

Teacher Stress: Implications for Teaching, Learning, and Coping

Briden Keay

Mount Saint Vincent University

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Lonnie and Barb Keay, and to my fiancé David. I would like to thank you for your unwavering support, advice, patience, and love. Without you, my journey would not have been as enjoyable or possible. Thank you for teaching me to have the courage to take the road less traveled; it has been a scenic and picturesque journey. Thank you and I love you.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the personal experiences of teachers who are new to the field along with teachers who are more experienced in the field with regard to their perceptions of stress in the school setting.

Ten teachers were interviewed to discuss their personal experiences with stress. The teachers worked in high schools in rural settings. Four teachers had less than ten years of experience teaching, while six had more than ten years of experience in the profession. Participants were interviewed and asked questions surrounding causes of stress and coping strategies. Participants were also asked to discuss their feelings toward support they receive for stress. The interviews were tape recorded and the tapes were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed using a descriptive, qualitative design.

Three main themes were identified throughout the interviews including, teacher's perceptions of stress, root causes of stress, and how teachers cope with and are supported when feeling stressed. The interviews indicated that there is an elevated amount of stress in the profession due to changing dynamics and work demands in the profession. Specifically, participants noted the lack of time, additional paper work, the emphasis on meeting provincial testing standards, lack of involvement in policy making, and lack of support in teaching students with diverse abilities as their main stressors. Furthermore, teachers emphasized concern regarding the lack of funding to support students with varying needs and felt that they could not properly support all students without additional programming supports and personnel. Differences in responses between newly experienced and experienced teachers were minimal; however, it was evident that there were slightly different perspectives in some areas. More specifically, newly experienced

teachers had slightly different views on causes and supports for stress. There were also many similarities in responses among participants indicating that stress is far reaching in the profession. Lack of supports and effective coping strategies for helping teachers deal with stress emerged as a significant issue.

Results of this study indicate that teacher stress is an area of concern that is in need of significant attention. By identifying causes of stress, it is hoped that supports can be utilized in a preventative manner to help teachers cope with stress on the job. Overall, responses from teachers indicated that in many cases they felt very vulnerable in their teaching roles. Perceived lack of services and supports coupled with other's attitudes regarding stress left them feeling exposed and unsupported. Given these feelings, it is important that all parties involved begin to collaborate in further efforts to create awareness and support for teacher stress concerns. Within this process, school psychologists can take on an active role by supporting students and teachers through direct and indirect servicing.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Stress in the workplace, while not a new phenomenon, appears to be on the increase and has evolved over time. Research interest in the effects of occupational stress has grown significantly over the past several years as evidenced by an increased number of studies conducted in the field. Organizations have reported substantial losses in terms of productivity, absenteeism, and illness due to the effects of stress on employees (Van Der Linde, 2000). This is a reality for most professions, including teaching. As far back as sixty years ago research was conducted on stress in the teaching profession (Hiebert, 1985). Today, teachers today are confronted with changing family dynamics, increased work demands and responsibilities, and changing academic and behavioral standards (Younghusband, 2003). These stressors, impact not only teachers, but also students and administrators. Absenteeism, decreased job satisfaction, and ill health are manifestations of stress experienced by individuals in the teaching profession (Borg & Riding, 1991). Teachers feel pressured to perform on a daily basis as their performance directly impacts their students. (Van Der Linde, 2000; Blase, 1986).

Research on teacher stress in the school setting is challenging because of the multifaceted nature of the profession as well as the internal and external variables that impact the individual teacher. Nevertheless, researchers continue to examine the incidence of stress in the teaching profession, the factors associated with it, and its far-reaching impact.

Improving our understanding of the causes of teacher-related stress may promote effective prevention and/or management. The causes of stress in teaching are endless and differ depending on the personality and coping style of each individual teacher. For example, Youngusband (2003), Hiebert, (1985), and Guglielmi & Tatrow (1998) note student attitudes, time management, workload, evaluation, and parent and administrative pressures as sources of stress. However, the use of individual coping strategies to combat and cope with stress influence the degree to which these factors will cause a stressful response.

“Stress” as a construct carries with it many connotations and perceptions resulting in a lack of a consistent definition. Stress has been defined in many ways, with most definitions derived from the work of Hans Selye, a pioneer in stress research. Selye defined stress as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made on it” (Selye, 1976). Similarly, Gold and Roth (1993), defined stress as either an external or internal response, or a combination of both. Furthermore, the manner in which an individual responds to a situation or stressor may influence the degree of stress that the individual internalizes or externalizes. Stress is seen as not only the cause and effect of external pressures on an individual; it is the response, the interpretation, and the interaction among these factors (Lazarus, 1999).

Research on coping appears to be inextricably linked to stress research. Lazarus (1999) praised the quantity of research in this area but criticized its quality. Methodological challenges are evident in this literature. Nevertheless, research in this area is argued to be the “most widely studied topic in all of contemporary psychology” (Hobfoll, Schwarzer, and Chon, 1998). Coping strategies and style are known to be

effective measures in combating stress. Much of this research is focused on helping teachers develop and maintain effective coping strategies in the classroom. Research results suggest that developing an effective and healthy coping style can help prevent the onset of stress, and in turn, decrease the chances of falling victim to its' effects (Somerfield & McCrae, 2000; Lazarus, 1966; Griffith, Steptoe, & Cropley, 1999).

B. Purpose and Aim

The complexity of stress in teaching is demonstrated by the explorations of many factors. To date, research has focused on the causes of stress in teaching at a general level of experience. There are few studies that closely examine teachers that are new to the field compared with teachers who have been teaching for a number of years. The purpose of the current study was to gain an understanding of the personal experiences of teachers who are new to the field along with teachers who are more experienced in the field with regard to their perceptions of stress in the school setting. The aim was to carefully identify patterns and themes that emerged in the interviews to note when and why certain stressors occurred and the mechanisms teachers have in place to deal with these stressors. Identifying stressors and recognizing the context in which these stressors occur may have implications for stress management.

C. Rationale for Current Study

As noted, existing literature focuses on the cause and effect of stress on teachers. Very few, if any studies, have specifically compared the perceptions of new teachers with those teachers who have been working in the profession for a long period of time. Findings in several studies suggest retention and recruitment of teachers is a vital issue

within the education system. Research is lacking in this particular area. To contribute to this research gap, the present study compared the perceptions and experiences of stress among teachers throughout different stages of a teaching career. By gaining an understanding of the differences between the perceptions and experiences of stress on the job, one would assume preventative strategies could be implemented earlier to reduce stress and its aforementioned repercussions. Increasing the current knowledge base surrounding teacher stress would be highly beneficial for not only teachers, but students and administrators as well. If it were known when stress is greatest in a teacher's career, then perhaps it would be better known when to intervene.

Identifying the type of stressor, how long stress lasts, and how intense the stress is will also promote effective intervention. Furthermore, identifying these factors of stress will benefit the students as well. The interactions between teachers and students are clearly influenced by stress; therefore identifying aspects of stress will help decrease stress and strengthen the interactions between students, teachers, and administrators. Recognizing when critical periods of stress occur in a teacher's career may also promote more timely and effective coping.

One may infer that teachers who are new to the profession would experience less stress on the job compared to teachers who have been exposed to the pressures of teaching for years. Everett-Turner (1984) deemed uncertainty in the demands of the profession as the major source of stress among teachers who are new to the profession (Hebert, 1985). It is also suggested that teachers who have had prolonged exposure to the stressors of the profession are more likely to burn out than a newly qualified teacher (Tye & O'Brien, 2002). It is also supported in the literature that newer teachers may be more

likely to leave the profession for other careers (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979). Another study indicated that teachers who have been teaching longer are often more tolerant of disruptive behavior in the classroom (Borg & Falzon, 1990), suggesting perhaps that newer teachers may find more sources of stress in the classroom.

Teachers may often view the school psychologist or school counselor as an ally. Individuals in such roles have a unique responsibility to teachers, administration, parents, and students to understand the demands on the job and in the classroom. Anticipating stress as an issue in the classroom for the teacher will aid support workers in taking a preventative approach as opposed to a remedial response.

D. Definition of Terms

Stress- For the purpose of this study teacher stress will be defined as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher” (Kyriacou, 2001). “Burnout” is another term that is frequently used to describe stress in the workplace. It is important to note that burnout is a term that is often used to describe the effects of stress. Guglielmi & Tatrow (1998) described these terms in their research by stating, “Although investigators seem to agree on what burnout is, they apparently have not reached the same consensus on what it is not.” For the purpose of this study the term burnout will not be used in place of stress to avoid a misunderstanding of the definition being examined.

Coping strategies- In psychology, **coping** is the process of managing taxing circumstances, expending effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to master, minimize, reduce or tolerate stress or conflict (Webster's Dictionary).

Experienced teacher- a tenure teaching who has been teaching for more than ten years in the school system.

Newly Experienced teacher- a teacher who has been teaching for less than ten years in the school system.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Introduction

In the literature review that follows, the prevalence of stress in teaching, issues surrounding the definition of stress, and some gaps and concerns with research in the area will be examined. The focal point of previous research on teacher stress has been identifying the main sources of stress in teaching. The three main research areas on teacher stress are: causes, effects, and coping abilities. Identifying the causes of stress is a critical step in developing appropriate and effective stress management. Understanding the implications and effects of stress on a teacher is also imperative when developing steps to combat its ill effects. As well, coping strategies and styles have been acknowledged as significant preventative measures in decreasing the impact of stress on the job. However, few research studies have addressed the impact of teaching experience on stress. This exploratory study examined the perceptions of teachers who were at different stages in their teaching careers, to better identify stressors so that needed supports can be made available at appropriate times during a teacher's career.

B. Reported Causes of Stress for Teachers

Results from a number of studies have illustrated that stress is highly prevalent among the teaching profession and continuing to grow (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). Although individuals may report sources of stress that are unique, there are in fact main sources of stress that have been consistently presented in the literature. Main causes of stress that have been reported include: teaching pupils with lack of motivation,

maintaining discipline, time and workload pressures, coping with change, evaluation, co-workers, status, administration, role conflict, and poor working conditions (Kyriacou, 2001). Not surprisingly, these stresses often lead to teacher burnout and eventually teachers leaving the profession. Stressors noted in the literature can be grouped into system and environmental causes and personal factors.

Factors in the work environment are identified in the literature. Tye and O'Brien (2002) surveyed 114 teachers who had been teaching for six to ten years and found that increased pressures of accountability and workload were the main reasons for leaving the profession or considering leaving the profession. Gold and Roth (1993) also identified burnout factors in teachers to include lack of social support, demographics, student violence, negative self-concept, administrative pressures, difficult parents, role conflict and ambiguity, and isolation. Hiebert (1985) reviewed Canadian research up to 1985 and found that in three studies (one in Quebec and two in Alberta) role overload was the number one source of teacher stress. Similarly, results of a study conducted in Manitoba demonstrated that interactions with administrators were the most common source of stress in teaching.

The findings from these four studies were derived from self-report questionnaires and interviews with large samples, the smallest being 957 respondents. Virtually every study reviewed herein touched on or focused on the causes and prevalence of teacher stress. Fuller (1969) identified common themes in the teacher stress literature despite reviewing research from differing populations. In his review of ten studies that spanned a thirty-six year time frame, it was found that classroom control, competency, student

discipline, and parent and administrative evaluations were reported to be the main sources of teacher stress.

Further causes that emerged in the literature fell under personal and internal factors. Individual characteristics such as gender, coping style, and locus of control all influence the ways in which stress is perceived and managed (Swortzel, 1999). Individual differences present significant challenges for researchers in the field, as it is virtually impossible to rule out internal characteristics that may or may not influence the onset of a stressful response. However, it is also possible to gain an awareness of the presence of these variables. Indeed, Lazarus (1999) noted that “work cannot be isolated from other aspects of a person’s life”, demonstrating the challenge of stress research in the workplace. The present study closely examined the individual’s length of time spent in the teaching profession and how this characteristic may influence stress on the job. Individual differences are a constant limitation and will be discussed further in the methodology of the study.

C. Effects of Stress on Teachers

The effects of stress on teachers have also been examined and categorized in the literature in terms of physical, psychological, personal, and student-related effects. Furthermore, efforts are under way to gain a better understanding of the long-term effects of stress on health. In an effort to strengthen such findings surrounding physical effects, van Dick & Wagner (2001) state that the long term negative effects of stress can include physiological, biochemical, and psychosomatic changes, leading to chronic illnesses such as coronary heart disease. Psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, exhaustion,

and headaches are just a few of the symptoms caused by stress (Farber, 1991). Personal and professional effects are also well documented. Guglielmi et.al (1998) also note the environmental effects that stress can have on the teachers' ability to attend to duties in the classroom. Teacher absenteeism often leads to a permanent absence from the job. Student-related effects are also recognized. Evidence suggests that teacher stress significantly impacts the students learning experience and interactions with teachers. Kyriacou (1987) also states that interactions with students may diminish along with job commitment if stress becomes a problem in the classroom.

The effects of stress not only impact the teacher and students but also the employer. In 1999, Canadian Mental Health reported costs of five billion dollars a year as a result of workplace stress and health related illnesses (Younghusband, Garlin, & Church, 2003). Implications for stress research are becoming more pertinent as industries continue to suffer financial and personnel losses.

An understanding of the physical and emotional effects of stress on teachers is somewhat lacking in the literature because of the overwhelming number of subjective studies that rely on retrospective reports. There are limited objective studies available that closely examine the immediate physical effects of stress (Vandenberghe, 1999). In a study conducted by Bishay (1996), teacher motivation and job satisfaction were measured using an experience sampling method. This method used an electronic device to page subjects five times per day for five weeks. Subjects were paged and were asked to fill out a questionnaire evaluating their stress level at that time. This method of research allows for reports of stress at the time of the onset, eliminating the drawbacks of retrospective designs. Similarly, in a time-use study commissioned by the Nova Scotia Teacher's

Union, researchers examined the relationship between time availability and increased demands placed on teachers in the province. A time-diary approach was used to evaluate demands placed on teachers. Findings of the study suggested Nova Scotia teachers find it difficult to complete their duties during a typical workday. The purpose of the study may have influenced or exaggerated the participants reports of time availability versus demands. However, it is clear that further research is needed in this area in order to gain a stronger understanding of the long-term and immediate effects of stress on teachers. Despite the lack of research in this particular area, there is undeniable evidence in stress research reporting the detrimental effects of stress on one's physical and mental health.

D. Coping/Stress Management

Coping with stress presents significant challenges. Researching coping strategies and studying the effects of stress management presents even greater challenges. A recurring criticism in the coping literature is the lack of process-oriented studies. Similar to stress research, coping research is often conducted using retrospective measures that fail to capture the process of coping. It is important to note that it is most often the perception of a situation, not the situation itself that causes a stressful response. One individual may perceive something as stressful, while another does not. It is the interaction between the interpretation, perception, and the response that create stress (Lazarus, 1999). Lazarus also states that "we should view stress, emotion, and coping as existing in a part-whole relationship." In "Stress and Emotion: A New Synthesis", Lazarus closely explores the entangled relationship between stress, emotion, and coping, and brings to light many of the issues surrounding stress, coping theory, and research.

In a review of literature on coping research, Somerfield & McCrae (2000) noted that coping research was described as “disappointing, tentative, modest, sterile, and trivial”. More specifically, Somerfield & McCrae (2000) point out the difficulty of separating predispositions from the individual. Furthermore, when studying stress in teachers, it is difficult to separate predispositions from the role of teacher.

Griffith, Steptoe, & Cropley (1999) studied the relationship between stress, psychological coping, and social support. In this particular study, questionnaires were administered to 780 primary and secondary teachers. Demographics that were considered in the study included age, gender, marital status, and number of children living at home. The Teacher Stress Inventory was used to assess the level of stress, a checklist measure was used to assess psychological coping, and work social support was also assessed using a measure by Unden, OrthGomer, and Elfosson. An interesting finding from this study suggests that teacher stress may be higher among younger female teachers than older males. The link between age, gender, and stress in teaching identified in this study highlights the importance of the proposed research question. Although the present study is examining teaching experience, age may correlate with experience in teaching. Limitations of the study by Griffith et.al (1999) are similar to limitations in many stress research studies including the use of one-time administered questionnaires and a population that may not allow for generalization of results. Despite these limitations, the results of the above study do suggest a link between perceptions of teacher stress and social support as a coping strategy.

In a related study Nagel & Brown (2003) proposes three main areas for managing and coping with teacher stress: acknowledging stress, using behavior modification

techniques, and communicating feelings of stress appropriately. The authors also imply that training mentor teachers on ways to properly model stress management to new teachers may help student teachers make the transition to the teaching profession. It was also noted that teaching effective stress management might help to reduce teacher attrition. Teaching behavior modification procedures is supported with substantial evidence in the literature, suggesting that certain techniques are more effective than others. Nagel et.al (2003) suggest that behavior modification strategies help teachers reach a state of “homeostasis”. Exercise, meditation, and creative problem solving are other techniques suggested to reduce the negative effects of stress. The authors also emphasize the importance of acknowledging the presence of stress in the profession and using appropriate ways to communicate strong feelings of stress.

Hepburn & Brown (2001) employed qualitative methodology to study the use of the term *stress* in teaching and the danger of abandoning organizational responsibility are closely examined. Interviews were conducted with a large sample of teachers and findings suggest that often times the onus is placed on the individual in the workplace, not the organization. Too often the responsibility is placed on the individual to cope with the high demands of teaching, while the organization remains stagnant and negligent. This study presents a noteworthy perspective on stress in teaching, emphasizing the need to change perspectives on how teacher stress is managed. Younghusband (2003) noted in her qualitative study using personal interviews to study stress in teachers in Newfoundland, that many teachers, including herself, were not exposed to proper stress management. She states in her study, “...in the 19 years I’ve been teaching I have never had any in-service or along the lines of how to handle stress.” She noted that many felt

ill prepared for the demands of the job and even less prepared to manage the stress on the job. The importance of coping and stress management is prevalent in the literature; however, it is also important to point out that stress management is not being given the attention it deserves in the schools. Perhaps further research should be conducted to examine the prevalence of promoting and teaching stress management to teachers in the schools.

Identifying ways in which school psychologists and counsellors can help teachers deal with stress in the workplace is also an area of interest in the literature. An article by Pelsma (2000) presents ways of providing a solution-focused approach to teachers when managing stress on the job. It is suggested that using a solution-focused approach may facilitate teachers in developing effective coping strategies while feeling in control of the environment in which they work. Pelsma (2000) proposes that school counsellors ask questions that allow teachers to reflect on their past experiences that have resulted in success. Using the aforementioned approach, teachers may develop a stronger sense of control and increase their self-confidence in drawing on past experiences.

The unique interaction between school psychologists and teachers is an area of research that deserves much attention. Educational psychologists are often called upon to provide professional support not only to students, but to teachers as well. Murphy & Claridge (2000) explored the distinctive relationship between teachers and educational psychologists by reviewing the delivery of stress management seminars in England. Steps involved in designing a stress management seminar for teachers are specifically noted in the study, including defining stress, identifying stress in oneself and others, teaching the long-term effects of stress, and educating teachers in developing strategies

that can be easily implemented on a daily basis. These steps were taken in seminars delivered in England and questionnaires were given out after each seminar to evaluate the effectiveness of the seminars. The authors concluded that the most important aspect of a stress management program is teaching techniques that will continue to be effective over a long period of time. Educational psychologists are not only a support for teachers dealing with stress they also aim to gain a better understanding of the demands placed on teachers.

In an effort to summarize the literature on coping research Lazarus (2000) provided a commentary on the state of the literature on stress and coping. Specifically, he comments on the quality of the research; stating that although questionnaires are the most prominently used research tools, there is a movement toward a multimethod approach. He also noted the importance of and increased use of longitudinal designs in studying coping and stress. Somerfield & McCrae (2000) also reviewed articles on teacher stress and concluded that there was a detachment of theory from practice. The authors point out the glaring gap between clinical application and research. It is also brought to the reader's attention that coping researchers have not presented clinicians with sufficiently convincing evidence to collaborate their efforts. As demonstrated in the previous findings, the criticism of research based solely on questionnaire results emerges and the search for clinically applicable information continues.

E. Summary

Most studies on teacher stress operate on the premise that teaching is stressful and attempt to determine the reasons why (Hiebert, 1985). Many studies have identified the

variables that influence teacher stress however very few directly examine teaching experience as an influential factor. One study identified the effect of age on stress in teaching, finding that teachers who have been in the profession for long periods of time were more likely to seek employment in less stressful working environments, whereas newer teachers are forced to find work in “less reputable areas” (Tellenback, Brenner, & Lofgren, 1983). However, very few studies directly compared the stressors and experiences of stress at different stages of a teacher’s career.

After reviewing much of the literature on teacher stress, the gap between clinical application and theory emerged as a major limitation. Developing an understanding of stress and coping strategies is the driving force behind much of the research; however, the evidence is not clinically relevant in most cases. There is a need for a shift in research methodology, which, according to Lazarus (2001), is slowly changing. The present study aims to use a qualitative approach that addresses this shift toward managing stress in a teaching environment.

Effective coping strategies have been identified in the literature; however, it is unknown whether or not these strategies are being used, implemented, and taught to teachers in schools. There are claims of stress management programs and policies, yet many reports indicate teachers are not given proper training in stress management and the term “stress” is deemed as an unspoken term on the job (Younghusband, 2003). The gap between theory and application in coping and stress management is also an area of noticeable deficiency in the literature.

An increasingly popular area of research addresses the effect of teacher stress on students and on classroom climate. Some studies, such as the one conducted by Nelson

et.al (2001), have examined the impact of teaching students with behavioral difficulties in the classroom but fewer studies have addressed the effects of teacher stress on the students. A shift in the research is beginning; however, further investigation in this area is needed.

Organizational responsibility for teacher stress is also an area of research that is beginning to grow; yet further investigation is needed. One of the reported causes of teacher stress is working with administration, therefore significant efforts should be put forth in order to manage this cause of stress for teachers. More often than not, teachers are being held responsible for facing immense workload demands, while the organization does not provide support needed to manage these demands. Taking a closer look at organizational pathology may strengthen the interaction between teachers and administration and further eliminate an unnecessary source of stress on the job.

Limitations of stress research are quite evident in the literature. The most prominent limitation is the use of one-time administered self-report questionnaires. The majority of the studies reviewed used self-reports or surveys. The retrospective reports often fail to capture the process of stress and its long-term effects. Lazarus (2001) comments on the need for more longitudinal studies on stress and praises the increase in these methods in the past few years. However, self-report questionnaires are often criticized for underreporting or over reporting stress on the job. Stress is a complex response that calls for a multifaceted examination of its role in teaching. Hundreds of variables may be present in the classroom that may or may not cause a teacher stress. The challenge is determining why some of these variables cause a stressful response in one teacher and not in another.

Researching stress in teaching presents several limitations and often overwhelming challenges; however, being able to identify these limitations while attempting to provide an accurate perspective of stress is more pragmatic. Stress research should attempt to capture the process of stress, not simply a snapshot of stress. Developing a strong understanding of the causes, the effects, and the interaction between the individual and the environment will only strengthen research in this area.

To summarize, it is clear that teaching is deemed a stressful occupation by researchers in the field. There is significant research supporting the causes and effects of stress. Coping research has determined a link between perceptions of stressful events and coping strategies. There is sufficient evidence maintaining the support for effective coping strategies; however, there is inadequate evidence of the use of stress management tools in the education system. The absence of a universal definition of stress in this field of research is a recurring and noteworthy challenge. Retention of teachers in the profession also emerged as a growing concern and ample evidence suggests that new teachers tend to drop out of the profession in the first 5 years of teaching. There is an overwhelming amount of research that examines several variables contributing to teacher stress.

The current study intended to focus on one variable that may or may not contribute to teacher stress: years of experience. Much of the literature suggests that teachers are more likely to leave the profession within the first five years of teaching. Gaining an understanding of stress throughout ones teaching career may lead to early prevention and management of stress. Much of the criticism of stress relates to its use of inadequate research tools. Therefore, in order to contribute to both substantive and

methodological gaps in this area of research, this study examined possible differences between stress in teachers who are new to the profession compared to more those who have been teaching for a number of years through qualitative research methods.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Qualitative research promotes exploring personal experience and allows findings to directly reflect the feelings and experiences of the participants. The current study examined personal experiences in teaching using in-depth semi-structured interviewing in order to gain an understanding of teacher's perceptions of stress. While quantitative measures are often used to evaluate how often someone experiences a type of stress, qualitative measures often extract the thinking behind these experiences. For this reason, I chose to use qualitative methodology.

A. Participants

Ten teachers working in high schools from rural communities were interviewed. In addition, teachers were grouped according to years of teaching experience. Grouping of experience was based on the following continuum: teachers with less than ten years of experience and teachers with more than ten years of experience.

B. Measures

i) Demographics Questionnaire- Participants were asked to fill out a demographics questionnaire that intended to gain information such as age, gender, years of experience, teacher certification level, and the setting in which they teach (Appendix A). The information obtained from this questionnaire is for categorizing purposes only and was not used for comparison of variables contributing to stress in teaching.

ii.) Interview Schedule- the author of this thesis developed an interview schedule to be used for the purpose of this study (Appendix B). The interview schedule was comprised of eight questions. Generally, the same questions were used for all participants. Issues addressed included participant's perceptions of stress, its causes and impact, how they cope with stress, and participant's perceptions of the role of experience in teacher stress.

C. Procedure

Upon receiving approval from Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board and a Nova Scotia School Board, permission to conduct interviews with teachers of local high schools was sought. (Appendix C). Visits to the schools were made to discuss the purpose of the study with potential participants and principals. A letter reiterating the details of the study as well as participant packages were handed out after speaking with staff. Packages were picked up approximately one week later at school offices. Upon receiving the consent forms participants were contacted by phone and asked if they were interesting in taking part in the study. All participants contacted agreed to take part in the study. Participants were then asked to set up a time and place, convenient for them, to conduct the interview.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the 10 participants. Each interview took approximately one hour and efforts were made to ensure the participants felt free to speak openly about their experiences as a teacher. The interviews were conducted at a time and in a place of the participant's choosing. The interviews were completed in person. Each interview was audiotaped and recorded on paper by the interviewer. Questions were open ended and the researcher encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences with stress in their profession (Appendix B). Efforts were

made to develop rapport and non-directive prompts were used to clarify answers, such as “tell me more.” Stoppages in the interviews were not anticipated; however, the participants were informed of their right to stop participation at any time. The interviewer avoided using prompts or comments that were leading. Typically, the questions were asked in order. There were no issues that occurred during the interviews. Participants were thanked for taking part in the study and made aware of their right to view the transcripts, as well as have a summary of the study results.

D. Data Analysis

The tapes from the interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded and analyzed using a descriptive, qualitative design. Participants’ descriptions of stress in teaching provided valuable insight into understanding stress in the teaching profession. Analyzing the perceptions of newly experienced and more experienced teachers may assist professionals in redefining procedures and services to better meet the needs of teachers who experience stress on the job. Careful transcription by the interviewer and a co-coder ensured reliability in transcribing the content of each response.

Research on the differences in perceptions of stress between newly experienced and more experienced teachers is somewhat limited. This qualitative study may lead to the emergence of other research questions that can be answered by future studies in this area. The process of coding the interview responses began with breaking down the information into discrete ideas. Data was then examined, compared, and questions were produced from this careful examination. Ideas that emerged from this analysis were then labeled and categorized. The final step was then to compare themes that materialized

from each category. Drawing comparisons between interviews facilitated identification of differences and similarities between perceptions of stress in teaching between the two groups.

E. Ethical Considerations

1. Confidentiality

Confidentiality of participants was ensured through direct communication before, during, and after the interviews. Participants were also informed that the tapes of the interviews will be made available to them, as well as results of the study. Participants were also reminded of their rights to remove any information revealed in the interviews from audiotape. Individuals were also reminded that the researcher will not reveal personal information such as names and place of employment, therefore protecting confidentiality. Further steps were taken to make certain the researcher did not relate to individuals, only to issues presented in the study.

2. Volunteer Participation

Participation in this study was voluntary. Participants were contacted through a third party and the researcher contacted only those wishing to partake in the study. At the beginning and during each interview, participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and they were able to decline further participation at any time. There was no cost to their participation. Participants were thanked for their cooperation and partaking in the study. They were also provided assurance of the value of their contributions toward furthering knowledge of teacher's experiences with stress on the job.

3. Issues of Harm

Participants were adults who volunteered to take part in the study. Participants were willing volunteers and did not receive pressure to partake. The nature of the interviews promoted self-reflection for participants, therefore participants may have benefited from taking part in the interview process. Furthermore, issues addressed during the interview process may have resulted in emotional reflection. Because of the nature of the issues discussed, debriefing took place at the end of each interview; however, there were no issues that arose at the end of any interview. Participants did not choose to seek outside support after the interviews as there were no immediate concerns.

F. Limitations of the Study

The small number of participants in the study was one recognized limitation of this study. Another possible limitation may have been the desire of participants to respond to questions as they think the interviewer would have liked them to respond. Perhaps participants may have responded more positively than they actually felt. Additionally, because the participants worked in a rural setting, they may have been less forthcoming with information because of the lack of anonymity that is sometimes felt in small communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

A. Introduction

This chapter contains the results of the interviews conducted with ten teachers who volunteered to participate in this study on teacher stress. The interviews conducted consisted of eight questions. Each question will be discussed separately in terms of common themes that emerged from each interview. The following chapter will also provide illustrative quotations from the interviews. Demographics of participants will be summarized in the chart found below.

B. Participants

In total, ten teachers were interviewed, four with less than ten years of teaching experience and six with more than ten years of teaching experience. Four of the participants were male and six were female. The participants were divided into two separate groups by years of experience (>10, <10) for data analysis. However, overall results are reported for each question with differences noted when they occur as perceptions from both groups were similar (See Table I). All participants taught in rural high schools. Level of teaching certificates ranged from five to seven.

Table I: Summary of Demographic Data on Participants

		>10 years of teaching experience	<10 years of teaching experience	<u>Total</u>
<u>Gender</u>	Male	4	0	4
	Female	2	4	6
<u>Age</u>	≤40	0	2	2
	≥41	6	2	8

C. Responses to Research Questions

Research Question #1: What were the participant's perceptions of the word "stress"?

Participant's responses to this question were similar between the two groups. Throughout the interviews, teachers frequently reported internal feelings and factors that impacted their lives on a personal level. Conversely, participants also reported external factors that they feel are out of their realm of control. Three themes emerged that encompassed teacher's perceptions of stress involving external factors, internal feelings, and coping with stress. Teachers felt that external demands such as lack of time, job

demands, and student's behaviors contributed to stress. Teachers additionally talked about the expectations from parents, administration, and the School Board as additional external factors that impacted on their stress level. The external factors reported were pressures participants were constantly being confronted with on a daily basis that they felt were beyond their control. A general response referred to the lack of time for teachers to meet the demands of the job. Deadlines and high expectations were also reported as contributing to stress on the job. As a few teachers noted:

“Stress means rushing, lack of time, not feeling prepared.”

“Not enough time to do the required tasks of the job.”

“I think sometimes the mental head games played between students and teachers..”

Several teachers described stress in terms of job demands. Feelings of anxiety were frequently reported, stemming from feelings of tension, vulnerability, and overwhelming responsibilities. Teachers noted feelings of anxiety and fear:

“...you're not working at that comfortable level that you could be working at and it means that there's extra pressure on you for whatever reason causing you to feel uneasy.”

“I suppose it’s anxiety, being overwhelmed, too many demands.”

“Not enough time to do the required tasks of the job and worry. Worry about not doing the job competently, making mistakes, and fear as well.”

One teacher noted extreme feelings of anxiety comparing stress of teaching to that of war:

“You’re like people in war conditions you know, I believe that those shell-shock things can happen.. I see a real inability to focus after a while. So it’s a tough career.”

Feelings of extra pressure to perform on a daily basis were also reported by several participants.

Participants also noted issues around coping with demands when describing stress. Finding a balance between work and family life defined stress for many of the participants. Coping with the pressures of vast responsibilities was described throughout the interviews as the meaning of stress. As several teachers’ stated:

“Balancing work with family life and other responsibilities outside of work.”

“There’s just so many things coming at you in different directions that you’re not as productive as you could be.”

“Anything that you feel responsible for can stress you out until you meet that responsibility.”

Succinctly, all teachers interviewed identified numerous internal and external factors and the difficulties coping with these factors when voicing their perception of “stress”.

Research Question #2: What types of stressors did participants identify? What stressors were identified most frequently? How have these stressors changed over time during their years teaching?

All participants identified both personal and work related stressors. Main themes that emerged as stressors include: balancing work and home, lack of time, job and classroom demands, and physical effects of stress.

All participants noted balancing home and work as a major stressor. More specifically, teachers mentioned taking work home, caring for sick family members, and maintaining healthy relationships with partners as challenging stressors they are frequently faced with. Several participants described the difficulties of managing numerous roles at home and work:

“I have a daughter with a learning disability, and I have a mother who is sick, and so school work, you know, you’d like to think a job is a place you can go and you know come home and leave it. I can never leave this job.”

“Personal (stressors) could be family demand. Around stuff like doing housework up to caring for sick children and families.”

One teacher placed stressors in context of her multidimensional roles at work and home:

“...just trying to balance all of the hats we wear, especially as a female teacher, balancing the mother hat, the wife hat, the you know, making sure things get done at home that needs to be done and that I meet all of my work requirements as well.”

Lack of time was another factor reported by all participants as a major stressor. Not having enough time at work to complete and meet all expectations emerged as a central stressor for all participants. An increased number of meetings was reported as taking time away from classroom preparation. Timeframes and deadlines were also noted as being key stressors for teachers. As one teacher stated, “tasks are growing but time allowed for tasks is shrinking.” Another teacher commented on the importance of time, “time management, time to get everything organized and done.”

One participant discussed time in relation to delivering the curriculum over the course of the school year:

“Because you’re trying to deliver a certain amount of curriculum in a certain amount of time... it’s like shoveling snow and it’s still snowing.”

All teachers throughout the interviews reported job and classroom demands as frequent and persistent stressors. Job demand stressors consisted of paper work, lack of resources, added responsibilities, and pressure from parents and administration. These external stressors were prevalent throughout the interviews and teachers described these elements as daily stressors they feel they have no control over.

“...work demand would be not only you know your basic work of teaching and marking, but also the extra paperwork that comes along..”

“...the paper work that is put upon us besides just our teaching, if I could just close the door and say okay, here’s my little domain and let me teach, and that’s all I had to do, then it would be a little less stressful.”

An increased amount of paper work was a frequent response from all participants in regards to policies such as inclusion, formal accommodations and Individual Program Plans. A few teachers noted that there is a significant increase in the amount of paper work required for students in their classrooms.

One participant from the newly experienced group interestingly reported computers and technology as a main stressor in addition to the increased paperwork demands. Stressors that were noted less often; however, reported by a few teachers throughout the interviews, included personality type such as teachers that have a negative attitude or approach to the job, and lack of support from administration.

It's important to note that there was a difference in response between the newly experienced and more experienced teachers surrounding stressors on the job. Newer teachers reported extracurricular activities as a more prevalent stressor in comparison to more experienced teachers. Newer teachers reported that they were expected to get involved in after school activities and felt added pressure to do so, whereas more experienced teachers did not touch on this as a major stressor on the job.

“The expectation to be involved in extra curricular activities, especially for newer teachers, they're expected to get involved and make a contribution. After a lot of teachers get their seniority, they say well, I've done my share. I've done my time.”

“I think as you go through the system more, some of the teachers tend to develop an edge. I'm very new to the system and I think in terms of stress I tend to stay fairly calm and it's probably because I don't have that edge yet.”

Classroom demands such as student's behaviors, discipline, and classroom management were recurrent themes throughout the interviews. An increasing number of students in the classroom paired with new policies such as inclusion were also reported as stressors on the job. It is clear that participants feel that classroom management is a common stressor in teaching. For the most part, participants feel that classroom stressors are often out of their realm of control. As teachers described classroom demands, it became clear that they felt that government policies are impacting stress in the classroom:

“The inclusion of those students in the classroom, but of course it would be nice to all have the streamlined kids that are going to sit down and listen all the time, but that is definitely a stressor.”

“When I first started to teach I found it very easy and then inclusion came along and the stress level went right through the roof when you’re faced with, you know, such a wide variety of abilities and behaviors, it becomes almost impossible.”

“Most of my stresses are rooted in policies either in administration or policies from the Department of Education.”

Several teachers noted that policies are the root of their stress, commenting on their lack of involvement in decision making.

Additionally, one experienced teacher talks about classroom management as a stressor:

“Classroom management is a big thing, and again in teaching classroom management can become very challenging. And depending on the group you have, sometimes it’s very positive...”

Behaviors of students have reportedly changed over the years. Several teachers mentioned that students have become disrespectful and they have difficulty managing a wide variety of social difficulties in the classroom.

“I’ve been teaching for 21 years and I’ve found children becoming more disrespectful and defiant. The consequences for their behaviors are getting less and less severe and I find that kids don’t listen well any more...”

“In a classroom, certainly discipline sometimes that you have to deal with causes undue stress because you’re not trying to cope with it at the same time you’re trying to teach so in the forefront you’re trying to get your lesson across, but secondly, you know, things are going on and different dynamics are happening that you’re not comfortable with...”

Moreover, teachers noted that the increasing class sizes contribute to their stress.

“For example, I’m quite fortunate that my numbers are really good this year, so you know all the discipline is good because there is one of me and just a few of them, but you when you get into 30, 35 (students) that’s really stressful in the classroom.”

“38 in every class... that’s enough right?”

Interestingly, a few of the more experienced teachers mentioned the physical effects that stress can have on their lives. Newly experienced teachers did not report or touch on the health factors associated with stress at work. The physical effects of stress have been documented extensively in the literature and it's interesting to note that only the teachers with more than 10 years of experience discussed these effects. As one teacher notes:

“As far as health, usually what it comes down to is, you know, obviously I mean... I know it's really bad when I fall asleep right away but yet I'll wake up very early. You know it's not the type of sleep you want. I mean most of the time you'd expect it to take you a while to fall asleep and then you're out. Stress absolutely wears you down.”

In summary, the types of stressors reported varied throughout the interviews; however, there were responses that reappeared frequently such as lack of time, job demands, and classroom management. There were a few differences in responses between the two groups, suggesting that newer teachers find extracurricular activities demanding and more experienced teachers find stressors impacting their physical health. The differences in responses may indicate that newer teachers feel pressure to take part in extra curricular activities whereas teachers that have been in the system for a longer period of time do not. Furthermore, the responses describing the physical effects of stress from the more experienced teachers may be indicative of long term effects of stress on

teachers. As suggested in the literature, the effects of prolonged stress can be considerable when one is exposed to it over a period of time.

The most commonly noted stressors were evidenced in all participants responses, suggesting that all participants felt that job demands such as an increased amount of paper work and classroom management are main stressors of the job.

Participants were also asked to rank the main stressors at work. Management issues with students, lack of time, and curriculum dynamics were reported as the top three stressors by participants. More specifically, management issues described involved discipline concerns with students in the classroom. Classroom management issues were ranked higher and reported more often from teachers with more than 10 years experience.

“I guess number one (stressor) in the classroom is discipline. Depending on your students, and know when you have a bad class, I mean it’s certainly on your mind all the time.”

“...For me, a daily stressor is discipline.”

Lack of time was also reported throughout the interviews, referring to deadlines, added responsibilities, and expectations outside of the classroom. Newly experienced teachers ranked lack of time above all other stressors. This difference between the two groups is worth noting as it suggests again that newer teachers find a lack of time as the most prominent stressor on the job. Interestingly, more experienced teachers mentioned classroom management as their most prominent stressor. These responses may indicate the progression of stressors throughout a teacher’s career. Perhaps as teachers become

accustomed to time and job demands they focus more on student's behavior in the classroom.

Newer teachers quoted lack of time frequently throughout the interviews:

"..not only the classroom but tying in what I'm supposed to do for extra curricular and again meetings, making sure I'm up to date and following all of the rules of the school."

"For work, time management, time to get everything done and organized."

"Overload, just trying to do too many things. None of them are terrible on their own, but there's just so much, trying to keep up."

Curriculum dynamics such as new policies, inclusion, lack of resources, and increasing class sizes were also reported among the top two stressors for teachers in this study. These stressors were reported equally by both groups of participants. A lack of books and other resources were often reported as a main stressor among teachers. Delivering the curriculum well and in a timely manner was also discussed as a main stressor.

"...delivering the curriculum, you know, so that you meet outcomes, you know you are battling against kids that are... it's like swimming up stream and you know the current is against you."

“Trying to always be well informed as the curriculum changes and stay well informed, and the material is just.. in my subject area, we don’t have books that we need, we don’t have the materials to teach, so you’re always looking for... add to things, add to the curriculum, look at the curriculum, and think well, how am I going to teach that, I don’t have that. That’s quite stressful because you know the class is coming in an hour’s time and you might not be as prepared as you should be because you don’t have the materials that the Board’s not buying for you, that you’re having to photocopy.”

One experienced teacher reported lack of support from administration as the number one stressor at work:

“Lack of support from administration.”

Participants were also asked if they felt the stressors teachers face have changed over time. All teachers interviewed felt that stressors have changed over time. Specifically, participants noted that the amount of work and pressure has increased over time. A progression was noted in terms of the amount of work expected from teachers today. Teachers interviewed reported more paper work, more “red-tape”, more time pressures to complete work, and more demands in the classroom. Participants also frequently stated that they had to complete more work after hours.

“so everything you do is before school and after school. I’m probably working three to four hours every day and then some time on the weekend to just get me through.”

Changed and added pressures were also discussed. Pressures from teaching to standardized tests, meeting curriculum outcomes, changing disciplinary approaches, and school board involvement were noted. A few teachers mentioned the ongoing reliance on technology as a stressor that has changed over time. Moreover, a few participants from both groups mentioned computers as a main stressor for them.

“There’s papers through the students to be approved, get your marks in the computers by this time and if the computer is not helpful, which often times is the case..”

Technology has progressed rapidly over time and teachers are faced with new technological challenges within the system. Additional changes noted included semestering, policies, inclusion, and increased class sizes. Having to teach more students with varying degrees of abilities has posed a definite change and challenge to teachers today.

“They’ve become more high tech...You need to get approval from the Board to make decisions for you...the hierarchy can be stressful at times.... The time and effort that goes into planning anything for the students.. the paper work, the red tape...is extremely time consuming.”

“All of a sudden we had huge class sizes and we’re supposed to be accommodating every need of every kid spending the weekend doing up their

individual education plan...I'm sorry, there are not enough hours in the day, nor months in a year, to get the job done.”

“Yes, the role had changed to fit the role of a social worker.”

“There just seems to be so many more demands now coming in so many directions you know, from the parents to the students to administration...for example, for us becoming semestered has been a big change in the way you teach. Just things that you have to change and adapt to.”

“..inclusion came along and the stress level just went right through the roof when you're faced with, you know, such a wide variety of abilities.”

One teacher stated that a change in culture has contributed to a change in the profession. Additionally, this participant mentioned a change in student's attitude toward authority:

“I blame it more on the fact that we're more and more of a video, fast-paced entertainment culture and people are paying less and less attention to, to you know the spoken word, and also respect for authority is crumbling as well.”

In summary, all participants agreed that the stressors teachers face today have changed. All participants also felt that changes in policies and work load have notably impacted their profession.

Research Question #3: Root Causes of Teacher Stress

Participants were asked to describe some of the root causes of stress in their profession. Responses were similar between the two groups of teachers participating in the interviews. Participants identified root causes that fell into four categories. First, participants reported lack of funding as a basic cause of stress. This would include lack of resources such as books, photocopiers, and computers. Next, teachers identified increasing demands on the job. These included lack of time, more paper work, extracurricular activities, student's behaviors, and work overload. Finally, new policies such as formal accommodations, individual program plans, and adaptations were identified as causing stress. Additionally, a few participants reported professional loneliness contributing to teacher stress.

Indeed, participants conveyed similar root causes of stress in their profession, and interestingly, funding and new policies were mentioned most often. When asked to describe root causes, one participant expressed the difficulty of naming a single cause,

“And that’s such a hard question to answer because so many factors are involved. Current... I guess in the immediate, now, this year, this month, I think a lot of policies. Trying to, you know... what works on paper doesn’t always work in real life.”

“Inclusion is another problem because we are having to prepare legal documents, like IPP’s (Individual Program Plans) and I need to make sure I had... delivered that IPP because it’s a legal document.”

Again, the issue of time came up as one participant stated: “Just demands on your time.” This was a common response throughout the interviews and emerged during several questions.

As mentioned, a lack of resources as a result of a lack of funding was a frequent response to this question. One teacher mentioned difficulties of delivering the curriculum without proper text books,

“Actual teacher stress, well for one thing, if you look right over on my book shelf, you’ll see that I’ve spent the best part of an hour and a half just photocopying one unit... that’s because I have no books. We have less than one class set of books.”

Several participants reported policies as a main underlying cause of stress:

“Policy definitely tends to cause stress. People who develop policy they can’t carry out themselves, no concern whether or not they’re practical. No consultation with the people who have to carry them out. You know those types of things cause stress. When you don’t have any input into something you have to do.”

As one teacher states, it’s the larger picture that is the cause of stress, an accumulation of factors in the profession that lead to unrealistic demands:

“One of the root causes I would say is trends and changes in society toward the questioning of authority and holding people more and more accountable. I also believe funding has a lot to do with it. We are seeing larger class sizes and less and less...there’s too many programs that are being brought in that are teachers

are expected to teach without proper training, proper support, proper resources to go with the program.”

Several teachers mentioned demands of the profession as a root cause. “I guess it goes back to overload. It seems like more and more becomes downloaded on us.” In addition to increasing demands, two participants referred to professional loneliness as a root cause of stress. Meaning, a few teachers felt that lack of support leads to professional loneliness. The newly experienced teachers reported professional loneliness in more direct ways, whereas the more experienced teachers reported a lack of support as a factor in professional loneliness. As a newly experienced teacher stated:

“It’s best for me to handle problems in the classroom without going to administration. I might as well deal with it. It often doesn’t help to see support. I feel professional loneliness as a beginning teacher, feeling disconnected from the rest of the staff.”

A few participants alluded to the lack of support they feel in the profession due to limited resources and lack of time. Interestingly, the newly experienced teachers were more upfront about reporting feelings of loneliness in the profession. Many participants feel that they have less time to support each other in their roles because of increasing demands.

In summary, the root causes of stress varied throughout the interviews; however, most responses fit into four main categories: new and changing policies, increasing job demands, lack of resources, and professional loneliness.

Research Question #4: How teachers feel stress impacts their interactions with students and other professionals?

Participants were asked to describe how stress impacts their interactions with students and other professionals with whom they work with. All participants felt that stress impacts their interactions both directly and indirectly with their students as well as coworkers. Teacher's responses to this question were similar between the two groups. Responses to this question involved descriptions of how teachers cope with their stress and how they relate to their students and coworkers when feeling stressed. First, interactions with students were reported as being affected by teacher stress in terms of students seeing their frustration and emotions. Several participants noted the importance of hiding their stress from their students. This was mentioned as a common everyday challenge that teachers face.

“I think teachers are very good at practicing self-control because they know they are constantly on stage as an example to those children. At least I feel that pressure to make sure that they don't see me lose control because they can't lose control.”

“It's very difficult...that's probably the hardest thing is not showing your stress when things... you know, you've just got bad news form the office... you know, you bring it in and try and leave it at the door, but that's so difficult.”

Other participants described how stress often compromises their performance on the job.

“Your efficiency and effectiveness is reduced. It could affect your health and job performance.”

“The more demands you have, you just can’t get the job done nearly as well. You’re not as good with the students because you’re not as alert, you’re not as patient with them, you know, just different way you treat them that you wouldn’t if you... if you’re comfortable and at ease, that wouldn’t be happening.”

“I was having few teachable moments because of my stress level. I felt like I was doing a terrible job and I’ve never felt that way before.”

Teachers expressed their concern for how their stress impacts their students. Several participants noted health related effects such as lack of sleep, illness, and lack of patience as factors that impact their interactions with others. One participant reported the dilemma of ignoring minor behavior offenses in the hallways of the school because of the increased paper work that comes with such minor offences today in the schools. Undeniably, participants in the interviews report that stress often does negatively impact their relations with students. Participants also irrefutably state that stress impacts their ability to interact and carry out their job in a more efficient and positive way. Furthermore, teachers interviewed reported interactions with other professionals as being significantly impacted by stress. Teacher’s descriptions of interactions among each other varied across interviews. Several teachers mentioned that stress brings teachers together.

“I think it’s better to vent with other teachers than to take it home with you, because your friends and family don’t want to hear it.”

Similarly, another participant described the support that comes from coworkers when stressed,

“...teachers tend to talk and luckily for us we have lunch times where we sit together and we can go ahead and talk and we can, you know, vent because we’re all in the same boat. But we also, you know, we commiserate, we also okay, now may the force be with you, and you just go back into battle.”

In contrast, some participants report stress having a negative impact on their interactions with other teachers. Two participants described the negative affect that stress can have on interactions with other teachers. In particular, participants report the changes in teacher interactions over time:

“18 years ago when I came here everyone laughed and joked around and had a lot of fun. Now the demands are such that there’s a time crunch...Do we share ideas anymore? No. Since we’re not getting together because we’re too busy worrying about our own issues, we can’t get together and say, what are you doing? We don’t work as a cohesive unit.”

Interestingly, this participant describes a shift in relations between coworkers as a result of increasing job demands. Likewise, one teacher reports the difficulty of venting and expressing stress in fear of appearing weak to administration and coworkers.

“Sometimes you might be fearful if I say something to the wrong person, it’s going to come back to haunt me if that person goes and discusses it with administration or something.”

These reports speak to the stigma that is often attached to teachers discussing stress openly with colleagues. Several participants alluded to the lack of empathy felt from others outside of the profession, which may contribute to teacher’s reservations to discuss stress on the job.

In summary, participants agreed that stress undoubtedly impacts their interactions with not only students but with other professionals. A recurrent theme involved participants hiding stress and emotions from students and other professionals. Furthermore, participants reported that students often suffer academically because of stress that is felt by teachers.

Research Question #5: What type of control do teachers feel they have over stress?

b.) What coping strategies and techniques are used most often and are most effective?

Participants were asked to comment on the control they feel over stress in their profession as well as what coping strategies they use to combat stress. First, participants considered the control they feel over stress. The responses were mixed between the two groups of teachers. Some participants felt that they have little to no control over stress in their work environment, whereas, others felt that they do have control over the stress they encounter on a daily basis. The participants that reported control over stress in their

profession noted specific factors they feel control over. Factors a few participants reported control over include classroom management, health management, having support from administration, and limiting the amount of work to take on.

“If I had no control I would be very vulnerable.”

“I know I could limit what I take on.”

“I think that there is some control... again, providing the support is there from administration...you're as good as the support behind you.”

“The only thing we have control over, and even that control is slipping, is the management of our classrooms.”

Conversely, the same participants noted factors that they feel they lack control over, such as class size, student's behaviours, discipline, and policies. A lack of control over policy making was noted throughout the interviews as a major point of stress for participants. Most teachers interviewed felt they were expected to carry out policies that they have no input or contribution in forming.

“We have very little say in decision making policy, the curriculum and policies are being dictated by people who are supposedly experts in the field, but they are

not in the classroom and they don't understand the realities of the modern classroom.”

This issue arose throughout the interviews as a major concern for teachers and appears to be contributing to teacher stress. Moreover, teachers interviewed expressed a lack of control in formulating policies, which reportedly leads to stress in the classroom. It seems participants feel the most stress as a result of their absence in formulating policies. Teachers are then asked to carry out policies in the classroom that they feel are unrealistic. All participants referred to this lack of involvement in policy making as an underlying cause of stress that they feel they have little to no control over.

In addition to lacking control over policies, teachers reported a loss of control over student's behaviors as well as classroom discipline.

“As far as discipline problems, sometimes you have very little control over them. They're out of your hands...So I think a lot of these things that cause teachers stress are things that we don't have a lot of control over. It just happens that you have 36 kids in a class. You can't say, okay, I want this child and that child...They're there are you've got to deal with it.”

“I don't think you have control because every day is different, your students react differently, groups of students react differently.”

Generally, all participants felt that external factors such as student's behaviors, class size, and policy decisions are out of their realm of control. These factors were noted as significant stressors for teachers. Factors that participants felt they have control over involved workload, seeking support, classroom management, and personal health. Differences in staff cohesiveness are school specific and may have resulted in different opinions for this question.

b. Coping strategies

Participants were also asked to share strategies and techniques used to reduce stress in the profession. Participants noted physical, psychological, and proactive strategies. Both groups of teachers named similar approaches to reducing stress; however, teachers with more than ten years of experience noted venting with other teachers more often as a stress reducing strategy. Teachers who have been in the profession longer may feel more comfortable venting about stress to coworkers than less experienced teachers. Sharing feelings of stress with other teachers was noted by most of the more experienced teachers while only a few teachers with less than ten years experience noted venting to others as an effective strategy.

“If you have a good close knit staff that’s able to talk and communicate and help each other too...we also kind of support each other in other ways, like filling in for one another, or help with discipline problems.”

Another teacher discusses communicating with other teachers as a stress relieving strategy,

“I think discussing with other teachers is certainly very beneficial where you realize you’re not the only individual that’s feeling this way.”

On the other hand, newer teachers did not report venting with other teachers as a common coping strategy. Interestingly, newer teachers focused on physical and proactive coping strategies such as time management, organization, health, and trying not to let expectations get to them. The differences in responses may indicate that newly experienced teachers feel less comfortable seeking support from others and feel more comfortable using personal techniques to reduce stress.

Physical activity such as yoga, walking, and working out were commonly noted as coping strategies throughout the interviews. Two participants mentioned drinking coffee as a way to reduce stress. Relaxation strategies such as yoga and meditation were also noted as stress reducers. Psychological strategies such as attitude and humor were considered stress-relieving strategies for teachers.

“We carry on and play jokes on each other and laugh at breaks, you know, stress relieving, so that’s one way.”

Proactive strategies such as time management, organization, and seeking support were commonly reported as coping strategies for stress.

“Being organized. Well, teachers are masters at organization, you have to be. Time management is a big deal... these are things we also try to instill in the kids.”

Also seeking support is an important coping strategy, “Talking to administration if they feel comfortable.” One participant mentioned taking advantage of the counseling services in place for teachers. Although seeking support was frequently mentioned, it is clear that many participants do not feel comfortable talking about stress with coworkers and administration.

In summary, strategies to cope with stress most commonly noted were physical exercise, attitude, seeking support, and venting with coworkers. It is clear that many participants feel that empathizing with other teachers is a commonly used strategy to reduce stress.

Participants were then asked to comment on how effective they feel their strategies are at reducing stress. Unexpectedly, most participants feel that stress is an ongoing part of the teaching profession. Many responses indicate that stress is never reduced for teachers. More specifically, participants reported that strategies to reduce stress temporarily work but do not produce effective long-term success. Teachers from both groups note that strategies such as physical activity, humor, and time management temporarily reduce stress but do not hold long term effectiveness in eliminating stress.

“There’s no support system for the teachers and I don’t think many people on their own can cope, so unless they seek help, I think they’ll crash and burn.”

“I think a lot of teachers can’t leave it (stress) behind and don’t have ways to deal with it through the day and it’s just ongoing..”

One participant reiterated the importance of addressing stress concerns for teachers with long term effective coping strategies,

“Sometimes yes and I guess sometimes they make the problems go away temporarily. I think if we want to do...seriously do something about teacher stress, we need to start funding education and stop adding responsibility without adding additional time and training to handle that responsibility and funding as well.”

Overall, teachers interviewed felt that coping strategies used do not have long term effectiveness. Coping strategies commonly used to reduce stress are only temporarily effective. Focusing on specific long lasting coping strategies to reduce stress may help decrease the levels of stress in the teaching profession.

Research Question #6: Awareness of school and community based supports to help teachers deal with stress. How do school boards, B.Ed. programs, and the NSTU address stress?

Participants were asked to comment on school and community based supports for teachers experiencing stress. Teachers were then asked to discuss how their school board, Bachelor of Education programs, and the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union (NSTU) address stress concerns for teachers. First, teachers noted how their schools and communities addressed stress concerns. Many participants were unaware of supports in place. The few participants that were able to name supports did so with hesitation and speculation. School based supports that were mentioned included inservices, workshops, and counseling provided by the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union. There was no mention of school supports provided directly by administration or other groups. Community based supports were also limited, including reduced rates at a local gym and yoga classes that many teachers attend on their own. Teachers interviewed generally seemed unaware of supports available in the schools and in the community. Consequently, some participants spoke candidly about the lack of support provided by the school and community:

“The community does not support teachers period.”

“No, I don't think you'd find any here that I'm aware of.”

“No, none that I am aware of. It doesn't even exist which is why I'm not aware of it.”

The participants who were able to name community based supports named local doctors and wellness nights put on by the NSTU. Additionally, a few participants referred to counseling services and inservices provided by the NSTU, not supports within the community or schools.

Additionally, participants were asked to discuss how their school board addresses stress concerns for teachers. Again, participant's responses indicate that they feel the school board does not properly address stress. Many simply said they had no idea, some responded with "no, they don't", while others said yes, but not properly. One participant described the services she was aware of but with skepticism:

"I think they do the mandatory things that administrative groups have to do. They'll have their workshops and offer help...here's a line...a number you can call if you're stressed out, those sorts of things. I think those are just things that they're mandated to do and not... they don't certainly do anything above and beyond what they have to."

Another participant gave a different but not positive, perspective:

"I know I had a teacher come to me about two weeks ago and said that this is going to be my last day, I can't cope anymore.... So the first thing the Board did was they implemented some of the resources she should have had in September. So I think they just respond to it, they don't address the issues or facts."

Participants noted some supports provided by the school board; however, they stated they were reactive responses as opposed to proactive and preventative supports. This is a key point that emerged in response to this question. Teachers suggested that the

school board reacts when stress becomes too much of an issue and does not engage in a preventative and supportive manner.

Others mentioned in-services presented on yoga, meditation and time management; however, these responses were limited, ineffective, and unclear. A few participants were able to name supports but had not been directly involved with supportive programs for teachers. Generally, teacher's responses indicate limited awareness, knowledge, or involvement with preventative or supportive programs provided by the school board for stress.

Participants were also asked to comment on Bachelor of Education programs and how these programs prepare students for stress in the profession. Many of the participants commented on the benefit of practicum experience rather than the actual course work in the programs. It is also important to note that several participants, even newly experienced teachers were speculating on current B.Ed. programs as their programs were taken over ten years ago. More than half of the teachers stated that education programs do not properly inform students about the stress in the profession and the focus is on unrealistic and often ideal situations in the classroom. As one teacher commented on this concern:

“I don't know what they're doing now but I don't think the interns get enough practical experience in the classroom and sometimes it's rather... oh, what's the word I'm looking for, controlled too much, not a realistic setting.”

Several teachers feel that education programs cannot possibly prepare students for the realities of the profession until the student experiences teaching in a real setting.

“Well, my B.Ed. program was 18 years ago. I think there’s a lot missing from the B.Ed. program, you come down to the common sense everyday...what to avoid, what do you do in a staff meeting, how do you present yourself to your administrator, where can you go for professional development, who do you see for funding, those issues are normally the issues and how to cope with stress.”

An experienced teacher notes feelings heard from others who are new to the profession:

“A lot of the new teachers that come out don’t have a whole lot of good things to say about the B.Ed. programs. Like they find it’s a lot of waste of time, you know, you should have some practice, but you know, should you have that much? You know, they’re feeling like they could be working at that time and getting experience at the same time.”

In general, most teachers felt that B.Ed. programs do not properly inform students about stress in the profession and often focus on an ideal classroom setting. Participants conveyed concern regarding practicum experiences; however, most felt that practice teaching could best prepare a teacher for the stress of the profession.

Finally, teachers were asked how the Nova Scotia Teacher’s Union (NSTU) addresses and provides support for teachers who experience stress on the job. Again, responses were varied. Some participants felt that the NSTU does support teachers with stress effectively while others expressed frustration and unawareness of the programs the

Union provides. Concisely, responses to this question were similar to the varied responses regarding school, community, and school board supports. Participants mentioned counseling services provided by the Union most often as their main support. Aside from the counseling services, participants seemed to have a negative view of support provided by the NSTU. More than a few participants discussed negative experiences they have had with the NSTU and most felt that their reactive approach ignores prevention.

“After the lack of support that they give us...my frustration with them makes me stressed.”

“I’m not a big Union person.”

“Do you know what, I have no clue what they do.”

“Personally, I’ve only been involved for three years and any time I’ve ever contacted the NSTU, they haven’t called me back.”

Conversely, two participants mentioned that they have had positive experiences with the NSTU in terms of supporting their stress concerns:

“And not having used the service myself, but you know, dealing with a co-worker that has in the last month, they’ve been very supportive. They’ve given her as

many appointments as she's wanted, you know, they told her, you know, you have sick days, take your days, you know. Come in on a regular basis until you feel that you have a handle on things until you could...you're not eating and sleeping then that's not very good... let's get you to an acceptable level where you feel comfortable enough to return to work.”

“They will talk to you about stress management and things.... I think some people are using it.”

Although there was a wide range of responses to the support questions, the majority of responses referred to a lack of preventative support for teachers experiencing the ill effects of stress. In summary, participants felt that they would have to seek support if in need and the availability of supports is limited. Many participants were aware of the counseling services provided by the NSTU but could not elaborate on other supports. As evidenced in the responses, it is clear that the teachers interviewed feel that more supports are needed to address stress concerns.

Research Question #7: Do teachers feel there is a role for school psychologists in supporting teachers to cope with stress?

Teachers were asked to comment on whether or not school psychologists should play a role in helping them cope with stress. Interestingly, all participants felt that school psychologists could support teachers in coping with stress; however, many felt that only

in an ideal system would school psychologists be able to take on such a role. Even more interesting, newly experienced teachers all reported a role for school psychologists in helping teachers cope with stress whereas more experienced teachers felt that it would be unrealistic for this role to be filled. A few participants expressed the need for additional support for students and not for teachers. Several teachers felt that the students are the priority and even their needs are not being met because of increasing demands on school psychologists. Responses varied from ideal to realistic situations:

“I think everybody wants someone to listen to your problems and maybe help with even just being there, somebody to talk to about it.”

“I think it would be very useful.”

“Yes, definitely, there is a role for school psychologists. We are not school psychologists.”

“Well, I imagine there is. But I don’t know... in my opinion if you can’t come up with ways to help yourself deal with stress...”

“Yes, definitely, but I guess the factor there is what happens when you see the school psychologist once every two weeks and they have, you know, a list as long as....teachers are just not priority at all. I don’t know anybody who’s ever thought about that (school psychologists) as a source.”

“They’re there to benefit the students, they could be, but that’s not their role.”

In summary, teachers interviewed felt that ideally school psychologists could be a useful and helpful source in coping with stress; however, many felt that realistically, the demands placed on school psychologists should continue to focus on the needs of the students. The participants that felt that school psychologists could be used as a source to cope with stress responded with speculation and interest. One participant commented “anything helps”. Participants seemed willing to receive support from many sources if possible.

Research Question #8: How comfortable are teachers with discussing stress with colleagues and others?

Teachers were asked how comfortable they feel discussing stress with colleagues and others. More teachers with less than ten years experience in the profession reported that they would feel very comfortable discussing stress with others. Participants with more than ten years experience noted that they would not feel comfortable discussing stress with others. The difference in responses between the two groups of teachers is interesting. It seems that newer teachers may feel more comfortable discussing stress with colleagues. This may suggest that the longer teachers are in the profession, the more stress becomes stigmatized. Participants responded openly about sharing their feelings about stress with other colleagues, but were more apprehensive when asked if they would share these same feelings with administration. Many teachers with more than ten years

of experience noted that they would not be comfortable expressing their stress concerns with colleagues or administration because they would appear weak and not fit to do their job:

“They don’t want to admit, it’s a no no. It’s seen as a... if you are off on stress leave and you’re a teacher, that means you’re weak. That means you can’t cope... You can’t do it.”

“But I don’t think they might be as comfortable discussing it with administration or school board people, because they would be seen as complainers...I really believe that we need administrators who are sympathetic to the stresses of the job and aren’t trying to.. you know, don’t consider teachers as a bunch as lazy complainers... Right? Because the job is extremely difficult and stressful.”

Another participant places stress in context with other mental illness stigma’s:

“I don’t think they are very comfortable with colleagues, other teachers. It’s like any issue of stress or mental illness, it’s still a stigma... change that happened probably in the last 10 years, we’re not there yet, people don’t look at mental illness the same way they look at some other issue, diabetes or whatever...”

On the contrary, one participant stated that it depends on the school and the culture of staff relations:

“I think it depends on your school. It really depends on teachers in the school. I find that department’s kind of stick to each other. I know that a lot of teachers come in and close the door... and it seems very close knit. Although some are brand new, they still want to come in and say, like I can’t this, how am I going to cope with this?”

A newer teacher reiterates the difficulty of sharing feelings of stress with others in fear of appearing weak to administration:

“There is always the concern that your conversation might be overheard by some...but in the school system, there’s a concern that your conversation might not be confidential inside the school system...”

Two more newly experienced teachers comment on their comfort level with discussing stress, concluding that teachers should be able to discuss stress:

“I think we have to be. We have to be able to discuss things. And I think that we’re so used to talking anyway, we’re not sitting at desks being and calculating figures, we’re talking all day long”

“Because everybody has got the same thing, they commiserate together.”

In summary, participant's responses differed slightly between the two groups. Newer teachers felt more comfortable with sharing feelings of stress with coworkers compared to more experienced teachers. However, both groups expressed hesitation in sharing stress concerns with administration. Many participants mentioned the stigma that still surrounds stress in teaching and how this stigma may be part of the problem in helping teachers cope with stress.

D. Summary

In summary, the interviews would indicate that the participants agree that teaching is a stressful profession with increasing demands. Three main themes were explored throughout the interviews including, teacher's perceptions of stress, root causes of stress, and how teachers cope and are supported when stressed. Participants spoke candidly about their experiences as teachers within the school system. By and large, the teachers conveyed concerns regarding stress in their profession.

First and foremost, the participants felt that the teaching profession in general defines stress. "Stress" to participants was defined in terms of feelings and external factors. All participants concurred that stress is defined by the individual; however, one factor that all participants agreed on was that stress is undeniably present in their profession.

Secondly, teachers were asked to identify and describe causes of stress. Root causes included, lack of time, increasing amounts of paper work, new policies, and lack of funding. More specifically, it is clear that all participants feel their role should be extended to include policy making. Most root causes were external factors that the

participants in general feel they have little control over. Overall, teachers reported increasing demands of the job without more time available to meet these extra demands as a foremost cause of stress.

Participants were then asked to explore coping strategies and supports for teachers experiencing ill effects of stress. Coping strategies varied from physical activity to time management and organization. Overall, teachers agreed that coping strategies simply mask the stress and provide temporary reprieve from the effects. Participants also expressed a need for coping strategies that have a long term impact in decreasing stress.

Additionally, teachers were asked to comment on supports provided to them from several resources. Teachers commented on supports from the school, community, the school board, and the NSTU. Participants were also asked to speculate on the practicality and effectiveness of B.Ed. programs. In general, the teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the support they receive for the effects of stress. Most participants were able to name lack of supports but struggled to find programs that directly addressed stress concerns for teachers. In addition, teachers feel that the stigma attached to stress in their profession limits supports available to them. In general, the teachers interviewed feel that others outside of the profession do not feel empathy for the stress they experience on a daily basis. As a result of this lack of empathy, participants feel that supports are and will continue to be limited.

In conclusion, as evidenced throughout the interviews, the participants reported elevated amounts of stress because of changing dynamics of the profession. In particular, the teachers revealed that although stress is becoming a more validated concern within the profession, much more attention is needed to produce change. It is apparent that

stress has a significant impact on teacher's productivity, effectiveness, and personal well being. As manifested in the responses, it is clear that awareness of the effects of stress on teachers is limited. In turn, supports must become more preventative as opposed to reactive. Preventing and reducing stress may not only benefit the teachers but the students and administration as well.

Differences in responses between the two groups of teachers were not overly prevalent; however, there were a few significant discrepancies between perspectives. First, newly experienced teachers reported extracurricular activities as a major stressor whereas more experienced teachers discussed effects on physical health as a more common stressor. Newer teachers feel pressures to become involved in programs after school whereas older teachers have already established these roles.

Next, issues with classroom management were mentioned more frequently with teachers who have been teaching for more than ten years. Newer teachers reported lack of time more frequently as a number one stressor, suggesting newer teachers may find it more difficult to develop routines to meet the demands of the job.

Newly experienced teachers were more upfront about issues involving administration and professional loneliness. Interestingly, teachers with more than ten years experience mentioned venting to others about stress as a common coping strategy whereas the other group of participants did not report this as often. In addition, newly experienced teachers mentioned more proactive coping strategies such as organization and time management whereas more experienced teachers noted more personal coping strategies without outside support. Lastly, newly experienced teachers reported feeling more comfortable with discussing stress with colleagues and felt that school

psychologists can play a role in supporting teachers with stress. Teachers with more than ten years of experience reported hesitation in sharing stress concerns with others and did not feel that school psychologists could realistically support their needs given the high demand from students.

In conclusion, there were discrepancies in responses between the two groups. The differences imply that the newly experienced teachers have slightly different perspectives on some of the issues discussed; specifically in coping strategies, causes, and supports. The teachers that have been teaching for more than ten years may have different perspectives in certain areas because of a long term exposure to stress and knowledge of how stress concerns are handled within the system. Nevertheless, there were also many similarities between responses indicating that stress is far reaching within the profession.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, issues related to stress that emerged during interviews with teachers will be presented and discussed. Their issues will be contextualized and discussed to determine their fit with existing research findings and current social situations. Recommendations and future implications will also be discussed.

A. Summary

At the present time, the research surrounding teacher stress is mainly focused on causes and coping strategies. More specifically, past and present research focuses on cause and effect of stress on teachers. Very few studies have explored the differences in experiences of stress between newer teachers and those who have been teaching for a number of years. This current research study was intended to investigate the perceptions of stress between newly experienced and experienced teachers in the profession. Causes, effects, coping strategies, and perceptions of supports were issues introduced throughout the interviews.

Generally, participants felt that teaching is a stressful profession with increasing demands and decreasing amounts of time to carry out these demands. In addition to increasing demands, teachers also mentioned the changing demands and dynamics of the profession. Participants also discussed the stigma attached to stress in teaching. Moreover, teachers felt that this stigma often interferes with proper supports and preventative strategies that should be in place.

Participants were asked to address the root causes of stress in their profession. The most commonly noted causes were increasing job demands and work overload. Lack of time was also frequently mentioned which correlates with the increasing job demands. Newly experienced teachers discussed the pressures of extracurricular activities and time constraints more often than more experienced teachers. New and changing policies that teachers are often asked to implement were also mentioned as a major cause of stress. More specifically, the lack of involvement that teachers feel they have in developing new policies was reported as a main cause of stress. Lack of funding and support were frequently noted as root causes of stress on the job. Increasing paper work that is often required with new policies was a commonly noted stressor as well.

Teachers with more than ten years of experience in the profession discussed classroom management and discipline as a stressor more often than newly experienced teachers.

Coping strategies were also explored with both groups of teachers. Responses most commonly noted surrounding coping strategies included physical exercise, time management, and talking with colleagues. Teachers with more than ten years experience mentioned expressing their feelings of stress with colleagues as a common coping strategy more often than newly experienced teachers. Conversely, newly experienced teachers identified more proactive coping strategies such as maintaining organization and effective use of time whereas the more experienced teachers noted other strategies. Newly experienced teachers also reported feeling more comfortable discussing stress with colleagues; however, when asked to comment on coping strategies, newly experienced teachers did not report this approach as often as more experienced teachers.

Furthermore, newly experienced teachers expressed a more positive outlook on expanding the role of the school psychologist to supporting teachers with stress.

While identifying common coping strategies, most participants expressed a lack of knowledge and awareness in this area. Strategies that were mentioned often addressed the short term goals of reducing stress and overlooked the need for long term effectiveness in coping with stress. Most participants conveyed a major concern for identifying and educating teachers on effective coping and management strategies for stress in the profession.

Participants were also asked to comment and discuss the supports that are in place for teachers to cope with stress in the profession. Overall, participants expressed discontent with the supports that are in place for teachers to cope with stress. Developing personal ways to cope with stress and empathizing with each other appeared to be the most commonly noted supports and strategies used by teachers.

In conclusion, the teachers interviewed conveyed concerns surrounding stress in the profession. Many participants suggested that stress is on the rise in the profession as a result of increasing job demands and decreasing time to fulfill these demands. Others noted that supports are lacking for teachers and often times coping with stress alone is easier than facing the stigma stress carries with it in the profession. It is evident that stress impacts teacher's productivity and contentment in the profession. Creating supports and increasing awareness of the prevalence and effects of stress in the profession among teachers may benefit not only teachers, but students and administration as well.

B. Discussion

i.) Prevalence of Stress

As stated in the introduction, stress is an increasing concern in the teaching profession and continuing to grow (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). This was confirmed throughout the interviews as participants noted that stress impacts their performance on the job. Participants responses during the interviews suggests that stress is a concern that needs to be addressed on several levels. Stress may be on the rise or the possibility of teachers discussing stress more openly may be the case for this apparent increase.

Nevertheless, stress in teaching is an area that is lacking in awareness and support. Historically, mental health issues have been viewed differently than other health concerns. Teachers who have been teaching in the system for a long time have seen the change in how stress concerns are approached. It is apparent that stress is a topic that is discussed more openly now than in the past. This study would have been very difficult to conduct several years ago when the effects of stress were not discussed or acknowledged. Because of the change in perceptions of stress, participants were able to speak candidly about stress in their profession. It appears that teachers feel more comfortable about discussing stress concerns and the effects of stress are now recognized as a serious health concern. The lack of objective evidence may also contribute to the stigma and historical negativity surrounding stress and other mental health issues.

Furthermore, there is evidence of effects on employers, as stated in chapter one, “in 1999, Canadian Mental Health reported costs of five billion dollars a year as a result of workplace stress and health related illnesses (Younghusband, Garlin, & Church, 2003).

Despite losses in productivity and costs, employers continue to attach a stigma to stress in the workplace.

ii.) **Impact and Causes of Stress**

The main causes of teacher stress noted in the literature include maintaining discipline, time and workload pressures, coping with change, coworkers, administrative pressures, role conflict, poor work conditions, and student's behaviors. These causes were reported multiple times throughout the interview process by participants. More specifically, work overload was noted frequently by teachers and was stated by Hiebert (1995) as the number one source of teacher stress. Moreover, Hiebert reviewed ten studies that spanned thirty-six years and found that classroom control, competency, student discipline, and parent and administration evaluations to be main sources of teacher stress. The causes of stress as identified by the participants throughout the interviews paralleled those acknowledged throughout the literature. Interestingly, teachers in the present study noted work overload and lack of time most frequently as well.

Tye & O'Brien (2002) surveyed one hundred and fourteen teachers and found that teachers who had been teaching for six to ten years identified increasing pressures of accountability and workload as a main reason for leaving the profession. This finding corresponds to the responses by newly experienced teachers in the present study. Newly experienced teachers mentioned extracurricular activities as a main stressor whereas teachers with more than ten years experience noted classroom management more often as major stressor. Typically within the school system newer teachers are individuals who are

most likely to be transferred and who face the most uncertainty in their jobs. Additionally, newly experienced teachers who are new to the school system have less control over their schedules and their placements. Perhaps newly experienced teachers felt this way because of the uncertainty that accompanies a new job. Both groups of teachers discussed increasing work demands which are also evident throughout the literature.

Additionally, uncertainty in the demands of the profession was noted as a major stressor for new teachers as stated by Everett-Turner (1984). Similarly, this was evident in the responses of newly experienced teachers throughout the interviews. Newly experienced teachers mentioned uncertainty in job demands and developing ways to cope with new demands. This is most likely due to the reality that newer teachers who have not worked in the schools for a period of time do not have a coping system in place early on in their career. Developing an effective system in working with such demands would come over time and with experience.

Conversely, the literature also suggests that stress may impact teachers who have had prolonged exposure to stressors as they are more likely to burn out than newly experienced teachers (Tye & O'Brien, 2002). In the present study, there was little indication that more experienced teachers were more stressed than newly experienced teachers. Stressors discussed between the two groups differed between some participants; however, most participants discussed and alluded to similar issues. More experienced teachers appeared to have differing opinions of the system and how the system handles teacher stress. In general, more negative responses and outlook was projected from the more experienced participants. This difference may be attributed to

the long exposure of stressors in the profession as noted by Tye & O'Brien (2002). While more experienced teachers responses appeared more negative it is probable that their responses reflected the reality in their profession. Again, more experienced teachers have been in the system longer and may have reported a more realistic view of how stress is addressed in the school system. Teachers who have been teaching longer see the lack of support and the slow change that has happened over a number of years. Teachers who are new to the profession have not been exposed to stress on a continuum as more experienced teachers have been nor have they been exposed to how stress is handled in the system.

Changing family dynamics, increased work demands and responsibilities, and changing academic and behavioral standards were stressors noted by Younghusband (2003) in a study exploring teacher stress. Teachers in the present study also noted similar changing family dynamics, demands, and policies impacting academic and behavioral standards. Specifically, participants mentioned policies such as inclusion that have impacted and increased their stress in the classroom. Teachers who have been teaching for many years have been exposed to the changes in policies that have significantly impacted the way they are expected to teach. Teachers are not longer teaching subjects, they are expected to teach individuals. This is an aspect in the profession that has created stress for teachers that have been teaching for many years. Teachers were trained to teach subjects and now they are expected to teach individuals with differing needs in the classroom. Expectations have changed for students as well. Retention is not common procedure in the present school system, whereas in the past,

students were held back without question. Changing expectations in how teachers do their job and how they deliver the curriculum is a main cause of stress.

Additionally, family dynamics were discussed by several participants such as an increase in single parents, and blended families as expanding stressors for some teachers today. There are perhaps more issues surrounding discipline and respect because of changing family dynamics and values, and therefore their role is expanding in the classroom to address these issues. In the past, teachers may have felt more support from families when dealing with behavior and academic concerns and are now feeling added pressure when coping with these concerns in the classroom. Moreover, teachers are coping with personal changes in their own family dynamics and many are coping with personal family changes.

Stress in the profession not only impacts teachers, but students as well. As Borg & Riding (1991) state, "Absenteeism, decreased job satisfaction, and ill health are manifestations of stress experienced by individuals in the teaching profession." Similarly, Van Der Line (2000) and Blase (1986) both stated that teachers feel pressured to perform on a daily basis and their performance in the classroom directly impacts the students they teach. Most importantly, the literature suggests that students learning experiences are impacted significantly by teacher stress (Kyriacou, 1987). As Kyriacou (1987) also states, "interactions with students may diminish along with job commitment if stress becomes a problem in the classroom." The learning environment is a unique atmosphere that requires full commitment and positive interactions between teachers and students. If teachers are hiding their stress and feel they are not supported in their role then further stress is caused. If teachers feel they cannot express themselves or act as

they feel then more stress is inevitable. There is a significant need for other methods for teachers to release stress and express their concerns. As illustrated throughout the literature and the present study, teachers are irrefutably impacted by stress. Several participants mentioned how difficult it is to balance the stress while maintaining a positive teaching environment.

A study conducted by the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union found that teachers find it difficult to complete their duties during a typical work day. The increasing job demands that teachers are confronted with would appear to increase stress in teaching. The effect of teacher stress on students is a significant concern that requires much more attention. It is important to address and support teachers concerns surrounding stress in the profession and equally important to examine the effects teacher stress can have on students.

iii.) Coping and Support

Coping with stress is a challenge for most teachers in the profession. Coping strategies that were identified throughout the interviews indicate that most teachers resort to personal approaches. Very few participants suggested that outside support is readily available. Coping strategies that were described by participants parallel the strategies that are discussed in the literature. Physical exercise, discussing stress with other teachers, and meditation were just a few of the strategies that were consistently noted in the current study and existing literature. Notably, coping research presents multiple challenges and criticisms in the field. As previously mentioned, "Work cannot be isolated from other aspects of a person's life" (Lazarus, 1999). This poses a significant

challenge to research in the field. Teasing apart personal attributes presents researchers with many challenges. However, abandoning responsibility of preventing and managing stress in teaching is not the answer.

Hepburn & Brown (2001) employed qualitative methodology to explore the use of the term “stress” in teaching. Their research indicated that the onus is often placed on the individual rather than the organization. This is an interesting finding as many of the participants in the current study reported that it is often easier to cope with stress on their own rather than seeking help from outside sources. The most glaring evidence indicated by the interviewed teachers suggested that individual coping strategies were most commonly used because of the lack of support available to them. Perhaps teachers taking part in the study felt it is often easier to deal with stress alone because of the rural environment in which they work. Rural areas tend to make seeking support for any personal issue challenging because of the lack of anonymity. This may be the case for teachers working in more rural areas. Finding ways to alleviate the stigma and lack of anonymity may help strengthen stress management approaches in smaller communities.

Moreover, several of the teachers mentioned that there is a lack of support felt in smaller communities. One participant mentioned the lack of respect and empathy from the community. More importantly, many of the participants described supports that they developed on their own; such as seeking a colleague’s support. The supports that were named throughout the interviews, such as the counseling services provided by the NSTU, were reactive measures taken when stress was at its peak. There was little mention of preventative supports discussed by participants. Similarly, Younghusband (2003) studied teacher stress in Newfoundland and found that teachers are not exposed to proper stress

management. Overall, the research suggests that proper attention is not being given to stress management in teaching. Taking a reactive approach to stress appears to be the norm in the profession. Perhaps there should be more of an emphasis placed on prevention of stress and stress management as opposed to reacting to serious effects of stress.

The unique relationship between teachers and school psychologists is an area that lacks attention in the literature. Pelsma (2000) suggests that school counselors should work with teachers to use a solution-focused approach to coping with stress. Many of the participants in the current study mentioned the difficulty of expanding the role of the school psychologist to support teachers with stress concerns. Interestingly, newly experienced teachers seemed more positive in their responses toward expanding the role of school psychologists. This difference may be a result of experience in the profession and being exposed to the role of the school psychologist over time. Conversely, school psychologists were not always present in the schools, meaning more experienced teachers are also learning about the role of the school psychologist. Teachers with more than ten years of experience seemed to feel that school psychologists are working to support students, not teachers. They may have felt this way because historically, school psychologists were not used to support teachers with stress.

Additionally, Murphy & Claridge (2000) investigated the relationship between educational psychologists and teachers. Findings from their study suggested that stress management programs for teachers should focus on teaching techniques that are effective over long periods of time. Interestingly, most participants in the current study mentioned that commonly used coping strategies are merely temporary relievers from stress.

Sharing coping strategies that have worked for some teachers with colleagues may also help teachers find successful stress relieving techniques and alleviate feelings of professional loneliness. Focusing on stress management techniques that will have lasting effects for teachers seems to be an area of need.

It is also important to note that stress is an individual response to internal and external factors. Furthermore, there is a significant need for long term and individual approaches for helping teachers cope with stress. One-time inservices were reported by some participants as ineffective. There is a need for ongoing support and methods for teachers to develop strategies and to acknowledge stress in their profession. Perhaps school psychologists can play an important role in supporting teachers through stress management seminars. Furthermore, school psychologists often provide teachers with classroom recommendations for students with learning difficulties; perhaps in supporting their students, school psychologists can provide further support for teachers.

C. Implications/Recommendations

The small number of interviews conducted and the rural setting in which they were conducted indicate the difficulty of generalizing the results of the current study. Therefore, results of the current study must be interpreted with caution due to the limited number of participants; however, participants provided valuable information on their perceptions of stress and current mechanisms in place to support them when feeling stressed.

Overall Recommendation:

Given the nature of responses from participants it is evident that a collaborative effort is needed to further support teachers and students. It is important that all parties involved work together to insure students and teachers are supported in the teaching and learning environment. A culture of respect and understanding for each other is vital in addressing stress in a collaborative and cohesive effort.

Recommendations for Teachers:

1. Given the concern expressed by many teachers surrounding the lack of effective coping strategies used by teachers, it is important to discuss stress concerns with other teachers. Expressing concerns surrounding stress is important for teachers and feeling comfortable discussing such issues is equally important.
2. Given the effectiveness of using a solution-focused approach in coping with stress, it is recommended that teachers use past experiences in developing strategies to cope with stress.
3. It was reported throughout the interviews that many teachers feel it is better to cope with stress concerns without seeking support. Teachers are urged to seek support and to discuss stress with outside support.

4. Teachers are also urged to self-advocate for supports and acknowledgement of stress concerns. It is a moral issue for both teachers and students as stress impacts how teachers function on the job. If teachers are suffering from the effects of stress, the students suffer as well. Delivering this message is vital in gaining more supports for teachers.

5. It is suggested that teachers continue to seek a venue to express concerns regarding policy making. Expressing main causes of stress may help policy makers consider the role of the teacher in the classroom and how policies are implemented.

6. Teachers should continue to advocate for changes in work conditions and for supports to accommodate the needs of the students. If these issues are addressed then some of the stress may be eliminated for teachers.

Recommendations for the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union:

In Nova Scotia, teachers are represented by the NSTU. The role of the NSTU is to provide supports to teachers throughout their careers. More specifically, the NSTU provides counseling services to teachers, promotes awareness of stress concerns, and funds Wellness Nights and Stress Management seminars for teachers. It is important to identify the gaps between what is made available to teachers and where there is further need for awareness and supports.

1. Given that teachers in rural settings may be less likely to seek support because of lack of anonymity, it is suggested that the NSTU provide more onsite inservices to inform teachers of stress management supports that are in place.
2. The NSTU could continue to advocate for more psychologists in rural areas to give stress management seminars and counseling. Additionally, focusing on more preventative strategies along with reactive approaches may help the NSTU to further support teachers.
3. The NSTU should continue to become an advocate for teachers experiencing stress. Expanding the awareness of teacher stress and advocating for acknowledgement of the concerns will help teachers feel more supported in their efforts in coping with stress.
4. Given the lack of awareness of supports that are provided by the NSTU, it is suggested that more focus be placed on the preventative supports that are available for teachers. Perhaps a website or mandatory seminars are required to properly inform teachers about supports made available to them. If teachers feel more informed about the supports then perhaps they will be more likely to seek support.

Recommendations for School Boards:

A variety of practices exist and are in place across boards that support teachers with stress concerns. While some boards do provide direct support, there is a need for further investigation into the supports being provided to teachers to cope with stress.

1. Given the lack of support that teachers report from outside sources, it is suggested that school boards develop a climate of understanding surrounding teacher stress concerns. Again, developing an understanding and awareness of teacher stress may influence teachers to seek supports and take a more preventative approach to coping with stress.

2. It is suggested that school boards continue to provide personal and professional support for teachers in coping with stress. Understanding the main causes of stress for teachers may help decrease these causes and therefore decrease stress for teachers. By addressing the main causes of teacher stress, teachers may be better equipped to carry out their professional duties.

3. Examining why certain schools are experiencing more stress than others is also important in gaining an understanding of the causes of teacher stress. Having a supportive administration in place is known to decrease stress for teachers.

4. Providing teachers with a venue to voice their concerns is equally important. It is recommended that teachers be provided with a valid venue that will allow them to voice concerns openly and anonymously. Simply expressing their concerns may decrease stress for many teachers as several teachers noted that talking to administration about stress is not a valid option. Also discussing and sharing coping strategies that some teachers have found effective will help teachers support their colleagues.

Recommendations for Government Policy Makers:

Currently, the government provides funding, support, and professional development for teachers including supports for stress concerns. Therefore, the following recommendations are made to strengthen these supports.

1. Given the number of teachers that reported feelings of disconnect toward policy making, it is suggested that mechanisms be set up to insure that teachers feel involved in policy making decisions. Teachers are the individuals who are required to implement many of the policies and many feel they are not part of a collaborative effort in developing the policies. This lack of involvement was a major cause of stress noted by several teachers in the interviews.

2. Once again, providing teachers with a venue to voice their concerns and to become involved in the policy making process is vital in taking a collaborative approach to delivering education.

Recommendations for future research:

1. Given the small number of participants involved in the current study, it is difficult to generalize the findings. Therefore, it is suggested that with more time and funding, more interviews be conducted with a wide variety of teachers from several schools. Duplicating the current study with more participants would add to the validity and reliability of results.

2. Using a survey that could be sent to a large number of teachers would also add to the validity and reliability of the study. Additionally, participants may be more open about their perceptions of stress in the profession and more willing to participate if a survey was used instead of individual interviews.
3. The current study was limited to teachers in rural settings. It is important for future studies to examine teacher stress in both rural and urban settings. Many potential participants may not have volunteered because of the smaller setting in which the study took place.
4. It will be important to examine teachers with a greater diversity in gender and culture in future studies. Given the small numbers of participants in the current study, it was difficult to have an equal representation of both males and females. Furthermore, most of the participants were Caucasian and female, limiting the diverse perspectives that would be available with a more varied group of participants. Gaining perspectives from other cultures and gender may add to the supports that other groups may access to cope with stress.
5. As well as examining individuals, it is equally important to include and investigate school climate and culture. School climate and culture heavily impacts teacher's perceptions of stress and how it is dealt with in the system. In the current study it was not the intent to examine this factor; however, future research could focus on school culture and climate and how this impacts teacher's perceptions of stress.

6. Given the purpose of the current study to examine newly experienced teachers perceptions of stress and more experienced teachers, it is suggested that further and more specific investigation be given to these groups of teachers. With more time and funding, perhaps further examination of stress during a teacher's career can be carried out.

7. Stress is an area of research that relies heavily on retrospective accounts and subjective findings. Because of the lack of studies that measure stress through direct observation, it is suggested that more studies use the direct observation to examine stress rather than relying on retrospective reports.

Implications for School Psychology:

1. School psychologists can be utilized in many ways to support teachers in coping with stress. Time may be set aside for school psychologists to deliver stress management seminars with teachers and to talk about stress management strategies.

2. School psychologists could be involved in assisting administrators and teachers in several situations that occur between students and teachers. Classroom recommendations made by school psychologists for behavior as well as academic problems is an indirect way of supporting teachers with stress in the classroom.

3. School psychologists may also be consulted on an informal basis regarding issues in the classroom as well as stress concerns from teachers. Having school psychologists as

an informal support for consultation may also help teachers discuss and increase awareness of teacher stress.

4. It is also possible for school psychologists to provide alternative resources for teachers to seek in regards to stress management and prevention. School psychologists may help teachers take a more preventative approach in coping with stress through direct and indirect support.

Failing to address stress concerns for teachers is equally detrimental to the students. As evidenced in the current study and in the literature, teacher stress impacts not only teachers themselves, but the students as well.

iv.) Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the causes, coping strategies, and perceptions of teacher stress. More specifically, differences in perceptions of stress between newly experienced and more experienced teachers were investigated. Results indicated that most teachers interviewed felt that stress is an area of concern in the profession. Furthermore, increasing work demands, lack of supports, and ineffective coping strategies were mentioned most often by participants. Similar findings are noted throughout the literature. There were few differences between the two groups of teachers, with the main difference appearing in more experienced teacher's attitude toward the system. Both groups identified similar causes of stress and noted that

increasing work demands are the major cause of stress for most teachers. Support in identifying preventative strategies is needed to properly address stress in the teaching.

On a personal note, I strongly feel that my role as a school psychologist has been impacted significantly throughout this research process. I feel that school psychologists and teachers have a unique relationship that is vital in fulfilling our responsibilities to the students. I also feel that school psychologists support teachers both directly and indirectly through consultation with the students who are experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties. In my practice I will feel empathy for teachers as I have gained a unique understanding for their role in the classroom through my research. This empathy will also be reflected in my recommendations that I provide for teachers in working with students with academic and behavioral concerns. A collaborative effort is needed for school psychologists and teachers to facilitate positive learning experiences for students.

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APPENDIX A

Demographics Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please indicate your age group:

<25 _____ 26-30 _____ 31-35 _____
36-40 _____ 40-45 _____ >45 _____

2. Gender :

Male _____ Female _____

3. Please indicate the area in which you teach.

• Rural _____ Urban _____

4. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching.

1-5 _____
15-20 _____
>20 _____

5. Indicate your Teacher Certification Level

TC _____

6. Have you had training and in-services on stress management and coping with stress? If yes, please indicate the details of these programs.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Stress in the workplace is a popular topic in the literature and in the media. When you hear the word “stress”, what does it mean to you? (Prompt: tell me about your concept of stress.)
2. a.) In your opinion, what are some of the personal and work related stresses that teachers experience?
b.) If you were to rank stresses at work what would be the top two stresses?
c.) Over time, do you think that stressors teachers face have changed?
3. Stressors originate from many sources. What do you think are some of the root causes of teacher stress? (Prompt: Personal, leadership, policies, funding, etc.)
4. Stress affects us all in different ways. How do you think being stressed impacts teachers’ interactions with students and other professionals?
5. a.) What type of control, if any, do you feel teachers have over the stressors they encounter in the workplace?
b.) Could you share with me some of the strategies, techniques, and methods teachers may use to reduce stress at school?
c.) Do you think these strategies to reduce stress at work are effective and successful?
6. a.) Are you aware of any school or community based supports to help teachers deal with stress in the workplace? (If response is yes prompt: could you elaborate on these supports?)
b.) Tell me how your school board addresses stress concerns for teachers.
c.) Do you think B.Ed. programs inform students about stressors teachers may encounter in the profession?
d.) Does the Nova Scotia Teacher’s Union address and provide supports for teachers who experience stress on the job?
7. Is there a role for school psychologists in helping teachers understand and cope with stress in the workplace?

8. In your opinion, how comfortable are teachers with discussing issues around stress with colleagues and others?

Appendix C

Letter to Participants

Dear (Teacher's Name/Participant),

My name is Briden Keay and I am sending this letter as a follow up to our telephone conversation on (date). I am enrolled in the Masters of Arts in School Psychology Program at Mount Saint Vincent University. At present, I am completing my thesis, which is on the topic of teacher stress. Understanding the implications of teacher stress is important for the education system. It is my hope in conducting this study that the timing and causes of teacher stress will be better understood.

This thesis has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study. I have included a form for you to fill out. I will call you to arrange a time for me to pick up this consent form.

I appreciate your time and appreciation.

You may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact me at (902) 448-5677 or my supervisor, Dr. Carmel French at (902) 457-6187. You may also contact Dr. Stephen Perrot, Chair, Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board at (902) 457-6337, who is not directly involved in this study.

Sincerely,

Briden Keay
Masters of Arts in School Psychology Student
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Carmel French
Thesis Supervisor
Mount Saint Vincent University

APPENDIX D

Interview Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

I, _____, am willing to participate in an interview as part of a research study that examines the personal experiences of teachers who are new to the field and teachers with varying teaching experiences with regard to their perceptions of stress in school settings. This research study is being conducted by Briden Keay, a graduate student in the Master of Arts in School Psychology program, to fulfill the thesis requirement of her degree.

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time. I have been informed that the one-on-one interview will be audio-taped and that the tapes will be destroyed after they have been transcribed and analysed.

I also understand that my identity will remain anonymous and that the information I give is confidential to be shared only with the researcher and her supervisor. I know that direct quotes from the interview tapes will appear in the thesis, but neither the name of the participant nor the school will be identified.

I understand that I may examine the final copy of the study and that a summary of the findings will be provided to me.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Phone numbers where I may be reached: _____

Times I may best be reached: _____

If you would like a summary of thesis findings please provide a mailing address below:

APPENDIX E

Letter to Principals

Dear (Principal's Name),

My name is Briden Keay and I am sending this letter as a follow up to our telephone conversation on (date). I am enrolled in the Masters of Arts program in School Psychology at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am currently completing my thesis, which is on the topic of teacher stress. Understanding the implications of teacher stress is important for the education system. It is my hope in conducting this study that the timing and causes of teacher stress will be better understood.

This thesis has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board.

In order to contact potential volunteers and to ensure confidentiality of personal information of participants, I am requesting your assistance. Sealed, stamped, and addressed envelopes containing a letter that describes this study and an invitation to participate will be provided to you. Your assistance in recruiting teachers for this study would be greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact me at (902) 448-5677 or my supervisor, Dr. Carmel French at (902) 457-6187. You may also contact Dr. Stephen Perrot, Chair, Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board at (902) 457-6337, who is not directly involved in this study.

Sincerely,

Briden Keay
Master of Arts in School Psychology Student
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Carmel French
Thesis Supervisor
Mount Saint Vincent University