relaxation, which allows a person to reach a deep state of relaxation.¹⁷

As the Mayo Clinic Staff, points out, exercise can reduce stress hormone production. The benefits of exercise are numerous, including improving overall health and well-being, as well as reducing stress directly by increasing endorphin production (the brain's "feel good" neurotransmitters). In focusing on physical movement, stress is reduced, mental clarity is improved, and mild depression and anxiety symptoms are minimized.¹⁸

The right amount of sleep and healthy eating can reduce stress levels. To get enough sleep, the Mayo Clinic Staff recommended following these steps: Keeping up with a sleep schedule, managing diet and drinking habits, creating a bedtime routine, keeping the bedroom cool, dark, and quiet, limiting daytime naps, and including physical activity in daily routine.¹⁹

Teachers can employ a variety of proven effective stress reduction techniques, such as self-analysis, brain rewiring (turning cynicism around), examination, back massages, and exercise. A teacher may be able to turn chaos into knowledge. It is imperative to know what causes stress so teachers can employ their coping mechanisms. Stress causes excited reactions that lead to agitation

¹⁴ Mohammad Nadeem et al., "Teacher's Competencies and Factors Affecting the Performance of Female Teachers in Bahawalpur (Southern Punjab) Pakistan," *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 2, no. 19 (2011): 217–22.

¹⁵ Malibongwe Dayimani, "Principal, Deputy Die of Covid-19 at Eastern Cape School," *News24*, November 3, 2020, <https://www.news24.com/news24/SouthAfrica/News/principal-deputy-die-of-covid-19-at-eastern-cape-school-20201103>.

¹⁶ Debi Kipps-Vaughan, "Supporting Teachers through Stress Management," *The Education Digest* 79, no. 1 (2013): 43.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Cooley and Paul Yovanoff, "Supporting Professionals-at-Risk: Evaluating Interventions to Reduce Burnout and Improve Retention of Special Educators," *Exceptional Children* 62, no. 4 (1996): 336–55.

¹⁸ Mayo Clinic Staff, "Positive Thinking: Reduce Stress by Eliminating Negative Self-Talk," Mayo Clinic, February 3, 2022, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/positive-thinking/art-20043950>.

¹⁹ Mayo Clinic Staff, "Sleep Tips: 6 Steps to Better Sleep," Mayo Clinic, May 7, 2022, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/sleep/art-20048379>.

and impedes action. Teachers must realise the rewards their calling offers and put the necessary support systems in place to enrich the lives of the students who get to know themselves and discover more about their environment through learning.²⁰

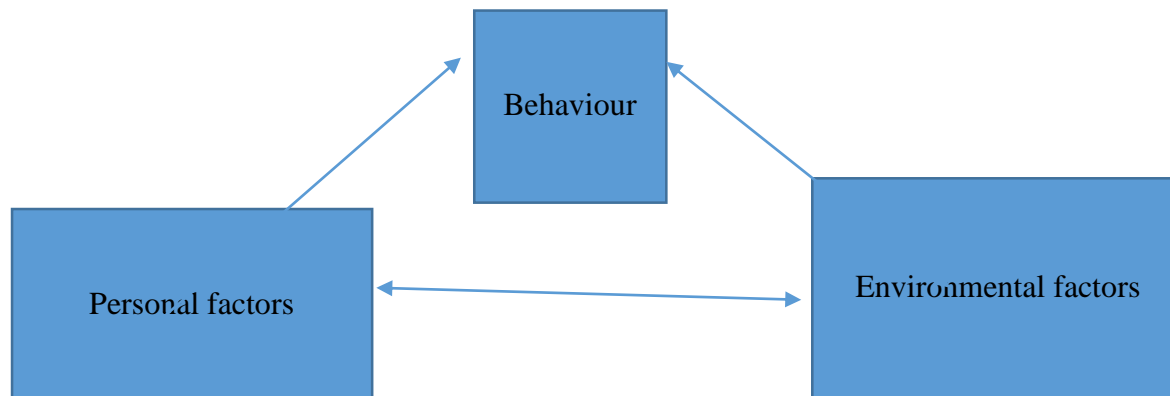
School Management must be aware of how they contribute to teacher stress and make the necessary changes.²¹ They may do this by using participatory leadership techniques and helping teachers when they ask for it. Teachers can teach or reinforce techniques that might enhance the school atmosphere during their in-service days to demonstrate their support such as stress management, conflict resolution, and communication skills, as well as effective parent-teacher communication techniques. Teachers should schedule time for professional development that deals with stress or provides techniques for maintaining inner calm in their teacher schedules.²² The lounges for teachers may be remodeled to provide educators with a quiet area.

Teachers may have negative emotional responses and burnout if their ability to deal with issues is limited or simply relies on fundamental coping mechanisms. Moreover, he proposes a number of strategies for dealing with stress that has been proven to improve the quality of life and reduce stress, including social interactions, self-care, relaxation, clubs, participation in sports, fun activities, a healthy diet, and relaxation techniques.²³

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Healthy communication is one of the advantages of the Social Cognitive Theory. In addition to explaining how people acquire and maintain behavioural patterns, Social Cognitive Intervention strategies are developed based on theory.²⁴ The environment has a significant impact on people's behavior. There is also a physical environment in addition to the social environment. Families, friends, and colleagues are all part of the social environment.

Conceptual Model



This research used the Social Cognitive Theory. In the reciprocal determinism model, people and their environments interact continuously, resulting in behavior, which in turn affects environments

²⁰ M. Israel, "From Chaos to Coherence: Managing Stress While Teaching," *Education World—Connecting Educators to What Works*, 2015.

²¹ Sharon K Parker, "Beyond Motivation: Job and Work Design for Development, Health, Ambidexterity, and More," *Annual Review of Psychology* 65 (2014): 661–91.

²² Israel, "From Chaos to Coherence: Managing Stress While Teaching."

²³ Parker, "Beyond Motivation: Job and Work Design for Development, Health, Ambidexterity, and More."

²⁴ Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control.*, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control.* (New York, NY, US: W H Freeman/Times Books/ Henry Holt & Co, 1997).

and their people.²⁵ This model's fundamental idea is reciprocal determinism. The Social Cognitive Theory guides the development of plans that impact people, environments, and behaviors. Conversely, when an individual adapts to these cognitive schemas, they lead to neutral or positive thoughts and emotions, for example, and healthy physiological processes and behaviors. This study uses a cognitive behavioral framework to study how teachers cope with stress during and after COVID-19.

METHODOLOGY

The authors used a case study design which means qualitative research methodology was chosen for this paper. Unlike quantitative research, using qualitative research helps to provide a broader perspective on the topic at hand and ignores quantitative information like the number of participants.²⁶ Qualitative research was used to explore practices and assumptions.²⁷ Through this methodology, teachers in the CHEDE in SA were able to express their experiences about the stressful working conditions they face. Among 14 different schools in the CHEDE in SA, one (1) Grade 7 Life Orientation (LO) teacher was selected using a purposeful sampling method. Due to their increased knowledge of the topic of investigation, LO teachers were chosen through a process of purposeful sampling. In social and educational research, it is often used for non-random sampling according to specific criteria.²⁸ Furthermore, Purposive Sampling was employed since participants were selected based on pre-selected criteria related to the research question under consideration. To fully comprehend the working circumstances of teachers in CHEDE in SA face daily, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with respondents. In this study, a research question was posed: What are the stress coping strategies before and during COVID-19 in CHEDE of the SA? Using qualitative data analysis techniques, the authors designed open-ended questions for teachers. Data composed was thematically analysed from raw facts and set into sectors and then coded for classifications.

Ethical Consideration

The authors, taking the responsibility to adhere to the ethical issues whilst conducting the research is of utmost importance. Walter Sisulu University provided ethical clearance. The approval from DBE, school principals and participants was granted. Individuals and groups develop ethical principles that are widely accepted after they are proposed.²⁹ Upon receiving permission from the schools, informed consent visits were conducted. For the study's purposes, the authors prioritized ethical issues during the data collection process. Keeping ethical standards refers to clarifying what's right and wrong, as well as acting on what's typically accepted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Factors that cause Teacher Stress

Learners' Lack of Motivation during Covid-19

It was revealed that student motivation is a problem that is connected to discipline. Participants who work in schools classified as disadvantaged once more described their struggles to deal with kids who lacked motivation, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants who taught at a range of schools also found it difficult to encourage kids to study and to cope with individuals who lacked that

²⁵ Bonni C Hodges and Donna M Videto, *Assessment and Planning in Health Programs* (Jones & Bartlett Publishers, 2010).

²⁶ J. G. Maree, "Career Construction Counseling with a Mid-career Black Man," *The Career Development Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2016): 20–34.

²⁷ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research*, vol. 108 (Pearson Custom Saddle River, NJ, USA, 2005); Jacobus G Maree, "Research on Life Design in (South) Africa: A Qualitative Analysis," *South African Journal of Psychology* 45, no. 3 (2015): 332–48.

²⁸ Jay L. Lebow et al., "Research on the Treatment of Couple Distress," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 38, no. 1 (January 2012): 145–68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2011.00249.x>.

²⁹ Thanduxolo Albert Nomtshongwana, "Stressful Experiences of Primary School Teachers in One Education District: A South African Case Study," PhD Thesis, Walter Sisulu University, 2019.

motivation. Participants said that since these pupils do not want to listen or engage in class, they cause problems that put the teachers under stress. The following grievances came from two of the teachers:

Participant C: "These are teenagers with lots of problems. They are not motivated to come to school and learn and they are lazy and do not do their homework".

Participant D: "Learners do not want to participate in class, and to do homework. It was worse after Covid-19. Learners were not motivated at all to participate in learning activities."

Lack of Resources in Schools

It was revealed that participants were stressed due to a lack of resources because they taught overcrowded classes and subjects they had never been trained to teach. The Department of Education also instructed them to switch from remote learning to online teaching, which made the situation worse. The following opinions came from one of the teachers:

Participant A: "You know, my buddy, that one of the reasons teachers today are under stress is because of a shortage of tools and crowded classrooms."

The situation was frustrating for teachers because most students did not have devices, and there were places where there was no network coverage. For teachers to be successful, they must understand more about the subjects they teach. The participating teachers went into further detail on the lack of resources, including labs, libraries, and educational tools that make teaching and learning easier. Employees who are not satisfied with their workplace do not generate the necessary level of the final output.

This finding confirms Ngidi and Sibiya's view that the lack of resources degrades a positive learning environment and prevents students from covering the syllabus.³⁰ The lack of classroom supplies and materials causes stress. In certain cases, teachers have to contribute to the maintenance of their classrooms with their own resources, and this results in added pressure.

According to surveys of teachers, physical characteristics of an organisation are the core "predictor of school teacher turnover."³¹ Some schools of thought claim that teachers are more likely to remain in their current positions over the long term if they feel that their schools have adequate resources and facilities. Insufficient resources provided by DBE cause teachers to be stressed.³²

Time Schedules for Co-Curricular Activities

Participants mentioned that a major source of stress is the time spent on co-curricular activities. They believed that the length of time required to complete the work assignment left teachers with little time to complete the curriculum let alone engage in other activities. This demonstrates how little time is available for teacher-student interaction. The following views came from three of the teachers:

Participant A: *It is the co-curriculum because it consumes a lot of our time for teaching and learning. This caused us to attempt to fill the time wasted during co-curriculum activities.*

Participant B: *...It is the music lessons because it takes a lot of time, since they start at 10 o'clock to practice music. After the music practice, you discover that these learners do not recall anything you have taught them.*

Participant C: *Because co-curricular events require a lot of time, there is not enough time to complete the work covered, which forces teachers to work overtime.*

When inexperienced teachers can't manage their tasks while handling paperwork and extracurricular obligations outside the classroom, they can be stressed.³³ Parent conferences, school

³⁰ David P Ngidi and Patrick T Sibaya, "Student Teacher Anxieties Related to Practice Teaching," *South African Journal of Education* 23, no. 1 (2003): 18–22.

³¹ Arnold B Bakker, Michael P Leiter, and Christina Maslach, *Burnout at Work: A Psychological Perspective* (Psychology Press, 2014).

³² P Govender and J Bornman, "Provinces Fail to Fund Poorest Pupils," *Sunday Times*, 2013, 4.

³³ Sheila Brown, *Understanding Youth and Crime: Listening to Youth?* (McGraw-Hill Education (UK), 2005).

surveillance, staff duties, office duties, classroom duties, cafeteria supervision, and a myriad of other activities that are given to teachers might be included in this list.

Minimal Learner Support from Parents

As part of their analysis, the teachers found that parents are a source of stress as well. This is because, for some parents, their children's education is not a priority to them, hence, they do not cooperate with teachers and are often absent from school programs and events. The high illiteracy rate among such parents coupled with the issue of poverty and drug misuse in the neighbourhood also add to teacher stress. The respondents mentioned that some parents lack the funds to purchase the gadgets and data necessary for their kids to engage in online studies post-COVID-19 made it extremely difficult when they were teaching online. These are some of the comments that were shared by the participating teachers:

Participant A: *The primary cause of our worry is that parents are uneducated, and as a result, they do not assist their kids with their homework at home or with school projects.*

Participant B: *These parents are ignorant, so they discourage their children from studying and don't participate in school activities or gatherings.*

Participant C: *Most Parents are illiterates. They do not assist the students or the school, and they do not worry about education.*

According to Maqoqa, a range of activities should be developed by the schools which aim at supporting children at home and at school and should include the parents.³⁴ The provision of a supportive atmosphere at home is one of a parent's responsibilities in the education of their children. Because healthy family interactions have a favorable effect on a learner's mind, the parent can do this by creating a nurturing environment.³⁵ Parental guidance must be fair yet forceful. When kids act inappropriately, parents may authoritatively discipline them.³⁶ Parents may assist in their children's education by participating in school activities and meeting their commitments, such as attending parent-teacher conferences.

This poor parental participation in their kids' learning is mostly because many parents are illiterate and unable to inspire their kids intellectually by reading to them or buying educational toys. According to Nomtshongwana, parents may have struggled academically in school, which causes them to provide a terrible example for their kids and frequently express their damaging and unfavorable attitudes regarding their education.³⁷

Conditions of Service of the Teachers

Remuneration and Funding

Participants mentioned the difficulty of working overtime (conducting lessons on Saturday mornings and in the afternoons after school hours) with no financial support. There have been several instances where the Department, and parents, have failed to recognize the effort put in by teachers. While education budgets have increased over the last decade, frameworks have not improved quality. The participants' stated:

Participant A: *It is the salary because even if you work overtime you don't get any cents from the Department of Basic Education.*

Participant B: *You sacrifice so much time and effort for nothing because overtime is not paid in education, for example, I come to school on Saturdays to complete the syllabus.*

³⁴ Maqoqa Thozama, "Experiences of Teachers in Large Classes in Selected Schools in the Libode Education District of South Africa" (Walter Sisulu University, 2017).

³⁵ Brown, *Understanding Youth and Crime: Listening to Youth?*

³⁶ Ruth Maclean and Abdi Latif Dahir, "Nigeria Responds to First Coronavirus Case in Sub-Saharan Africa," *The New York Times* 28 (2020).

³⁷ Nomtshongwana, "Stressful Experiences of Primary School Teachers in One Education District: A South African Case Study."

Participant D: *It contributes to our stress because even if you work hard, for example, by attending school in the morning and in the afternoon, you're not appreciated, and the Basic Department of Education doesn't give us money.*

The education budget however has to be returned to the National Office of Instruction (NDE), which distributes reserves to provinces if they do not use them by the end of the fiscal year. In this budget, the after-hours classes and the need for appreciation by the Division of Instruction are not considered, leading to feelings of frustration among the teachers because their efforts go unrecognized. These views confirm that of Nadeem, et. al., who opine that it is impossible to deliver dynamic teaching without dynamic teachers.³⁸ That the teaching and learning environments can impact how effective teachers are and how energetic they can be. Teachers and students need conducive teaching and learning environment where everything is under control so that it does not disturb the educational timetable, and to foster better performance of both the teacher and the learner.

Measures used to Combat Teacher-Related Stress

Engagement in Church Activities

The study revealed that most teachers attend church services in trying to overcome the stress they face in line with their jobs. As everyone was afraid of encountering Covid-19 during the pandemic, they kept their faith in prayer because the church was closed. The authors believe these teachers had no choice at the time because no one knew the drugs that could be used to treat Covid-19. Most teachers encountered difficulties at work during COVID-19, such as, rapidly transferring classroom learning to remote environments, difficulties in handling online software for distance learning, difficulties in maintaining a distinction between work and home, and challenges in differentiated learning for diverse students. The authors observed that these teachers decided to entrust their lives to the hands of God. The participants' views below confirm these factors:

Participant E: *When I am facing a crisis at work or hard times at home, I visit church since God gives me enough encouragement.*

Participant F: *(Inye nje into endiyenzayo kukuya eCaweni ukuzama ukuhlisa uxinezelelo endinalo) Going to church is the only thing I do to reduce stress.*

Family Support

The study found that other teachers have the full family support that kept them going during Covid-19. These teachers said their families always encouraged them to not give up during those difficult times because most of them are the breadwinners in their homes. The authors believe that home support is very important since it gives every individual a chance or energy to move to the next step and lowers stress levels. These are some of the comments that were shared by the participating teachers:

Participant A: *I have a supportive family that helps me feel empowered to face the day with strength and will assist me with everything I need, including the finance to go to work since our wages are not enough to support us.*

Participant H: *During and after Covid-19, I received support from my family so I was able to face the challenges in life.*

WhatsApp groups

The teachers revealed that to overcome their stress, they always logged on to WhatsApp groups and interact with others, which relieves stress. In their interactions, they realize that others have more problems than they have which give them relief. They also revealed that some groups on WhatsApp are designed to help those who are under stress while hiding their identity and these groups make their lives easier. The authors believe that WhatsApp groups are an important element where everyone can

³⁸ Nadeem et al., "Teacher's Competencies and Factors Affecting the Performance of Female Teachers in Bahawalpur (Southern Punjab) Pakistan."

get help with their problems and they encourage people to join these groups to overcome stress. Below are the views of participants:

Participant G: *During the first semester of our school, we formed a Whatsapp group where we met to encourage each other.*

Participant I: *I am a member of whatsapp groups in my area. Every time I feel exhausted and stressed, I log into these groups to read the difficulties other people face, and it has helped me to realize that many people are dealing with worse problems than myself. Being aware that someone has a greater problem than I does helps me destress.*

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies teachers used in coping with stress before and during COVID-19 in CHED. The study revealed that it is challenging to be a teacher due to the high incidence of drug use, aggression in the classroom, and vandalism and lack of parental support, lack of social support from the Department of Education. These situations largely caused stress. The study also showed that teachers used church activities, family and WhatsApp groups to deal with their stressed lives. South African teachers work in an environment where many issues affect their ability to teach students effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This paper revealed that student lack of motivation and ill-discipline is a problem that resulted in teachers being stressed. It was recommended that DBE train teachers on how to deal with these students who are not motivated and employ security to maintain safety in their schools.
2. It was also found that teachers were stressed due to a lack of resources because they taught overcrowded classes and subjects they had never been trained to teach. It is, therefore, recommended that the DBE provide sufficient resources in schools, like computers and tablets so that teachers can easily interact with students without facing stress. Teachers must also be properly trained on how to use technology in their schools.
3. Another major source of teachers' stress is the time spent on co-curricular activities leaving little time for school work. This paper recommends that DBE allow enough time for contact sessions between teachers and students. It must employ coaches who will conduct extra mural activities after working hours.
4. This paper also found that learners' parents are a source of stress and recommended that DBE commence campaigns that enlighten parents on their role in supporting their children and teachers during the time of teaching and learning.
5. The paper revealed that teachers found it challenging to work overtime (conducting lessons on Saturday mornings and afternoons) without any remuneration. It is recommended that the DBE employ assistant teachers who will help teachers on Saturdays, as well as during early morning and afternoon classes. The DBE should always be aware of the diligence of under-resourced teachers and strive to pay rural allowances to teachers working in rural areas.
6. It was also found that most teachers attend church services in trying to overcome the stress they face in their schools. This paper recommends that Christian religious studies must be introduced again in the school curriculum since teachers mentioned that their faith is the only hope to overcome stress.
7. The data analysis revealed that other teachers have the full family support that kept them going during Covid-19. It is therefore recommended that principals must encourage teachers to build good relationships with their families to get enough support during times of crisis. To resolve some of the issues faced by school teachers, the formation of social groups, especially on WhatsApp is recommended. Also, the Ministry of Basic Education must employ psychologists and social workers to manage these groups on WhatsApp to assist the teachers better.
8. It is also recommended that DBE organizes workshops to train teachers to deal with various problems. Examples are, high school dropout rates, heavy workloads, low status, and low pay, role overload, poor discipline, a lack of resources, time constraints, frequent meetings, large

class sizes, lack of assistance and unsupportive parents. The Department of Education has the duty to ensure that the welfare of teachers remains a focus of its policies.

CONCLUSION

This study has discussed the factors that cause stress in South African teachers and the strategies they have employed to cope with their stressors. Various recommendations have been provided to help in policy making. This would go a long way to protect the welfare of teachers as they perform their roles. The realities on the ground must not be sidelined by the Authorities. Action plans must be developed and enforced to protect the posterity of education in South Africa.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Thanduxolo Nomtshongwana is a Doctor Education student at the Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, Eastern Cape, South Africa. He is also a fulltime professional teacher in Department of Basic Education, Eastern Cape, South Africa. His research focuses on teachers' stress and education leadership and management.

Andrea Mqondiso Buka is currently a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Education in the continuing professional teacher development at Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, Eastern Cape, South Africa. His research focuses on inclusive education and educational management and policy, especial psychopedagogical research.

Nozuko Nqabeni is a Part-time Lecturer at Walter Sisulu University in the Department of Adult Foundation Phase and Educational Foundations, Faculty of Educational Sciences. She is currently enrolled for a PhD in Mathematics Education with the University of the Free State, South Africa.