

The level of Strain and its Differences Among School Principals

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Abstract. Work strain is a common concept which is applied for all occupations. The present study aimed at identifying the level of strain at school settings. 92 school principals were volunteered to participate in this study. Frequency, descriptive statistics, t-test and ANOVA were used to analyze the study objective. However, the results showed that the level of strain among school principals was low to moderate which represent positive result. The result also indicated that there were no significant differences on the level of strain among school principals based on their gender, age, and work experience. Discussions and limitation were discussed.

Key words: Strain, School Principals, Individual Characteristics.

Introduction

The concept of the term 'work' generally encompasses various types of professions and occupations and it is a basic condition for people and a significant element for the human environment. Additionally, the primary element in developing individual and economy is work and most individuals spend majority of their lives in work-related activities. In the workplace, the occurrence of strain related experiences is natural as there is minimal ways to get rid of pent-up feelings. Majority of works dedicated to this topic evidenced that work issues may lead to adverse outcomes for the working individual (Youngusband, 2008). More specifically, psychological strain is among the negative outcomes in the workplace and is referred to as a reaction to the organizational demands including lack of concentration, loss sense of worth and depression. Moreover, strain, according to Winnubst (1993) refers to a multiple process involving behavioral, psychological and physiological factors that arise under stressful situations that causes destruction to the normal function of the individual. Moreover, strain is an affective feeling stat that is characterized by lowered emotional resources and energy levels (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). According to Idris (2011), strain is a particular kind of emotional distress that originates from a response to a circumstance involving the perception of threat to the well-being of the individual.

Problem Statement

Teachers generally experience many situations in their day to day work activities that are physically and mentally taxing, necessitating them to expend energy in the classroom while balancing it with personal and family responsibilities. Studies on teachers showed that they have a higher likelihood to be affected by psychological strain compared to other professions. Based on these studies, academic staff perceived low job satisfaction and psychological and mental health issues (Ingersoll, 2013; Ingersoll & May, 2012; Kinman, 2001). Added to this, in the academic sector, stress and burnout issues are often reported by teachers (Chand & Monga, 2007). This holds true for school principals throughout the globe. According to Friedman (2002), school principal is a profession that is characterized by numerous responsibilities, information ambiguities and emotional anxieties. Nevertheless, an effective school principal is one that has leadership skills, can inspire collaboration among his/her subordinates when achieving the mission and goals of the school.

In certain instances, overwhelming strain from responsibilities can cause negative effects on the well-being of principals, particularly if they fall short of meeting satisfactory learning processes and lower achievement of professional and personal goals as evidenced by Riley (2014), Riley and Fox (2013) and Friedman (2000). In Phillips and Sen's (2011) study, they indicated that good leadership is at the core of every good school and as such, a mentally and physically unwell leader could impact the well-being of the school and those within it in a negative way (p.180).

Moreover, several studies have also evidenced burnout and stress to be the outcome of work-related experiences of principals. This situation is a reality in Saudi Arabia, with Alqahtani (2009) revealing that stressors and burnout level is moderate-high among Jeddah national schools principals. In a related study, Beusaert, Froehlich, Devos and Riley (2016) indicated that factors play a key role in driving stress and strain level and these include individual and contextual factors. This study therefore includes individual factors of gender, age, educational level and years of experience as drivers of psychological strain.

Literature Review

Strain is a multi-process behavioral, psychological and physiological reaction that arises under the influence of stress and hinders the normal function of the individual and it could lead to many negative outcomes like cynicism, lowered professional efficacy, mitigated organizational commitment and leave intention (Idris, 2009). In a related study, Bhagawan (1997) carried out a study involving 100 (53 male and 47 female) teachers chosen from 20 Orissa schools. The findings showed that the greater the teaching experience, the lower the perceived burnout level. In the Saudi context, Alqahtani (2009) examined the burnout level of Saudi principals numbering 47 from national schools and identified the stress sources that caused psychological combustion. The principals were noted to have varying degrees of stress and burnout owing to the regulation and requirements of the schools. Also in Saudi Arabia, Alhassan (2016) identified the anxiety level of public school teachers using modern computer applications. The study sample comprised of 110 teachers from different schools in Riyadh and the findings showed that teachers possess moderate degrees of teaching confidence with a slight anxiety level in teaching. In the same level of study, job strain and dissatisfaction was investigated among teaching staff by Huda, Rusli, Naing, Tengku, Winn and Rampal (2004). The findings showed strain-dissatisfaction correlation and psychological job-job dissatisfaction correlation, with decision authority being the driver of job dissatisfaction.

In the subject of school principals and stress, Beusaert, Froehlich, Devos and Riley (2016) examined the influence of stress on 3572 school principals and found social support to predict lowered stress and, in turn, burnout among them. Also, the burnout level among school principals was determined by Friedman (2002), in terms of related antecedents' key role. The author used a sample of 821 male and female principals, to which survey copies were administered and the results showed different burnout levels were brought about by the pressures on teachers and work overload.

A comparative study of occupational stress among private and government teachers was carried out by Kaur (2011) in relation to the following demographic characteristics; age, gender and teaching experience. The authors urged for more studies to focus on examining stress factors among school teachers. In Jang's (2007) comparative study, he revealed that African American women had a higher likelihood to report strain levels relating to physical health, interpersonal relationships, and gender roles in the family, and a lower likelihood to bring up work-related, racial and job strain compared to their male

counterparts. In the same line of study, the degree of life stress and role stress experienced by professional women were determined by Devi (2007), in a study involving 180 women professionals under six occupations. Based on the findings, the elderly experienced lower stress levels and role stress while the youth experienced higher stress. Also, higher service years equated to higher life and role stress, with those with lower income experiences higher levels of stress (i.e., stress levels are minimized by income increase).

Among executives, Reddy and Ramamurthy (1991) conducted an analysis of age influence on stress experiences. The study sample numbered 200 executives and the results showed that 41-50 years old executive experienced higher stress than those who are 51-60 years old. Using a study sample of 80 executives, 40 for each gender (male and female) in different organizations, Beena and Poduval (1992) found that with increase in age, stress experience also increases owing to the increase in responsibilities. This is particularly true among female executives, who revealed higher stress levels as women experience higher amount of work change compared to men. Meanwhile, in Aminabhavi and Triveni's (2000) research, the authors revealed that employees' age, gender, and coping strategies had no significant influence on their occupational stress in the banks.

Similar findings were reported by other studies like Virk, Chhabra, and Kumar, (2001), who focused on occupational stress and work motivation and their relationship with age, job level and type-A behavior. Age and job level were found to have a significant impact on stress on the job. Added to this, in Rastogi and Kashyap's (2003) study, the authors laid stress on occupational stress and work adjustment among female employees comprising of 150 nurses, clerks and teachers. The average sample age was mature and experienced, assisting in their oversight of stress and maintenance of a smooth transition in the organization. Meanwhile, using 100 supervisors and below-supervisors as their sample, Bhatia and Kumar (2005) examined occupational stress and burnout in the industrial sector, with employees' ages ranging from 22-32 and from 33-42 years old. They found that with higher age group, there was higher experienced stress in the occupation. Moreover, the level of life stress and role stress among 180 professional women (involving 6 occupations) was examined by Devi (2007). The author found science and technology professionals and doctors felt higher life and role stress and they were followed by administrators and self-employed professionals. On the other hand, less stress in role and life was experienced among teachers and bankers.

Objectives of the Study

The current study browses and examine the newest literature that is devoted to the scientific problem of psychological strain in the context of school environment. The study generally aims to examine different levels of strain among school principals. The main objective is divided into the following sub-objectives:

1. To fix the levels of psychological strain among school principals;
2. To detect the levels of psychological strain based the gender of school principals;
3. To estimate the levels of psychological strain based on the age of the school principals;
4. To identify the levels of psychological strain based on the work experiences of the school principals.
5. To fix, access and analyse the levels of psychological strain based on the level of education.

Methodology and Study Design

Study Design

In the current study, there was approved a survey plan the study is based on, with involvement of a considerable number of participants in a disinterested sample in order to represent the peculiarities of the population of the presented study.

Sample

The principals from the Southern region’s of Saudi Arabia took part in the study and formed a study population. They gave their consent for participation. The method of convenient sampling was applied for the selection of 92 principals. For gender criterion there are 25 female principals and 67 male principals-participators.

Measure

The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) proposed by Goldberg (1978) was used gauged using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always). The developed items were initially reviewed by 5 experts in education for content validity. Reliability was ensured through Cronbach’s alpha (strain=0.681).

Data Analysis

The current study is aimed on examining the states of psychological strain as well as individual characteristics of school principals of Saudi Arabia (its Southern region). The cross-sectional survey design has been used. The demographic data are presented in Table 1 and divided on criteria of gender, age and work experience.

Gender criterion. Men participators prevailed with numbering 67 (72.8%) and the remaining 25participators were women (27.2% of respondents).

Age criterion. For age criterion the highest number of respondents were principals of 40-50 years old (68 people, 73.9%). The least number of respondents for age criterion formed 8 participators who are school principals of above 50 years old (8.7% of all respondents. 16 respondents were 30-40 years old (this made 17.4% of participators).

Experience criterion. As for the experience of principals there are such a survey background existed: the respondents who had 10-15 years of experience prevailed significantly (53 principals, 57.6% of respondents). Those that had above 15 years of experience followed them (this made 28 respondents, 30.5% of participators). Those principals who had even less than 10 years of experience made 11.9% (numbering 11 respondents).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Participants

Gender criterion			
		Number	Percentage
1.	Male	67	72.8%
2.	Female	25	27.2%
Age criterion			
		Number	Percentage
1.	30-40 Year	16	17.4%
2.	40-50 years	68	73.9%
3.	Above 50	8	8.7%
Work Experience criterion			
		Number	Percentage
1.	Less than 10 years	11	11.9%
2.	10-15 years	53	57.6%
3.	Above 15 years	28	30.5%

Firstly, there was analyzed the data accuracy and conformity as well as the outliers presence. All the data were analyzed with application of descriptive statistics method. The result of descriptive statistics indicated that principals are having low to moderate level of strain ($M= 3.40$; $SD= .579$), which represent that they can manage stress situation as well as they are having good ability to control stressful situation in the workplace. An independent sample t-test was adopted for the comparison of the mean scores of strains in light of gender among the school principals. Table 2 presents the results of the t-test, and from the table, it is evident that no significant difference was found on the strain level between male and female principals ($t\ value=.181$; $p> 0.05$).

Table 2. Differences of Strain Based on Gender

Factor	Gender	N	M	SD	Mean Diff	df	Sig- (2-taild)
Strain	Male	67	3.40	.555	.024	90	.857
	Female	25	3.38	.649			

The study used a one-way ANOVA to compare the mean scores as for the difference in strain level on the basis of the respondents' ages. Table 3 displays the results. It is clear that there is no significant difference in the strain level of the principals based on their ages, $F=2.078$ (.131; $p> 0.05$).

Table 3. ANOVA Results of Strain based on Age Groups

Strain	SS	DF	MS	F	Sig
Between group	1.361	2	.681	2.078	.131
Within group	29.152	89	.328		
Total	30.513	91			

Similarly, there was involved and implicated one-way ANOVA method for the comparison of the strain level mean scores based on the school principals' experience (Table 4). The obtained results show that there is no significant different in the principals' psychological strain levels based on their working experience, $F=.076$ (.927, $p> 0.05$).

Table 4. ANOVA Results of Strain based on Work Experience Groups

Strain	SS	DF	MS	F	Sig
Between group	.052	2	.026	.076	.927
Within group	30.461	89	.342		
Total	30.513	91			

Discussion and Implications

In personal and professional life, stress is an unavoidable element and this is particularly true for professionals holding jobs that make them susceptible to various stress causes, some of which are common to genders in the professions. This study found no significant differences between the school principals based on their gender, age and work experience. This lack of difference may be attributed to the job nature of the principals that remain relatively unchanged exposing them to lesser role overload, same working hours, and long vacation periods. This means that principals can avail of quality time to spend with their family and on social activities, perceiving a relaxed climate in the workplace. The study results are supported by some studies and rejected by others (e.g.,

Jang, 2007; Virk et al., 2001) which is inconsistent. This study contributes to literature concerning factors that influence psychological strain in schools among the principals. The study implications lie in the information concerning individual differences and their impact on psychological strain among Saudi school principals. Managers can use the information gathered by this study to assist in understanding psychological strain among principals in Saudi schools.

Study Limitations and Recommendations

Similar to other studies, this study has its own limitations that are discussed under this section. First, the study sample may be representative of the general population as it is only taken from Saudi schools in a specific region. This makes the findings generalization throughout geographical and demographical boundaries questionable. On the basis of such limitation, future studies can explore the topic using the same design and framework – specifically they can include all Saudi public and private schools. The second limitation relates to the quantitative data obtained using self-report measures, exposing the answers to self-manipulation of participants. In some instances, when boredom sets in with filling the survey, participants are likely to complete it without thinking, or to satisfy the author. Hence, the answers may not be totally accurate in terms of true experiences (Creswell, 1994). Hence, future studies are recommended to adopt qualitative methods to provide greater insight into the school principals' perceptions in the Saudi context.

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