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# AN INVESTIGATION INTO WORK STRESS EXPERIENCED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATORS

by

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the mini-dissertation hereby submitted by me for the MEd (C.W.) degree at the University of Vista is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university/faculty. I further confirm that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

*Rammone S Moduka*

R S MODUKA

*19 May 2007*

DATE

This dissertation is dedicated to my:

- late father, Mantje Abel Moduka
- late brother, Motlhouwa Josiel Moduka
- mother, Tina Lucy Moduka
- lovely Morwesi Sandrah Moduka

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## SUMMARY

Research has indicated that secondary school educators in South Africa experience significant levels of stress, emanating from the effects of political change and the concomitant new vision for socio-economic development in this country. These changes, among others, duly influence the approach to teaching and learning, which in turn have a bearing on educators' conduct. Educators experience stress from various sources, for example, from within the immediate school environment as well as from outside the school, which includes pressures from the community and negative media coverage.

This study aims at advancing and enhancing existing knowledge with regard to an understanding of levels of stress and its impact on secondary school educators. In this exploratory study a purposeful sample of twenty secondary school educators were used to obtain information-rich responses about the real issues that affect the level of stress in the work environment. All of these educators were exposed to a questionnaire study. This was followed up by interviews with five educators randomly selected from the sample, all in an endeavour to further explore the problem under investigation.

The questionnaire study revealed the following as major stressors in the work place : lack of parental support or involvement; lack of commitment and discipline among learners; inadequate resources; work overload and overcrowded classes; poor relationship or communication between ordinary educators and educators who hold management positions; and lack of security in the work place. Furthermore, this research study indicated that work stress does in fact affect educators' attitude and perception, work productivity and efficiency, as well as their mental and physical health. Educators also expressed a strong need for psychological and administrative support from education officials. Based on the findings, recommendations are made as to how to address and alleviate the negative effects of high levels of stress on educators.

## CHAPTER 1

### ORIENTATION

#### 1.1 GENERAL BACKGROUND

The historical disbanding of apartheid in 1994 has brought about comprehensive political changes in South Africa. Inevitably change in the political arena also necessitated a new vision for socio-economic development in this country. A different approach to socio-economic development and the concomitant changes in the educational dispensation have brought with them numerous changes. This include changes in the approach to teaching and learning, which in turn necessitated a whole new curriculum (Curriculum 2005). All these changes, as well as the inclusive approach to teaching, gave rise to the fact that the teaching task (as educator, facilitator and assessor) has become more and more complex and in most cases also more difficult and demanding. This and the prevailing conditions in most South African schools as well as other work-related obligations have led to increased levels of stress experienced by educators (Hayward 1994:5; Van Zyl & Pietersen 1999:74; Niehaus & Myburgh 1999:9).

It would therefore appear that educators (teachers) can be included in the group of South Africans suffering from high levels of stress. Since the introduction of educational change in the 1990's, educators too had to adapt to the new reality. Educators in all probability are experiencing more stress because of the changes in the basic occupational structure of teaching. They are exposed to a wide variety of multidimensional stressors within the work situation, for instance, inadequate working conditions, role conflict and ambiguity, learner behavioural problems, time pressures, the threat of redundancy and expulsion, work pressure, little

participation in decision-making and unequal distribution of tasks, lack of recognition, as well as inadequate support and salaries. The consequences of excess stress among educators only spell negative implications for all the role players in the teaching profession. Occupational stress is of special significance in the case of educators since it may affect not only educators, but it may also have a negative impact on learners for which they are responsible. Educator stress is therefore a problem for the individual educator, the learners, the school, the teaching profession and education system (Hayward 1994:6; Ferreira 1994:112-113; Marais 1992:305-307; Rigby *et al.* 1996:38).

The increase in media coverage on education in South Africa every year, once the matric results have been published, focuses mainly on poor results, the poor conditions in many schools and the inferior quality of education in general. Inevitably this raises concern regarding stress experienced by educators and especially those teaching senior classes. This concern revolves around the stress and burnout experienced by educators who will ultimately avoid teaching senior classes owing to the focus of the public and education officials (Steyn & Van Wyk 1999:37).

Researchers in the human sciences, including education, are quite justified in asking the question: why is there an almost insatiable present day interest in the topic of stress and its reduction? The inevitable answer is that the interest is there because of the universality of the phenomenon of stress and varying responses to stress. Everybody who works with people, including educators, experience stress. The experience of stress does not only affect the individual experiencing stress, but also the organisation and its clients. Prolonged exposure to stress can result in diminished job satisfaction, reduced teacher-learner rapport and learner motivation, and decreased teacher/educator effectiveness in meeting educational goals. Prolonged stress can result in burnout and early quitting the teaching profession

(Abel & Sewell 1999:287; Hayward 1994:18).

Schools in townships are beset by many problems, which often vary according to the specific community. This appears to affect educators' effectiveness in teaching, and hence this situation gives rise to an increase in the levels of stress experienced. Chisholm and Vally (1996:13) confirmed that the morale of educators is deeply influenced by the socio-economic environment in which they work. Most township schools serve deprived communities. A substantial percentage of members of these communities have witnessed violence and their background is not making it easy for them to become fully prepared learners (Steyn & Van Wyk 1999:41).

The unstable nature of the teaching profession, due to the process of transformation, will constantly challenge educators to cope with and adapt effectively to all the changes encountered in their profession. How people respond to the accelerating pace and complexity of social change varies widely among individual educators, depending on their beliefs, as well as their perceptions, attitudes, values and needs. Personal beliefs are at the basis of a human being's approach to life situations. The goals individuals seek, the things they do, the judgements they make, even the experiments they are willing to perform, are determined by their beliefs. This happens because beliefs could be regarded as the pre-existing notions that a person has about reality, serving as a perceptual lens and determining how the person sees him/herself and the world in which he/she lives (Niehaus & Myburgh 1999:9, 11). Hayward (1994:18) alluded to the fact that the teaching profession is one of the 'caring professions'. Its practitioners are normally committed to the giving of their best for the welfare of those entrusted to their care. Such commitment is appreciable, but the consequences can be detrimental when the job demands are such that practitioners are unhappy and unable to perform effectively in the workplace due to stress. Stress can affect

educators' job satisfaction and hamper educators' effectiveness in the teaching-learning situation. Stress can also result in mental and physical illness and impair the working relationship between educators and learners as well as the overall quality of teaching (Borg & Riding 1993:14; Abel & Sewell 1999:287).

## 1.2 POTENTIAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

②  
Motivation

Educators (teachers) are currently experiencing high levels of stress due to the work demands they have to fulfil, which in turn may not necessarily promote effective teaching. Professional stress is often activated by the developments and changes over which the individual educator in this caring profession has little or no control. The South African education system is currently undergoing a process of fundamental change which will inevitably precipitate into stressful consequences as educators adapt to a new reality. However, adaptation of educators will not be smooth if educators become victims of too much criticism and lack of support by education officials who underrate the teaching and learning environment (Hayward 1994:10; Rigby *et al.* 1996:38).

Furthermore, one of the major characteristics of today's world is the accelerated rate of social change and its far reaching effects on individuals' lives. Life has become increasingly tense and complicated and educators are not exempted from this experience. Excessive pressure over an extended period of time results in the gradual deterioration of the quality of life. Living a well-adjusted life in a changing world is no longer easy. Educators' work is becoming more complex day by day and more demanding. In a single school day educators have to carry out a multitude of responsibilities. The roles of educators are not clearly defined and the variables that come into play are growing more complex. The issue at stake is that educators are expected to excel in all or most of their responsibilities in and out of

classrooms (Niehaus *et al.* 1996:104-105; Parikh 1991:14).

① Society needs to recognise that educator stress has become a major issue which will not disappear but is likely to have escalating negative effects on the quality of education, the mental health of educators and the life changes of children (learners). For some educators, stress is positive, called *eustress*, which serves as the driving force behind their success. For others, it takes the form of *distress*, that is, dissipating their energy and affecting their quality of life. The direct costs of the latter are significant for the individual educators and the school, as well as for the educational experience of the learners (Ferreira 1994:112-113; Hayward 1994:6; Marais 1992:308, Rigby *et al.* 1996:38).

② With the introduction of Curriculum 2005 which requires educators to operate differently from what they were used to, it is likely to add to stress experienced by educators. In the new dispensation educators require much more time for administrative duties. Where educators, for example, previously devoted a lot of time to planning their lessons, they now also have to work together in groups devising the timetable and integrating learning areas. There are major complaints from educators about the increased amount of work and time required to do this. Furthermore, continuous assessment, which is an extremely time-consuming exercise, remains a major stumbling block to educators (Fine 2000:8).

Of concern to educators is that they experience their daily work as very stressful. This in turn gives rise to the fact that educators together with education officials, often feel obliged to either overlook or shelve problems encountered. Furthermore, educators do not know how to cope with the situation due to the unavailability of support and coping resources. During the training phase in their professional education programmes, teacher trainees were not equipped or prepared to face these challenges in the field of education (Gold & Roth 1993:14).

The aforementioned factors thus necessitates further research on educators' stress. Furthermore, Cooper and Sutherland (1990:10) are of the opinion that in order to significantly address the issue of stress experienced by educators, further information need to be obtained on factors that give rise to these increased levels of stress. Information in this regard could lead to measures being taken that could rectify the current situation, so that the teaching profession can again become an enjoyable and rewarding profession. This information may be useful in helping psychologists and employers to identify stressors and plan accordingly for the effective management thereof among educators in secondary schools (Van Zyl & Pietersen 1999:74).

### 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

①

Educators are exposed to a wide variety of multidimensional stressors within the work situation and these have a bearing on the quality of their teaching. Innumerable demands are made on an educator, whether a first-year educator or an educator with many years of experience. Stress will nevertheless be experienced as the educator attempts to meet the myriad demands. It seems that pressures exerted on educators by education officials serving the education department do have negative consequences on the very quality of teaching that are being targeted (Beard 1990:111; Bell 1995:67; Abel & Sewell 1999:287-288).

In this study the extent to which different aspects of the teaching profession impacts on educators' stress is investigated. The research problem is to acquire a better understanding of the intensity of the phenomenon stress and its influence on educators' level of performance and health. It is, therefore, appropriate that educators and the senior management teams of schools learn to understand themselves and others better through a greater awareness of the negative

influence of stress on the teaching profession. Through mutual awareness, collegial support and the implementation of coping strategies, negative stress can be reduced within a school (Hayward 1994:5).

The *research questions* that emanate from the research problem include:

- What are the levels of stress experienced in the teaching profession?
- What are major causes of stress among educators?
- To what extent are educators' health affected by teaching stress?
- To what extent are educators' performance affected by teaching stress?
- What coping strategies are implemented by educators working under conditions of stress?

#### 1.4 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Purpose (3)

Bearing in mind the above research issues, this study project is aimed at advancing an understanding of stress levels and its consequences among secondary school educators. The aim is to contribute to and amplify the existing body of knowledge as regards the extent of the problem of stress experienced by educators in their work environment, its impact on the quality of their teaching and to propose appropriate guidelines to cope with the negative influences of stress. In order to accomplish this aim, the following *objectives* should be realised by the study.

- To establish educators' perception of the degree of stressfulness of their profession.
- To identify causes of stress in the teaching profession.
- To establish the extent to which prolonged exposure to stress affects educators' performance.

- To establish the extent to which educators' health is affected by prolonged exposure to teaching stress.
- To identify what coping strategies educators use to cope with stress in the workplace.

## 1.5 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW TO PRESENT POSSIBLE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

The variables identified for investigation in this research study are based upon a review of related literature and the researcher's years of experience in working with practising educators. These variables are deemed of significant importance for the exploration of stress factors among educators. From the literature survey conducted it became clear that extensive research was done on stress experienced in the workplace, especially during the last two decades. Researcher will therefore, occasionally refer back to pioneers during this era.

### 1.5.1 Stress

*Stress*, according to Cranwell-Ward (1990:10), is the physiological and psychological reaction which occurs when people perceive an imbalance between the level of demand placed upon them, and their capability to meet those demands. Stress is therefore regarded as an adaptive response in which a person's body prepares, or adjusts, to threatening situations.

Furthermore, Hayward (1994:5) defined stress as the individual's negative or positive response to a situation - whether the situation is of the past, the present or anticipated in the future. Response may take various forms, viz. distress (i.e. bad

or negative stress), eustress (i.e. good or positive stress), hyper stress (i.e. over stressed or excessive stress) or hypo stress (i.e. under stress). However, it is the individual's unique perception of the situation which determines the degree of negative or positive stress experienced.

From the preceding definitions it is clear that in order to reduce the negative influence of stress in the workplace, the educator needs to adjust to external stimuli depending on his/her belief or perception of the stressor, which in turn will determine the level of stress he or she will experience. Research has shown in this regard that educators who are successful in dealing with negative influences have a positive and realistic view of reality and above all they believe in themselves (Niehaus *et al.* 1996:109).

### 1.5.2 Stressors

A *stressor* is an experience or situation within or outside the individual, which elicits a stress response. It is the individual's unique perception which determines whether the stress is viewed as negative or positive (Hayward 1994:5). In this case the construct stressor refers to any teaching experience or condition within or outside an individual educator, which require a stress response (adjustment).

### 1.5.3 Coping strategies

*Coping strategies* refer to cognitive skills and forms of behaviour by means of which individuals give expression to their capacity for coping (holding their own) in situations that involve tension, frustration or agitation on their part (Niehaus 1994:36-38). It refers to changes in the person's way of thinking, feeling and

behaving to meet contextual demands, as well as personal needs, aspirations, goals etc. In fact, the ability of educators to hold their own is expressed by the particular coping strategies they use (Niehaus & Myburgh 1999:10).

According to Hayward (1994:5), coping strategies are those factors planned and implemented to help achieve under optimal human stress levels. These strategies may be reactive or pro-active in their planning and implementation.

From the preceding definitions it is clear that coping strategies are applied by educators to cope or counter the excessive and unrealistic demands made on their work. What is clear again is that stress-reduction interventions include both cognitive and behavioural components. Cognitive strategies attempt to change the way people perceptually deal with their world. This is achieved through the development of thinking patterns which promote a more accurate appraisal of the stress experienced. The behavioural techniques involve the development of a set of behaviours that will interfere with the stress response (Rigby *et al.* 1996:38-39).

#### 1.5.4 Educator

For the purpose of the study *educator* refers to a person who educates, i.e. a person whose job is to teach learners in a formal school setting, being a secondary school or a primary school.

#### 1.5.5 Secondary school

For the purpose of this research study, *secondary school* refers to a school category which constitute the sampling site of this study.

## 1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6

### 1.6.1 Design

6.1

This research is both qualitative and quantitative in design. A qualitative approach was deemed most suitable for this type of study as it provides educators an opportunity of defining their own perceptions and problems experienced as regards stress in the workplace. This allows the researcher to learn from informants' perspective and their personal experience. It is a naturalistic inquiry, since it uses non-manipulative data collection strategies to discover the natural flow of events and processes and how participants themselves interpret their situation. The qualitative approach to this research study is designed to be exploratory and implies a descriptive narration of findings. Thus, no attempt is made to establish cause and effect relationships (Kinchelwe & McLaren 1994:75; Wilson 1997:109; McMillan & Schumacher 1993:372-373).

The quantitative approach to the research study became necessary with the implementation of the Likert scale. This instrument was used to obtain or 'discover' certain characteristic features of subjects participating in this research study. These features were revealed by the numerical indices that are characteristic of the instrument. Such numerical values are then summarised and reported to depict the results of the study (McMillan & Schumacher 1993 : 223).

### 1.6.2 Population and Sample

6.2

The population for this study includes secondary school educators offering a wide variety of subjects to Grade 10 to Grade 12 learners at three township secondary schools near Virginia in the Goldfields of the Free State Province. Participants

selected are from Meloding, Mamello and Reatlehile secondary schools. Purposeful sampling was implemented in an effort to obtain information-rich feedback from a relatively small sample of educators. From the site selected, twenty educators will be approached that are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon under investigation.

### 1.6.3 Data collection

603

Data collection comprises questionnaires that was administered to twenty educators as well as interviews conducted with five educators randomly selected from this sample.

#### 1.6.3.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires is the most widely used technique for obtaining information from people, especially in educational research. A questionnaire is relatively economical, has standard questions, ensures anonymity, and questions can be written for specific purposes (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:238). It determines how people feel about the particular issue, or it may seek to establish the effect to some extent on peoples' behaviour. In addition, questionnaires provide an opportunity to examine correlations between the subjects; responses and possible patterns of cause and effect (McBurney 1994:193).

### 1.6.3.2 Interviews

Interviews are essentially vocal questionnaires. It involves direct interaction between individuals, and this interaction has both advantages and disadvantages as compared to the questionnaire. The interview technique is flexible and adaptable. During an interview, non-verbal as well as verbal behaviour can be noted in a face-to-face encounter. Furthermore, the interviewer has an opportunity to motivate the respondents which in turn results in information-rich responses (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:250). In this study semi-structured interviews will be implemented, based on open-ended questions that are fairly specific in its intent. This is a kind of non-directive, controlled in-depth interview since interviewees are given freedom to speak out their hearts.

### 1.6.4 Data analysis

6.4

Questionnaire responses will be gathered for the purpose of identifying emerging topics and recurring patterns. Transcripts of recordings of interviews will be carefully scrutinised and analysed over a period of time in order to gain familiarity for categorising purposes. Content analysis will be used to analyse research data and it entails identifying, coding (the process of dividing data into parts by means of a classification system) and categorising the primary patterns in the recorded data (Miles & Huberman 1994:13; McMillan & Schumacher 1993:480-482).

## 1.7 DELIMITATION OF STUDY

The research is undertaken in the study field of cognitive education. Although the

study will be conducted in the Goldfields of the Free State Province, its findings or elements thereof, could probably also be applicable to other parts of the province or country. The findings of qualitative research, however, is aimed at an extension of understanding the phenomenon observed or researched, rather than generalising findings. Nevertheless, it is imperative that stress in the workplace (school or classroom) be managed in an effective manner so as to pursue excellence in the classroom.

## **1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The qualitative research design is not aimed to generalising the results, but ultimately to make statements about the relationships among categories and establishing certain characteristic patterns in the data (Schward 1994:48). This will enable the researcher to gain some understanding of the complexity of the problem.

This study, however, has a number of shortcomings. Among others, the following are worth mentioning:

- lack of research evidence in this study as regards stress experienced by educators who are not offering subjects at levels Grade 10 to Grade 12;
- there is no intensive comparative study between educators who are involved at Grades 8 to 10 level and those teaching Grades 10 to 12 learners.

## **1.9 SUMMARY**

The aim of this introductory chapter was to give an overview of the research study.

This included, in brief, the demanding experiences of practising educators in schools. A short review of the potential importance of the study was offered, research questions and objectives, definition of terms as well as the methodology were discussed briefly. This first chapter also contains limitations and delimitations of the study.

In order to establish a clear perspective of the impact of stress on educators' level of performance, the following plan of action will be pursued.

## CHAPTER 2

This chapter reviews the relevant literature and past findings with regard to the concept *stress*.

## CHAPTER 3

This deals with the research design, data collection techniques, the sample of the study and the procedures that will be followed.

## CHAPTER 4

Data collected will be processed and reported. Hence a preliminary analysis will ensue.

## CHAPTER 5

The research findings will be discussed, recommendations be made and the necessary conclusions be drawn.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ON STRESS

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

During the past few years there has been a growing interest in the topic of stress. However, in South Africa there is still limited research data available as regards stress experienced by educators. The interest in the influence of stress, is nevertheless maintained because stress is viewed as an adaptive response whereby a person's body prepares, or adjusts to a threatening or too demanding situation (Skillern *et al.* 1990:110)<sup>1</sup>. Excessive levels of stress experienced over an extended period of time is one of the major causes of deteriorating health, lack of productivity, depression or even burnout. It is a relevant topic to research because stress seems to strike those in the helping professions, such as teaching in a disproportionate manner as compared to other workers. Today, more than ever before, learners and educators experience a great deal of stress (Reglin & Reitzammer 1998:590).

Despite the fact that educators experience a broad spectrum of stress, there is little research describing their actual levels of stress, especially in South Africa (Bulwalda & Kok 1991:118).<sup>1</sup> Researchers have found that approximately 30-40 % of South Africans in general suffer from high levels of stress (Van Zyl & Van der Walt 1994:22). Countable research studies showed that educators are exposed to a wide variety of multidimensional stress within the work situation.

1) Method of referencing and quoting implemented is done according to Van der Walt (1999 : 14).

Due to the depressing climate that currently prevails in the area of school education, it is quite evident why educators experience a great deal of stress in the workplace. For educators who are vulnerable, too much stress will affect their health and performance negatively. Educators desperately need a support system to help reduce their vulnerability to stress. Research has revealed that if stress factors are not effectively controlled, many educators today would choose another career if they could start over again (Reglin & Reitzammer 1998:593).

## 2.2 APPROACHES TO STRESS

Acknowledging the elusive nature of stress, researchers have identified three main approaches to the concept, namely the response approach, stimulus approach and interactional (transactional) approach (Beard 1990:111). These three major theoretical approaches have sought to explain the nature of stress and the ways in which human beings respond to stress. These approaches are influenced mainly by two schools of thought, that is, that of the behaviourists and cognitivists. The behaviourists focus almost solely on observable behaviour and behavioural change as forms of individual response to demands. On the other hand the cognitive psychologists explain stress as an internal reaction process by individuals under pressure that can only be associated with certain individual behaviour (Cranwell-Ward 1990:7-8). The following discussion provides a detailed account of the aforementioned approaches to stress.

### 2.2.1 Response approach

This approach focuses on the psycho-physiological response by the individuals to environmental demands, which include physiological reactions such as increased heart beat and psychological reactions such as irritable behaviour. This approach defines stress as a response syndrome mediated by an appraisal of threat to the educators' self-esteem or well-being. In this model the judgement of threat to the well-being of the individual is the main mechanism for mediating the experience of stress. The response approach describes the particular response or pattern of responses which illustrates that the person is or has been under pressure due to events in the environment (Derogatis & Coons 1993:202).

Coping, according to this approach, is the individual's intentions to reduce the personal threat and mediate the stress response syndrome. An individual's perception of the demands on his/her ability, will affect the stress he/she will experience. Stress then becomes the extent to which the individual is able to meet the demands emanating from a lack of effective coping (Cranwell-Ward 1990:67; Abel & Sewell 1999:289).

According to the response approach to stress, stress is described as a process in which the physical as well as the psychological characteristics of the individual play a role. Furthermore, the focus is on the important role of specific demands and the individual's ability to handle them (Van Zyl & Pietersen 1999:75). The demands experienced by the individual are either external or internal of nature. The external demands comprise factors outside the individual (for instance time demands) and internal demands include the needs which determine behaviour. The individual is continuously observing and evaluating these demands.

### 2.2.2 Stimulus approach

This approach focuses on the types of events and conditions that are stressful. Advocates of the stimulus approach are of the opinion that stress emanates from external factors, known as stressors, which influence an individual's level of perception and functioning. These external factors may be environmental aspects that exaggerate demands upon the individual or disorganise the person (Palm-Forster 2000:86; Derogatis & Coons 1993:201).

This approach views stress as environmental stimuli causing disruption or strain to a person. A person becomes stressed, when he or she perceives an imbalance between level of demands placed upon them, and their capability to meet those demands. These demands originate from a group of external causes or that which happens to a person and not symptoms or that which happens within a person. The stimulus approach acknowledges that human beings can handle stress only up to a certain point and this point varies from individual to individual. When this cut-off point is reached whereby an individual can handle external demands, any additional or excessive demands could result in negative results. These extreme demands can then lead to permanent emotional and physiological damage (Palm-Forster 2000:86).

In addition, the stimulus approach differentiates between different types of stimulus stressors and their estimated capacities to cause stress. These include, acutely-limited stressors (for example confronting an aggressive dog), stressor consequences (for example from the death of a family member), chronic stressors (for example a hostile manager, financial strains, or constant sexual dysfunction and daily stressful events).

Palm-Forster (2000:87) views the stimulus response approach as being too

simplistic for human stress incidents. According to her criticism, the stimulus approach can be seen as focusing on:

- externally originating forces;
- externally provoked forces;
- environmental catalysts causing pressure and strain;
- forces beyond the control of the person-catalyst with an external focus of control;
- harmful stimuli that may cause permanent psychological and physiological damage;
- forces beyond the control of the person-catalyst with an external focus of control; and
- things happening to a person.

### 2.2.3 Interactional or transactional approach

Due to the fact that stress is a complicated phenomenon, a broadly based definition of stress was developed by using the stimulus and response-based approaches, whereby stress is viewed as an interaction between the person and the environment. The interactional approach obviates an important flaw in early research on stress which emphasise the stimulus response interaction. The interactional approach takes the complex interactions between stressors, as well as psychological factors and stress responses into account.

According to the interactional or transactional approach, individuals are subjected to external environmental and internal demands in the form of psychological and physiological needs (Cooper & Sutherland 1990 :10). Stress therefore depends on an individual's cognitive appraisal of events or circumstances and on the ability to

cope. Stated differently, stress is viewed as the end result of a person's transaction with his or her environment. When an individual experiences stress, according to this model, it is due to the fact that the demands do not seem to be in equilibrium (balance) with such an individual's coping ability. In order to satisfy the demand, people weigh up their own perception of such demand, as well as their perceived capacity to cope with the specific demand. This process controls an individual's behaviour. Stress is therefore not due to the disequilibrium between demand and coping ability, but between perceived demand and perceived coping ability. If a person manages to cope, the balance between demand and ability is restored. However, failing to cope with the perceived demand leads to physiological side effects or malfunctions, such as exhaustion, headaches, faintness and low blood glucose, psychological effects, for example, the inability to concentrate, irritability, fatigue, behavioural effects, for example, absenteeism, eating disorders and accident prone behaviour (Louw & Edwards 1993:649; Palm-Forster 2000:92; Van Zyl & Pietersen 1999:74-75).

Furthermore, an individual's coping strategy is constantly changing in an effort to manage specific demands that are appraised as exceeding the person's resources. This implies that as long as the individual's ability to cope is not exceeded, no consequences of long-term stress need to be experienced.

The end-result of future decisions that will be made by an individual, is influenced by the feedback built into this approach. Feedback is, for example, a physiological response when the adrenaline hormone is secreted and this influences the individual's view of the situation that causes the stress, or a behavioural response that can change the characteristic of the true demand (Palm-Forster 2000:93).

According to Palm-Forster (2000:93) the above contributions by the transactional approach seems to be characterised by the following :

- psychological and physiological needs;
- external and internal demands made on a person;
- personal cognitive assessments of situations and abilities;
- subjective assessment of a demand;
- subjective assessment of the ability to cope with a specific demand;
- controlled behaviour through personal assessment of danger;
- the imbalance in the manner in which a demand is grasped and handled;
- the balance that is restored if a person can handle the situation;
- headaches, irritability, fatigue, absenteeism and eating disorders when a person cannot cope;
- strain in case of inadequate coping;
- stress resulting in psychological, physiological and behavioural problems;
- feedback that occurs when adrenaline is released;
- problem-solving - when a balance occurs between actual and perceived demands; and
- illness and death - when disequilibrium occurs between actual and perceived demands and real and perceived coping demands.

The above approaches seem to have common grounds, although they differ in their definitions and methods. In order gain clarity on the stress phenomenon and its effects on secondary school educators, the researcher will make use of the broad definitions and various approaches to stress. In order to understand the relationship between stress responses and stressors, it is necessary to take a concise look at stress response moderators.

### **2.3 STRESS RESPONSE MODERATORS**

Stress response moderators are personality and behavioural characteristics which

expand or reduce a person's vulnerability to stress. The vulnerability to stress varies from person to person and may even vary within the same person. This is influenced by a number of factors, for example, age, personality, how someone has learned from previous experiences, the degree of security experienced from ties with others, state of health, behaviour patterns, hardiness, etc. The amount of stress which a person can withstand depends largely on the individual, because a problem will only be perceived if there seems to be a discrepancy between demands placed on the individual and his or her ability to cope. Some people can endure tremendous emotional or mental anxiety and yet seem to emerge unscathed, even strengthened. Others crack when they are addressed in a harshly manner (Davies & Ellison 1990:113; Palm-Forster 2000:94).

The discussion about stress will be incomplete if the complexity of *personality* is not explained in greater detail. Possibly the simplest explanation of the difference in individuals' response to stress is the 'Type A' and 'Type B' personality theory of Friedman and Rosenman (Cole & Walker, 1990 :19). For the purpose of this study, a brief look will be taken at behaviour patterns as an example of stress response moderators that expand or reduce an individual's vulnerability to stress.

### 2.3.1 Type A

Individuals with a Type A personality are characterised as restless, over-conscientious, workaholics. They are likely to perceive more stressors and experience more situations as potentially stressful. The Type A personality individuals exhibit an intense drive of ambitiousness, aggressiveness and competitiveness. They need to get things finished and are often very impatient (Louw & Edwards 1993:632; Fontana 1995:393).

This type of personality is also characterised by a high self-esteem, tenseness,

pursuit of success and recognition, and easily become hostile. Excessive demands (which may be self-initiated) can cause Type A people to be adversely affected by fairly low levels of stressors so that their responses become out of tune with the degree of danger and they 'blow up' at a minor inconvenience. Type A personalities find it difficult to cope with failure and have an internal locus of control and hardiness. Hardiness includes three characteristics : *control*, a belief in a person's ability to influence events; *commitment*, an approach to life marked by curiosity and a sense of meaningfulness, and *challenge*, or the expectations that change is normal and stimulates development (Palm-Forster 2000:95; Davies & Ellison 1990:114).

Educators who are considered "hardy" respond to stress differently than may be expected, they possess a sense of purpose that allows them to be proactive, not reactive, in most stressful situations. For example, a change in the working environment, such as dramatic increase in class size, would be seen as a "challenge" to the hardy person (Gaseoyne 1997:8)

Research has shown that the Type A personality is vulnerable to illnesses due to stress. The Type A personality, for example, is prone to coronary problems. Even when the other risk factors, such as smoking, cholesterol level, etc. are controlled, the incidence of coronary heart disease and the death rate is twice as high with Type A individuals as is the case with Type B individuals. Stressors, like competition at work, cause higher levels of catecholamine (a group of compounds that have the effect of sympathetic nerve stimulation) and norepineprine (noradrinaline which raises the blood pressure) to be present in Type A individuals (Palm-Forster 2000:95; Fontana 1995:393).

Type A behaviour is thus a typical response of an individual who demands much from the environment. As a result of Type A's competitive personality, the fight-or-

flight response is chronically evoked, resulting in excessive secretion of adrenaline and cortisol. When Type A individuals are subjected to high levels of stress they tend to experience a typical set of stress-related health problems such as high blood pressure, gastrointestinal problems, muscle cramping, vulnerability to viruses or more severe chronic ailments (Gaseoyne 1997:8).

According to Palm-Forster (2000:96) it appears as if Type A personalities possess the following characteristics:

- react in a characteristic manner;
- are extremely vulnerable to stress and burnout;
- are vulnerable to heart attacks;
- have the ability to turn ordinary issues into stressors (always want no disturbance);
- get annoyed easily;
- tend to be aggressive and argumentative;
- are on guard if their control is intimidated;
- must feel in control of their surroundings;
- are tense people;
- are highly motivated and competitive;
- are achievers who set high personal goals;
- have a strong need to dominate others;
- are committed;
- are energetic;
- are unable to relax;
- find it hard to accept failure;
- suffer from work overload;
- reveal fight or flight reactions; and
- live hard and fast.

### 2.3.2 Type B

The qualities and behaviour patterns of the Type B personality are held to be the opposite of the Type A personality. Type B personalities have a more easy-going manner, are patient, and make time to appreciate leisure and beauty. They are not particularly competitive and do not feel the need to set deadlines. The Type B behaviour is seen as an alternative way of responding to or coping with challenges in the environment. With qualities that are more opposite of Type A personality, the Type B personality is as much effective as the Type A personality in his or her job performance. They also do not suffer from time pressure, can relax without feeling guilty and are associated with being less vulnerable to coronary heart diseases and stress-related health illnesses (Palm-Forster 2000:97).

Palm-Forster (2000:97) identified the following characteristics to be typical of Type B personalities.

- They do not display Type A habits.
- They are free of negative Type A peculiarities.
- They enjoy a more relaxed lifestyle.
- They do not suffer from time pressure.
- They are less vulnerable to heart and stress-related illnesses.

## 2.4 STRESS : ITS NATURE AND INFLUENCE ON PERFORMANCE AND HEALTH

Healthy stress represents those challenges which excite us and keep us on our toes, and without which life for many would become dull and ultimately not worth living. Stress, however, also represents those conditions under which individuals experience demands that they cannot physically or psychologically meet, and that

could lead to breakdown at one stage or the other. From these two extreme poles, stress serves two interests. On one hand it is a lifesaver, encouraging an individual to do his/her utmost best to perform at an expected level, while on the other hand it can be a life-destroyer, debilitating performance.

#### 2.4.1 The nature of stress

Stress can have severe detrimental effects on the individual and the school organisation. Yet if properly understood and skilfully managed, it can also be beneficial to both the individual and the organisation (Hayward 1994:6).

Thus some stressors are exciting challenges, others are minor irritators and yet others are devastating pressures. Similarly, while some individuals manage to cope with many stressors, others are overwhelmed by them. In all cases, the body endeavours to adapt to these stressors and will manage to cope for a shorter or greater period of time, depending on the individual concerned. If however, the stress is severe and prolonged a breakdown of some kind in this response will ultimately occur (Fontana 1995: 391-392).

Stress is the response to the pressure individuals experience in any event or situation. A certain degree of pressure provides a healthy stimulus. Too much pressure, however, can lead to disabling stress. The degree of pressure experienced by individuals depends on them and how they view the situation, and not on the situation itself. People are likely to feel stressed when they perceive a mismatch between what they perceive as their abilities and what they perceive as demands of the situation, i.e. if there is a disequilibrium between capabilities and demands. Furthermore, if the individual is capable of handling the demand and enjoy the stimulation involved, then stress is welcomed and beneficial, hence

producing, a positive stressor effect. If however, the individual is not capable and find the demand debilitating, then stress is undesirable and unhelpful; hence the negative stressor effect (Makin & Lindley 1991:13).

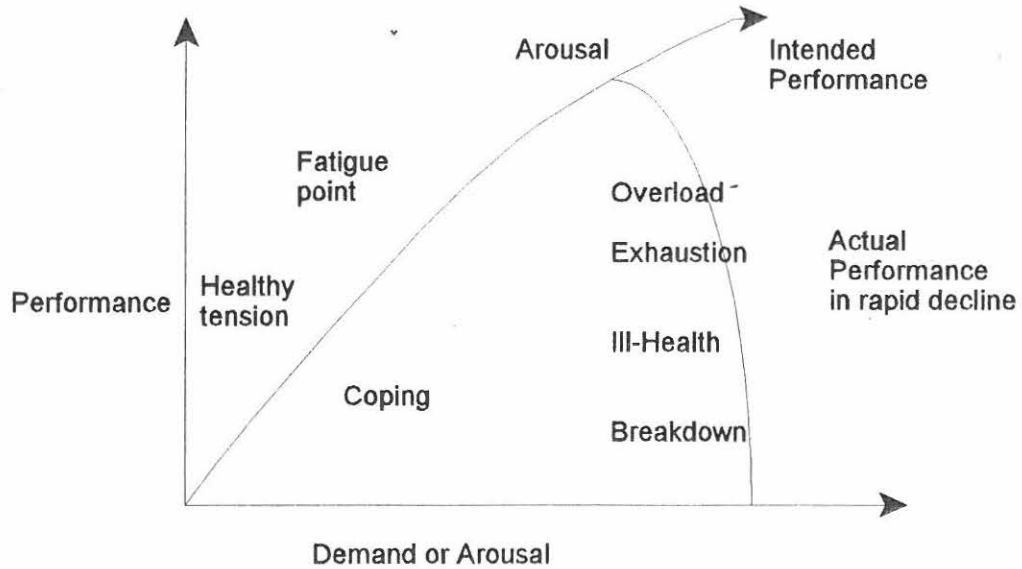
The influence of negative and positive stressors in relation to performance and health are discussed in the next paragraph.

#### **2.4.2 The relationship between stress, performance and health**

Occupational stress can be thought of as job-related discomfort or illness that people experience because of their work situation. This discomfort may manifest itself in a variety of ways, including, coronary heart disease, headaches, restless sleep, fatigue and decrease in individuals' job performance. The symptoms of job stress may be psychological, physiological, or behavioural in nature (Quick, Murphy & Hurrell 1992:239).

The positive dimension of stress is often ignored. However, a moderate level of stress is necessary to ensure the healthy functioning of the individual. Problems occur, however, when the stress level becomes unremitting or too intense. At this level, stress restricts and hinders our normal living and is then no longer beneficial. The figure below represents the relationships between stress demand and performance.

**Figure 1 : Performance break down with increasing demand**



Source : Burns (1988:x)

Numerous demands are made on individual educators irrespective of experience. It is therefore expected that every educator will experience some stress due to work demands. The ability to survive will not rest on avoiding such demands, but on how individual educators learn to cope with these demands. Educators should perceive some work demands as necessary challenges, however, they must avoid or adapt to situations that would cause them to suffer undue tension (Hayward 1994:5).

An outsider to the teaching profession who does not understand the effects of the numerous demands experienced by the educator, will view the inability of an educator to cope as inadequacy or failure to cope with such demands. This viewpoint ignores the beauty of the teaching profession. The reality is that such an educator's response is quite normal, but the work situation is often unpredictable

and sometimes even abnormal from a professional point of view.

Acknowledging the positive and negative consequences of stress will be incomplete in our study if we ignore positive and negative stressors. For the purpose of the study *stressors* are considered to be causative agents of stress, whilst *stress* is viewed as a non-specific response. The form that the stressors take and the impact it has on an individual is dependent on the kind of stress that the person experiences (Hayward 1994 :4).

#### 2.4.2.1 Positive stressors

Positive stress is necessary to get the best out of an individual's capabilities. This type of stress is usually termed *eustress*. Eustress gives an individual extra energy or a sense of positive self-worth. This specific category of stress can encourage exceptional performance in a set goal (Hayward 1994:6).

From a positive stressor perspective, when an individual is faced with pressure his or her energy level rises to meet the challenge. One feels alert and in control of the situation. He or she is able to take life as it comes, dealing with issues and problems without becoming over-anxious. When the pressure is over one is able to relax. Individuals enjoy life and are able to laugh, enabling tension to flow from their bodies. The individual feels self-confident and has a high level of self-esteem. This is a kind of stress which is needed to motivate educators or any other individual to take pleasure in their profession and, against all odds, strive towards helping learners and their institution to prosper (Cranwell-Ward 1990:13-15).

#### 2.4.2.2 Negative stressors

As has been mentioned before, the impact of stressors on an individual is dependent on the kind of stress that such a person experiences and this could have negative consequences. This type of stress is usually called *distress*. Faced with pressure one may at first feel very wound-up and active. However, as time progresses one may experience a feeling of tenseness and out of control of the situation. Gradually every incident seems to become a problem; life seems to revolve around a series of crises and one feels very anxious. Over a period of time one may become exhausted and feel despondent or apathetic. One constantly feels uptight and unable to relax. The individual at this stage has difficulty in enjoying life and seldom laughs. The end result of negative stressors or too many exigent demands on an individual is counterproductiveness and a negative effect on the individual's health in the long run (see figure 1, p.29). Negative stressors, as perceived by the individual, cause negative stress with accompanying destructive and counterproductive professional outcomes (Hayward 1994:6; Cranwell-Ward 1990:15).

#### 2.4.3 Stress and health outcomes

Medical experts generally agree that many illnesses are stress related. Research has shown that chronic stress lowers resistance to illness and intensifies its impact. Some stress-related illnesses are killers, such as coronary diseases. Other physical effects are less severe. It should be noted, however, that the impact of stress depends on the severity and duration of the pressure experienced and the individual's vulnerability. Most people have one or two physical weak spots in their bodies. Prolonged stress quite often leads to a particular physical response

depending on individual's point of weakness (Cranwell-Ward 1990:67-68).

Prolonged stress induced by the working conditions in which educators find themselves could lead to a gradual weakening of their immune system. It can eventually wear down an educator's constitution, leaving him or her vulnerable to disease and poor physical health. Recent research in the field of health psychology suggests that the effect on health varies from person to person. This is dependent on an individual's personality and resistance tolerance. Physicians have observed for years that some people who are subjected to high levels of stress tend to experience a typical set of stress-related health problems such as high blood pressure, gastrointestinal problems, muscle cramping, vulnerability to viruses or more severe chronic ailments (Gaseoyne 1997:8).

## 2.5 SOURCES OF STRESS

For educators' stress problems to be alleviated, it would be necessary to pay attention to the kind of work environment that increases or contributes to educators' stress. Although stress was defined earlier in terms of response to numerous pressures, there are also other factors that feature in the equation, such as an individual's personality and the existence or non-existence of control mechanisms. However, a healthy balance of such pressures and these compensatory factors would keep an individual at the ideal stress level for effectiveness. On the other hand, an imbalance on one side would result in an individual moving towards rustout or burnout.

Due to transformation in education it is highly probable that educators will now experience even more stress than before, because of the changes in the basic occupational structure of teaching (Hayward 1994:5). His research also reveals

that educators are bombarded with a variety of multidimensional stressors within the work situation. These stressors include inadequate working conditions, role conflict and ambiguity, learner problems, time and work pressures, the threat of redundancy and possible expulsion, little participation in decision making and a disproportionate distribution of tasks. Apart from the work situation producing stress, stress can also emanate from other sources including the family, other individuals and social environmental conditions. Stressors from these sources can work as:

(a) External demands on educators from parents and society

- Changing demands causing confusion about precise responsibilities.
- Perceived poor standing in society.
- Lack of opportunities for career development and promotion.
- A largely hostile media exacerbating the situation.

(b) Time and work overload

- Excessive workloads, hence the evening and weekend work at home (which can lead to family problems).
- Acting as a substitute for colleagues involved in in-service training.

It is important to remember that the different stressors do not yield the same negative consequences with educators. Nevertheless, stressors are accumulating and do have an influence on many educators, therefore affecting educators' health, performance and satisfaction. The ultimate effect of these stressors, if allowed to become excessive, can be detrimental to the educator physically, emotionally, physiologically, psychologically and socially (Davies & Ellison 1990:111-113; Beard 1990:111).

## 2.6 COPING AND COPING STRATEGIES

### 2.6.1 Coping

Since stress lies in the individual's perception of a situation(s) and how he/she respond to his/her feelings, it follows that the individual's coping with stress is about restructuring their perception. Coping in this context refers to an educator's ability to hold his or her own, that is, to cope and is described as having the means to maintain, acknowledge, protect and enrich his/her inner self, with all the meanings he or she attaches to reality affecting him or her as a unique person (Niehaus & Myburgh 1999:10). This ability of an educator is manifested in his/her behaviour. It refers to the person's way of thinking, feelings and behaving to meet contextual demands as well as personal needs, aspirations, goals etc. This entails how an educator will act faced with the experience of work. Coping therefore involves controlling unpleasant emotions and solving problems (Chaplain & Freeman 1994:19).

The following paragraph reflects on three coping strategies as classified by Niehaus (1994:77). He distinguishes among these strategies as problem-oriented, meaning-oriented and emotion-oriented coping strategies.

### 2.6.2 Coping strategies

In exploring educator stress, it is equally important to explore possible coping strategies. Both teaching staff and administrators need to find suitable strategies for dealing with stress. Coping strategies are those strategies planned and implemented to help individuals perform at optimal human stress levels. Strategies

may be proactive or reactive in their planning and implementation. Some strategies may be destructive (that is, temporarily relieving but have negative dependency in the end, like taking drugs) and constructive (that is, enabling individuals to survive and be productive).

#### 2.6.2.1 Problem-oriented coping strategy

According to Niehaus (1994:77), "a problem-oriented coping strategy aims at averting emotional experience such as tension, frustration and alarm, and includes taking things one step at a time, engaging actively in a plan of action, and negotiating with those concerned to gain something positive from events". When using these coping strategies, educators hold their own by actively trying to manage or solve the problem. An individual in this instance directs energies in solving the problem constructively and appreciates the results that he or she may get through his or her efforts.

#### 2.6.2.2 Meaning-oriented coping strategy

Meaning-oriented coping strategies are aimed at cognitively changing or neutralising educators' perceptions and value-orientations in respect of demands placed on them, in other words, efforts are made to understand the problem and to assess the implications of the events.

These coping strategies include efforts to view situations or problems more objectively and to concentrate on the positive aspects of events. Educators through this strategy are trying to hold their own by exercising control over their experiences of the event (Niehaus & Myburgh 1999:10). Faced with a

situation or problem, educators in this regard appraise the meaning of the event with regard to what is at stake for them.

### 2.6.2.3 Emotion-oriented coping strategy

Educators could also attempt to cope in their working experience by using strategies aimed at controlling and even reducing emotional experiences that have already been elicited in them, that is, emotion-oriented coping strategies. These types of coping strategies include trying to displace one's feeling by reducing tension by eating more, be extravagant, expressing their disapproval in a flood of words, or by taking out frustration on others especially their immediate subordinates (Niehaus & Myburgh 1999:10).

In summary, there is a possible continuous interactive influence between the meaning a person attributes to events and his or her use of particular types of cognitive skills and forms of behaviour at enabling him or her to hold oneself.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

The topic of stress is far from being eradicated out of the human mind. Many researchers have attempted to understand stress, however, even today the concept is still elusive to comprehend (Beard 1990:110). The way to come close to an acceptable definition is by following the existing approaches to the concept stress.

Stress affects people differently and its impact is largely influenced by the individual's personality and experience in a particular situation. Some people can

stand tremendous pressure while others crack up (collapse under strain) with just little pressure (Davies & Ellison 1990:113; Palm-Forster 2000:34). The latter effect can be negative toward one's performance and health. From the aforementioned discussion it became apparent that people cope differently to stress demands. How one copes is dependent on what one perceives as threatening and on his/her coping ability.

The next chapter deals with procedures that were implemented to collect data from educators as regards stress experienced in the work environment.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

There are two social research methods that researchers use to conduct research, namely, qualitative and quantitative approaches. In a research study the researcher may choose one approach or at times use both approaches to effectively conduct research. Each category uses several specific research techniques (e.g. survey, interviews, historical analysis), yet there is much overlap between the type of data and the style of the research (Neuman 1997:14).

Traditionally, both qualitative and quantitative research studies are conducted in education. The difference between the two approaches is imbedded in the way in which the results are presented. Qualitative research presents facts in a narration of words whilst quantitative research presents statistical results represented with numbers. What makes the two approaches different is the way they view reality and the world. They have different assumptions about the world, purpose for researching, research methods, researcher role, and the importance of the context (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:14).

Neuman (1997:14-15) argues that most quantitative data techniques are data condensers, that is, they condense data in order to see the big picture. On the other hand, qualitative methods, are best understood as data enhancers. When data is enhanced, it is possible to see key aspects of cases more clearly.

### 3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research study undertaken, implemented both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach was deemed suitable for it affords educators the opportunity to explain their working experience from their own perception of their profession. The strength of qualitative research lies in the fact that it studies individuals in their natural settings in an effort to see and experience the way in which they attribute meanings to their work situation.

This allows the researcher to learn from informants' perspectives and their personal experience. Qualitative inquiry is further described as an approach which uses non-manipulative data collection strategies to discover the natural flow of events and processes. In data gathering, it follows procedures that are not strictly formalised and the scope is more likely to be undefined (Kinchelwe and McLaren 1994:75; Wilson 1997:109; McMillan & Schumacher 1993:372-373).

The qualitative approach assumes a free attitude questioning whereby informants are allowed to give information from their own understanding. Measures of finding information include informal structured interviews, diaries and observations. The relationship with the informants is built on trust, empathy and interaction. It appears that qualitative research consumes a lot of time and is used to study few cases and many variables simultaneously. However, what is important is the social meaning and subjective experience of informants that contribute to the provision of information-rich data (Cresswell 1998:16; Phillips 2000:53).

To enhance the validity and reliability of the empirical investigation, the quantitative approach was also implemented. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997:167), quantitative research study involves choosing participants, data collection techniques (such as questionnaires, interviews, or observations) and

procedures for gathering the data.

✦ In this study the purposeful sampling technique was used to select participants who are perceived to be representative or informative of the population of the study. This sampling technique is regarded as one of the most reliable tools to select information-rich sources or participants (McMillan & Schumacher 1997 :171).

Furthermore, the Likert scale questionnaire was used to gather information from the participants. A Likert scale is constructed by assembling a number of statements about an object, whereby about half of which express a clearly favourable attitude and half of which express a clearly unfavourable attitude (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh 1990 :234-235). Questionnaire items are scaled in such a way so as to indicate a series of gradations, levels or values that describes various degrees of something (McMillan & Schumacher 1997:256-257).

Ⓒ In this study the questionnaire items were constructed based on knowledge generated from past research as well as own experience, and would be analysed in terms of the attitude inclination of the respondents. A pictorial representation of the outcomes are depicted by means of graphs, followed by a brief discussion interpreting the results.

### 3.2.1 Population and sample

The selection of participants for a study is related to the manner in which the researcher chooses a sample (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:381). For the purpose of this study, purposeful sampling was implemented in an effort to obtain information-rich responses from a relatively small sample of secondary school educators. The population for this study consists of one hundred and nine (109) secondary school permanent educators offering a wide variety of subjects from

Grade 10 to Grade 12 at three township secondary schools, i.e. Mamello, Reatilehile and Meloding schools in the Free State province, South Africa. From the site selected twenty educators from the population were approached as they were regarded to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon under investigation. In order to obtain different views and perceptions on the topic, the informants were selected from different post levels and of both sexes (i.e. male and female).

The participants to the study were made aware of the nature of the research and the procedure to be followed to obtain information (i.e. step one, participants will complete a self-report questionnaire and step two, five of the twenty educators will be selected for interviews). After explaining the purpose of the research project and the importance of their contributions toward gathering information, the prospective participants were asked whether they were motivated to become involved in the research project. Everybody accepted enthusiastically to participate in the research project. Due to the fact that educators had to attend to a multitude of responsibilities during any single day and might forget to complete or misplace the questionnaires, the researcher made an appointment with participants to complete the questionnaires in one venue (this was achieved after school in the staff room through consensus). However, the interviews were conducted separately with individuals at a time that was convenient to the interviewees. Interviews took place in their offices during their free time or after school.

### 3.2.2 Role of the researcher

One of the chief criticisms levelled against qualitative research lies in the area of subjectivity. Such criticism is usually made because of the role the researcher

plays in collecting data. According to this, the research data collected is more susceptible to bias due to the subjective interpretations of situations (Adler & Adler 1998:88).

A second main criticism levelled against the qualitative approach is that it lacks reliability. The argument is that qualitative measures do not have statistical analysis to confirm the significance of their findings, patterns or trends. Researchers according to critics, cannot ensure that their findings are real and not merely the effect of chance (Adler & Adler 1998:88). However, qualitative methods including the role that the researcher plays, yield insights that are more likely to be accurate for the group under study.

Unlike in quantitative research where subjectivity is regarded as a hindrance in data processing, qualitative researchers view subjectivity as a valuable instrument. Smaling (1994:17) does not view objectivity as an escape from subjectivity, but rather as “the intelligent, acquired use of subjectivity to analyse something”. This in turn implies that the viewpoint, experience, definition or interpretation of the researcher cannot be ignored. It is therefore crucial to indicate the role and position of the researcher as these elements may possibly have an impact on the research. This could even confound the results. The researcher is a member of the school management team based at one of the secondary schools. He has taught for several years and served in portfolios of many community and school-based committees through which experience and insight was gained in this field of study.

Although the researcher disclosed his own subjectivity, in this study, it was not difficult for him to distance his own views during the interview sessions, as well as during the session in which the questionnaires were completed. Due to the researcher's experience in the teaching profession, he had an intimate

understanding of the participant's problems and concerns. It placed him in an ideal position to understand why the participants were open and willing to provide information on very sensitive and even intimate issues.

The researcher's experience in teaching, especially in the new dispensation, as well as the fact that stress gave rise to many educators not performing well, falling ill and even leaving the profession, led to the qualitative investigation of the stressful work environment of educators and its implications on performance and health.

### **3.2.3 Data Collection Strategies**

#### **3.2.3.1 Questionnaires**

Questionnaires is the most widely used technique for obtaining information from people, especially in educational research. A questionnaire is relatively economical, has standard questions, can ensure anonymity, and questions can be written for specific purposes (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:238). It determines how people feel about the particular issue(s), or it may seek to establish the effect of some troubling issues on people's behaviour. In addition, a questionnaire provides an opportunity to examine correlations amongst the subjects' responses and simultaneously look for possible patterns of cause and effect (McBurney 1994:193).

For the purpose of this study the questionnaire consisted of three sections, namely Section A (personal information); Section B (closed question items) and Section C (open-ended questions) (refer to Annexure A, pp.97-106). Sections B and C of the

questionnaire focused on research objectives. Items in the latter case addressed issues such as:

- perception of the degree of stressfulness of the teaching profession;
- causes of stress in the teaching profession;
- the extent to which prolonged exposure to stress affect educators' performance;
- the extent to which educators' health is affected by prolonged exposure to teaching stress; and
- identifying coping strategies educators use to cope with stress in their workplace.

### 3.2.3.2 Interviews

Qualitative study aims to understand and describe the human and social behaviour from the participants' perspective. The researcher in this case personally has to get to the particular setting which is under study, because he or she is concerned about the context of the study (Phillips 2000:45). Therefore a personal open-ended, semi-structured interview was conducted with five secondary school educators offering at least one subject at Grade 10 to Grade 12 level at the aforementioned township schools. The aim was to capture the richness and complexity of behaviour that occurs in the natural setting from participants' experience. Although these interviews were guided by a list of questions to be asked, the interviews took the form of a free conversation and the interviewees were encouraged to talk without restraint. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed with the permission of the interviewees. This was done to capture the participants' words, thereby ensuring first hand information. In total, five educators were interviewed. Interviewees were men and women obtained by means of

The interview process began with the researcher establishing a rapport with the interviewees. On the whole the level of cooperation or non-cooperation by educators was probably influenced by their teaching experience, familiarity with the researcher, the sensitivity of data being collected, and their educational background. Arrangements were made to interview educators in an environment that was comfortable and private, e.g. after school or during free times and in their offices. Interviews were limited to a maximum of thirty minutes. The questions were asked in English and respondents were to respond in English or at the least in the language in which they felt comfortable to express their real feelings or meanings. In so doing the researcher allowed the respondents the full range of expression and feeling in their native language in reflecting on their work experiences. A few educators who responded in English seemed to be more comfortable in South Sotho when dealing with questions of a more personal sensitive nature. They were allowed to switch over from English when the situation demanded it. Yet despite such care, difficulty arose over the language of interviewing. Translating and transcribing the tapes/transcripts proved not only to be time-consuming, but also very difficult.

### 3.2.4 Data Analysis Strategies

#### 3.2.4.1 Qualitative Analysis

Neuman (1997:439) noted that qualitative analysis requires more effort by an individual researcher to read and reread data notes, reflect on what is read, and make comparisons based on logic and judgement. The researcher obtains information from participants about their present or past work experiences which form detailed descriptions of people's perceptions and

obtains information from participants about their present or past work experiences which form detailed descriptions of people's perceptions and social realities. From these, descriptions are generated, explaining the phenomenon being studied, all in an effort to gain a better understanding of such phenomenon (Phillips 2000:56).

Neuman (1997:317) points out that qualitative research primarily uses data inductively. Inductive reasoning allows one to explore and discover with an emerging research design, rather than testing deductions from theories in a predetermined design like it is done in quantitative research (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:91). In the study the researcher aimed at exploring the work stress experienced by a group of secondary school educators, causes of stress, coping strategies employed, effects of work stress on their health and performance.

Based on the magnitude of the research study and the fact that most research conducted on stress followed a quantitative approach which to some extent ignores the informants' perspective, a qualitative research approach was considered to be more appropriate. On the other hand limited quantitative techniques were used to supplement information gathered through qualitative techniques. A quantitative technique in the form of a Likert scale questionnaire was used to enhance the qualitative study. McMillan and Schumacher (1993:93) elicit that in qualitative research participants are described as individuals who have different personal histories and display different physical, emotional, and intellectual characteristics in various situations. Incidents form a narration about the social settings, similar to telling a story. Narrative descriptions emphasise the participants' language and not the language of the researcher. Furthermore, participants' "meanings" imply how people view their reality or

how they perceive their world. Participants' meanings are captured when they disclose why events took place, i.e. giving their own perception why things occurred the way it did.

Most forms of qualitative data analysis involve coding and writing analytic memos. Both are complex efforts by the researcher to read over data carefully and think about them seriously (Neuman 1997:439). In the study transcripts of recordings of interviews were carefully scrutinised and analysed over a period of time in order to gain familiarity for categorising purposes. Content analysis was employed to analyse research data and it entailed identifying, coding (the process of dividing data into parts by a classification system) and categorising the primary pattern in the recorded data (Miles and Huberman 1994:14; McMillan and Schumacher 1993:479-480).

In the case of uncertainties regarding the interview response, the participants were contacted and the uncertainties ironed out.

descriptive

6.5

#### 3.2.4.2

#### Validity and reliability

6.5

*Validity* refers to the appropriateness of a statement and it is important to determine whether research information is valid, that is, whether the questionnaire is actually measuring what it is supposed to measure. At its core, measurement validity is the degree of fit between a construct and indicators of it. It refers to how well the conceptual and operational definitions match with each other. Validity is more difficult to achieve than reliability (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:167; Neuman 1997:141).

Although *reliability* is traditionally associated with quantitative study, it is also important in qualitative studies. Reliability deals with an indicator's dependability. Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement, that is, the extent to which the results are similar over different forms of the same instrument or occasions of data collection. If you have a reliable indicator or measure, it is supposed to give similar results each time the same thing is measured. Reliability implies that information provided by indicators does not change as a result of characteristics of the indicator, the instrument, or the measurement device (Neuman 1997:138; McMillan & Schumacher 1993:168). This is important because it minimises chances or errors being made during the research process.

Different steps can be followed to ensure or maximise validity of qualitative data. For the purpose of the study the following steps were applied:

- *Validation by the participants themselves*

Qualitative study always strives to represent data from participants' perspective. It is therefore recommended that the findings of the research be validated by the participants (Kruger 1997:145). In order to obtain consensus on the gathered data, respondents or participants were involved in the discussion of the findings of the study. The participants agreed that the findings did indeed represent a true reflection of their work experiences.

- *Validation by the researcher*

Since this is not the first time that research is being conducted on educator stress, validity was established by checking the findings against that reflected in the current literature. This enabled the researcher to determine

to what degree findings fit or did not fit the current trend of literature in this domain (Kruger 1997:145; Palm-Forster 2000:147).

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has identified the research design that was followed and the population from which the study was conducted. A brief differentiation between the two research methods were discussed. The researcher's role as well as how data was collected and data analysis strategies were also dealt with in brief. Furthermore, the validity of the study was highlighted. In the next chapter the work stress as experienced by secondary school educators in Meloding township is investigated.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES AND DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The research investigation as regards stress in the workplace was conducted in order to get information from participants of what they experience in the teaching profession. This was supported by the fact that there is limited research information available based on the situation in South African context. Buwalda and Kok (1991:118) alluded to the fact that, despite a broad spectrum of stressors that are affecting educators, there is little research evidence available that relate to the South African perspective.

#### 4.2 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

For this research project the researcher implemented questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to investigate the influence of work stress experienced by secondary school educators from the three township schools mentioned earlier on.

Twenty questionnaires were administered to secondary school educators that were identified through purposeful sampling, i.e. via a referral system that was implemented. Ten of the participants were from Meloding Secondary School, nine from Reatlehile Secondary School and only one from Mamello Secondary School; schools situated near Virginia in the Free State province of South Africa. An equal number of males and females participated in the questionnaire exercise.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections for gathering different types of

information. The sections in the questionnaire included:

Section A : This section aims at collecting biographical details of participants in the research study.

Section B : Consists of scattered question items addressing the research objectives and questions. Regrouped items elucidated issues such as educators' attitudes and perceptions toward their work situation, productivity and work efficiency, side effects of stress on physical and mental health, coping strategies and lastly to establish whether any support is rendered or support programmes are provided to assist educators suffering stress in the workplace.

From the questionnaire attached as Annexure A, p.99, items were grouped in the following manner to address said objectives and questions. The *criteria* implemented for grouping the outcomes (responses) to the respective questions were based on whether the expected point of view/perspective portrayed by the respondent (or by the item itself) impacts positively or negatively on the educator and/or the teaching profession. A viewpoint/perspective that exerts a positive influence on the educator and/or the teaching profession would thus be viewed as a positive perspective and vice versa.

- (a) Educators' *attitude* and *perception* toward their work environment : Items 1, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27 and 31 portrays this construct. Items 1, 12, 22 and 27 were further grouped in one category where it was expected that participants would furnish positive views. On the other hand items 7, 15 and 31 were expected to elicit negative views due to prevailing circumstances in the workplace.

- (b) Educators' *productivity and work efficiency* : Items that address this component of the study were items 2, 8, 13, 23 and 28. These items were expected to yield positive views as regards educators' inclination to productivity and work efficiency. Items 18 and 32 portray negative views.
- (c) *Coping strategies* or strategies to reduce stress : Items to address this research component include items 3, 4, 9, 10, 14, 19, 24, 25, 29, 33 and 35 from the questionnaire. Furthermore the items 3, 10, 14, 24 and 35 were grouped because they seem to portray strong positive perspectives. However, items 4, 9, 19, 25, 29 and 33 were expected to serve as strong indicators of negative long-term approaches toward coping strategies.
- (d) Any support rendered or *support programmes* : This matter was addressed by items 5, 11, 15, 20, 26, 30 and 34. These in turn were subdivided into categories that would be likely to reflect positive or negative viewpoints. Positive views are highlighted by items 5, 11, 26, 30 and 34, whilst expected negative perspectives are carried by items 15 and 20.
- (e) The *effect of work stress on mental and physical health* : Items 6, 16, 21 and 36 were all expected to elicit negative views based on the current conditions in schools.

Section C : Section C included four questions. In the first question participant were to list six major stressors arranged from the highest to the least stressful according to what they experience as educators in the workplace. Questions two to four were open-ended questions. In question 2 participants had to state what coping strategies should educators themselves implement to overcome the negative impact of the aforementioned stressors. Question 3 dealt with measures that the school management team and educational authorities at provincial and national

level need to implement to alleviate the general phenomenon of stress experienced by a major portion of educators in the current school environment. Question 4 required participants to write down a honest/candid opinion of their overall impressions/thoughts that they experienced as they worked through the questionnaire.

## 4.3 ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

### 4.3.1 Biographical data

The biographical information obtained through section A of the questionnaire is summarised in table 1.

**Table 1 : Biographical information of participants**

Participant	Gender	Age	Qualifications	Major subjects	Teaching Experience (Years)
A	F	29	SED	English/Afrikaans	5
B	F	35	UDE	English/Biology	9
C	F	38	SED	English/Afrikaans	19
D	F	28	SED, BTech (M)	English/History	4
E	F	35	STD, FDE	Geography/SSotho	12
F	M	40	JSTC, SED	Bus Eco/Accounting	17
G	M	30	STD	Afr/English/SSotho	6
H	M	43	JSTC	English/SSotho	17
I	M	38	STD	English/Mathematics	13
J	M	39	STD	Economics/Phy Sc	14
K	M	29	STD	Geography/Agric	8
L	M	28	STD	English/Biblical Stud	6
M	M	29	BA, STD	Education/SSotho	7
N	M	34	BA	Education/History	8
O	F	32	BA, SED, FDE	English/SSotho/Hist	8
P	F	34	STD	Economics/History	6
Q	F	32	STD	Biology/Typing	6
R	F	30	SPTD	Mathematics/Phy Sc	5
S	F	31	BAEd	Afrikaans/SSotho	5
T	M	29	SED	Economics/Bus Eco	5

The twenty participants that took part in the research project are offering a variety of subjects from Grade 10 to Grade 12 in their respective schools. From table 1 it is clear that their teaching experience ranges from 4 and 19 years, with an average of 9 years of teaching experience. Their ages range from 28 to 43 years (average: 33 years) and the majority of participating educators are qualified with teacher diplomas, whilst only four (20 %) have university degrees. By modern standards it is quite clear that the majority of educators in the aforementioned sample are not duly qualified to teach at this level in the secondary school phase.

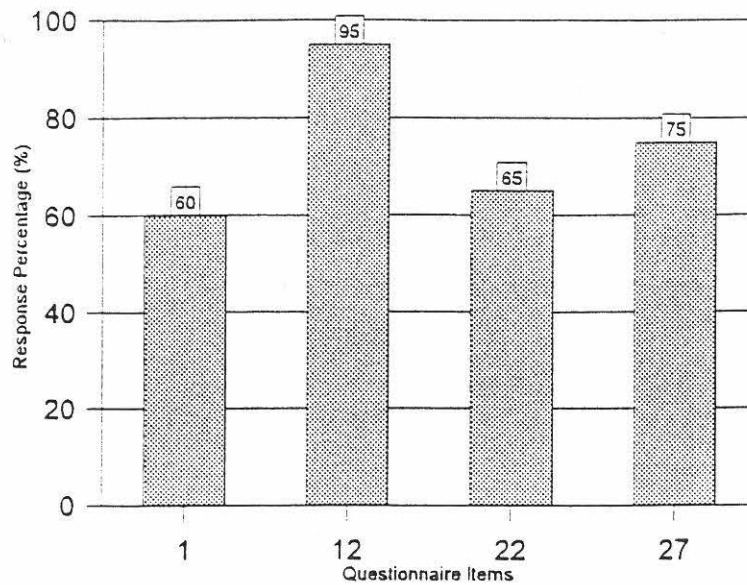
#### **4.3.2 A summary of results obtained through the Likert scale type questionnaire (Section B)**

The outcome of this research will be depicted in the following graphs, which in turn will be elucidated by descriptive comments. The responses expressed in terms of percentages, appear on the vertical axis while the items concerned are reflected on the horizontal axis.

##### **4.3.2.1 Educators' attitude/perception towards their work environment**

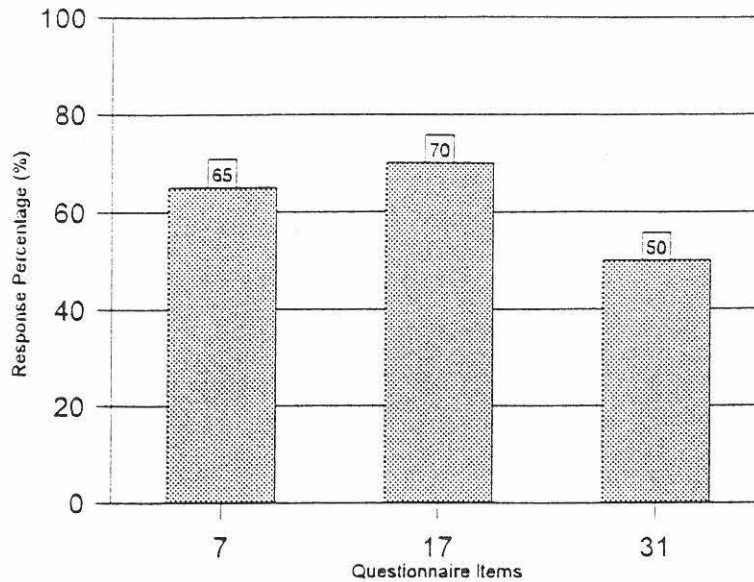
The graph is based on questionnaire items referred to in paragraph 4.2(a), on page 50 and is used to show how participants responded. The graph in figure 2 depicts the expected positive viewpoints and the graph in figure 3 the negative perspectives.

Figure 2 : Educators' attitude/perception toward their work environment (positive views)



Sixty percent of participating educators rated themselves as highly successful in the current climate. It was significant that 95 % of the respondents suggested that they get very upset when they do not manage to complete their work planned for the day. Sixty five percent are confident that only their level best as educators are good enough. Seventy five percent of them indicated that they do not favour procrastination, but do however acknowledge the fact that they need to put in a lot more effort towards accomplishing their school tasks on time.

**Figure 3 : Educators' attitude/perception toward their work environment (negative views)**



Sixty five percent of participant educators indicated clearly that they would not recommend teaching as a career to school leavers (matriculants). An alarming 70% of the respondents indicated that they are not excited about their future in the teaching profession. This attitude of mind in all probably supports their stance of not recommending the teaching profession as a career. Half of the participants were of the opinion that their enthusiasm for the teaching profession was dwindling due to stress experienced in the workplace.

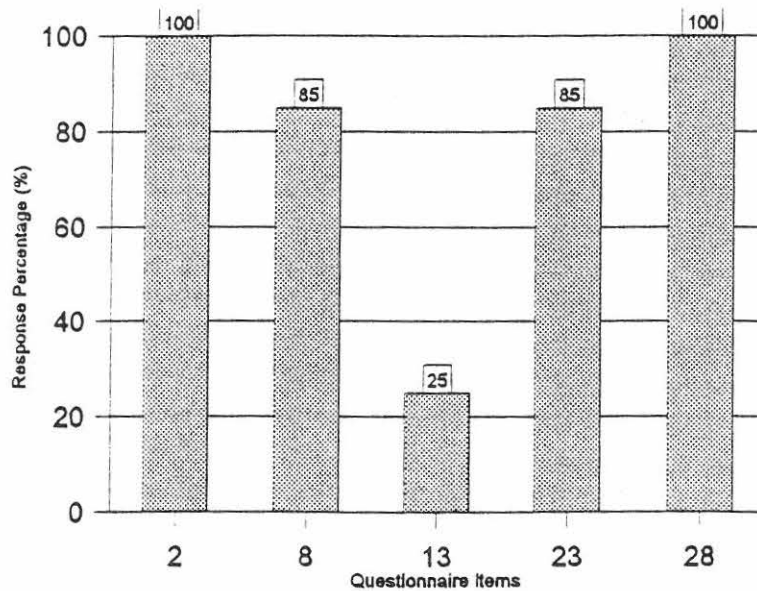
To summarise, participating educators indicated clearly that they inherently possess a positive inclination towards their performance as successful educators. However, like any normal person they do get upset by fundamental issues that adversely affect them as educators. Since they cannot recommend teaching as a career and the fact that a large percentage of them agreed that their enthusiasm for the profession was declining, clearly indicates that the teaching environment is not a stress free work environment. The situation becomes disturbing when seventy

percent of youthful educators are no longer excited about their future.

4.3.2.2 The impact of stress on productivity and work efficiency

The figure below is based on questionnaire items referred to in paragraph 4.2(b) on page 51.

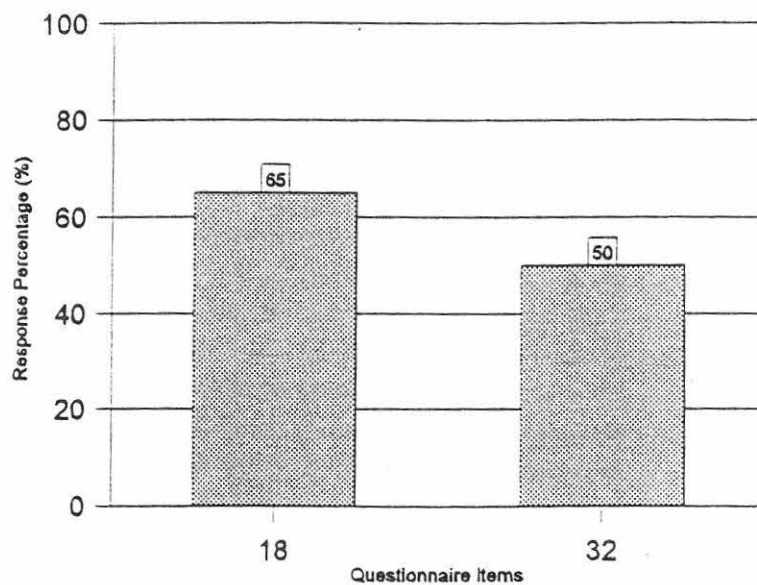
**Figure 4 : Aspects that influence productivity and work efficiency (positive views)**



All participating educators indicated that a major portion of their energy and time during the week is spent on school work. Eighty five percent of the respondents preferred to execute their daily/weekly teaching/facilitation on the basis of thorough advanced planning to avoid the negative effects of stress on their productivity and work efficiency. With regard to time spent after school hours on planning, preparation and marking, participants revealed contradictory responses because only 25 % indicated that they

spent at least four hours on such activities, whilst on the other hand 85 % of them maintained that they frequently work until late in the evenings to get their school work done. All participating educators indicated that they were using a well-planned work schedule, hence devoting a major portion of their energy and time during the week to the implementation of the planned work.

**Figure 5 : Aspects that influence productivity and work efficiency (negative views)**



Due to prevailing circumstances in schools 65 % of the respondents maintain that they cannot perform at optimal level of proficiency. From the initial responses recorded under item 18 it was interesting to note that only 20 % of the participants feel they manage to perform at their level best in current school conditions. A very significant correlation exists between items 18 and 32. As regards the latter 50 % of the participants stressed the fact that negative circumstances prevailing in their school situation do not augur well with their expected level of performance. The former has a negative

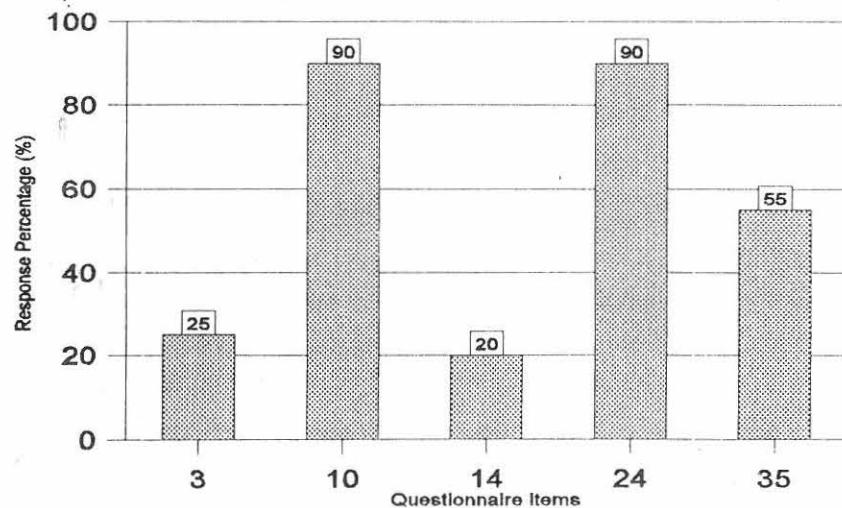
bearing on their level of preparedness when they get to class.

To conclude, much of an ordinary school day is devoted to school-related matters by educators. This implies that during the week educators have little time left for themselves or their families. From these responses it also became clear that through an advanced planning schedule, educators can to some extent manage to cope with the work demands they are experiencing. Lastly, there are certain factors prevailing at schools that do not support optimal productivity and work efficiency.

4.3.2.3 Possible coping strategies educators could employ to manage stress experienced in the teaching profession

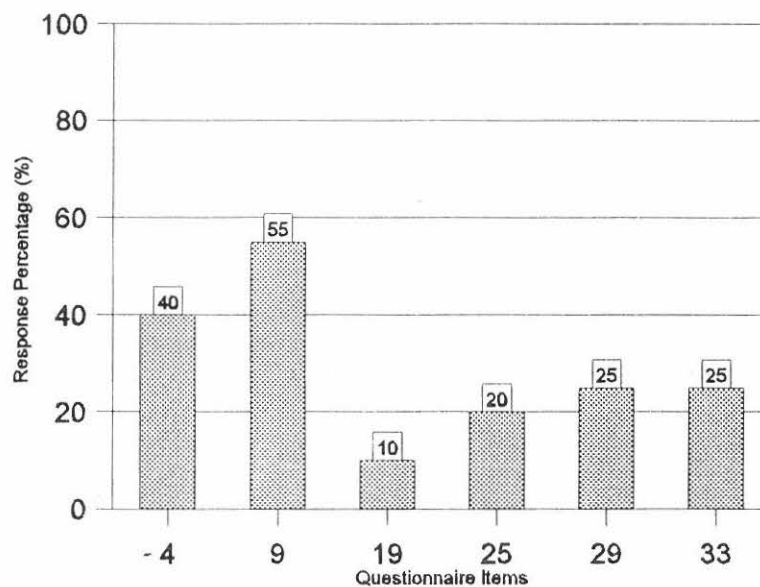
The following graphs are based on questionnaire items alluded to in section 4.2.(c) on page 51.

**Figure 6 : Stress coping strategies (positive perspective)**



It is an acknowledged fact that relaxing activities and engaging in sport activities could assist individuals in coping with work stress. However, the figure above (as depicted by items 3 and 14) indicates that very few educators engage in such activities. Furthermore, a very interesting observation from the figure (items 10 and 24) is that 90 % of the respondents experience collegiality and sharing experiences, together with attending workshops and seminars as very helpful dischargers of stress. Lastly, 55 % of the respondents regarded spiritual strength (by engaging in religious activities, item 35) as being important to cope with stress effectively.

**Figure 7 : Stress coping strategies (negative views)**



Although not significantly high, 40 % of participants become bad tempered

overindulgence in food, medication or alcohol as a means to effectively cope

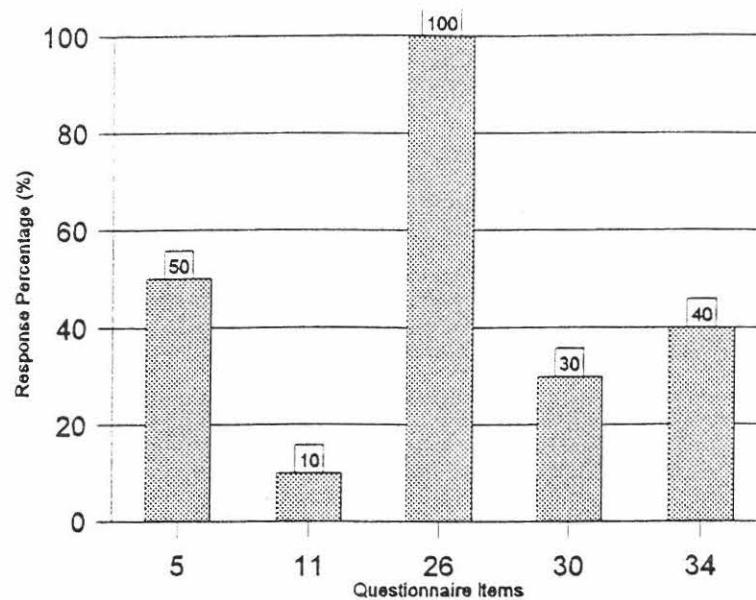
with stress (refer to items 19, 25, 29 and 33) respectively.

To reconcile the aforementioned comments and the experience gained whilst conducting research, it became clear that a significant high percentage of educators do not want to experience stress when faced with demanding situation at work. Also on a positive note, they also do not want to depend on drugs such as alcohol, cigarettes or medication for their survival in the teaching profession. There is a positive sign that educators could cope with stress if they are prepared to share experiences with other colleagues or members of the community. Most importantly, they believe that by acquiring information related to innovate educational practices through organised seminars and workshops, one is better equipped to meet the demands of the learning-teaching environment in our schools. Spending time on one's hobbies and involvement in physical exercises are also viewed by participants as beneficial to educators' mental health.

#### 4.3.2.4 Support rendered or support programmes to cope with stress in the workplace

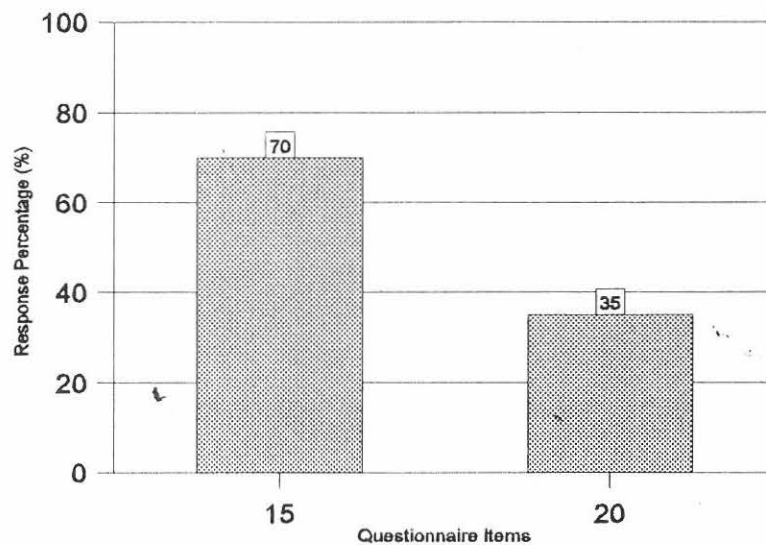
The graphical representations on pages 62 and 63 are based on items referred to in section 4.2(d) on page 51.

Figure 8 : Educators' experience of support rendered (positive view)



Only 50 % of the participants acknowledged that they have acquired knowledge of how to cope with stress during their professional training as educators. If only 10 % of the respondents are of the opinion that the education department does indeed provide psychological support programmes to educators who suffer excessive stress, then it is indeed doubtful whether such a service can provide a service to the broader educator contingent. There is unanimous support for access to psychological support programmes in order to effectively cope in the current teaching-learning situation (refer to item 26). Seemingly contradicting themselves, there are 30 % of the respondents who nevertheless maintain that they are in full control and do not require any support to cope. Only 40% of the respondents claim that they can rely on the assistance and support of the school management team when experiencing excessive stress.

**Figure 9 : Educators' experience of support rendered (negative view)**



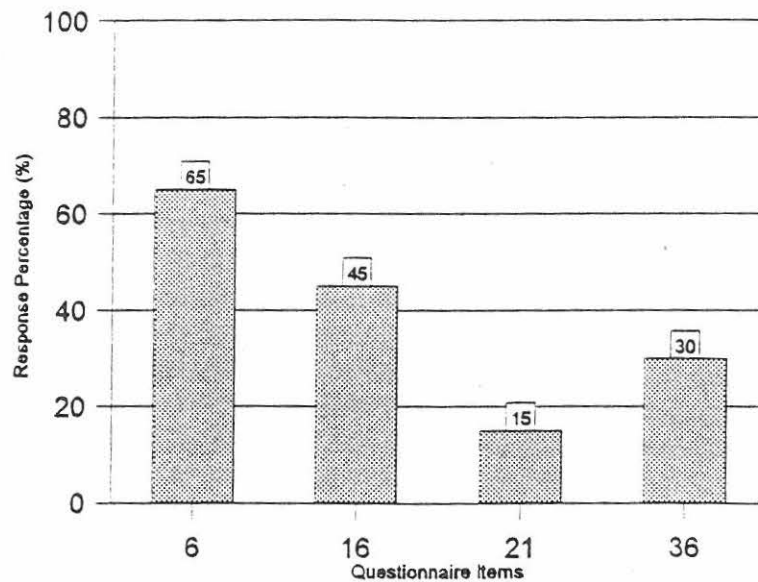
Seventy percent of the participating educators indicated that the learning facilitators (LF's) do not always timeously communicate to educators what is expected of them. In a changing teaching-learning environment such a situation can contribute to an increase in the levels of stress experienced by educators. It is interesting to note the 35 % of the respondents claim that school governing bodies do not render the necessary support to alleviate the problems experienced in schools.

To conclude, the low percentage of educators who are equipped or have acquired knowledge on how to cope with stress is worrying. This is even intensified by the fact that this kind of knowledge is not disseminated to student teachers while they are at universities or colleges of education. What is alarming is the fact that in South Africa, which is currently undergoing rapid transformation in education, educators do not enjoy psychological support provided or subsidised by the National Department of Education.

4.3.2.5 Stress effects on mental and physical health

The figure below is based on questionnaire items referred to in section 4.2(e) on page 51.

**Figure 10 : The influence on the mental and physical health of educators (expected negative views).**



Sixty five percent of teaching participants in the study are experiencing poor sleeping habits and believe this may be due to stress experienced at school. Almost 45 % of them also experience concentration problems which they think originate from a high degree of stress. A very low percentage (15 %) of participants' experience an increase in heart beat. Thirty percent of participants' general physical and mental health have deteriorated over the last five years due to increased levels of stress experienced in the workplace.

To sum up, abnormal sleeping patterns could lead to educators' fatigue and ill health which will ultimately affect their work negatively. A decline in concentration can negatively influence one's performance as educator, especially as regards quality of teaching. It is important that educators realise that they may be affected mentally and/or physically by stress experienced over an extended period of time.

### 4.3.3 Analysis of open-ended questions

#### 4.3.3.1 Six major stressors in the work environment of the educator

In question 1 of section C, page 103 of the questionnaire, respondents were requested to list what they consider, constituted the six major stressors in the work environment of the educator/teacher, arranged in order of impact. These are derived from appendix A, page 106 of the questionnaire, which listed twenty possible stressors in the work situation.

The six major stressors identified by the participants, arranged in order of impact, are listed below:

Level 1 - stressor number 19 : Lack of support from parents as primary educators to ensure their child's success at school.

Level 2 - stressor number 1 : Lack of discipline among learners.

Level 3 - stressor number 13 : Lack of resources to execute one's task properly.

Level 4 - stressor numbers 2 and 15 : Excessive work overload and facilitating the learning process in overcrowded classrooms.

Level 5 - stressor number 7 : Poor relationship between staff and the school management team.

Level 6 - stressor number 12 : Lack of security in the workplace.

#### 4.3.3.2 Coping strategies that educators should implement to overcome the negative impact of stressors.

Participants suggested the following coping strategies (refer to Question 2, Section C, Appendix A, p.103).

- ✕ - Goal objective setting.
- ✕ - Time management : Planning in advance and properly.
- ✓ - Open and timeous communication by officials, school managers and educators.
- ✓ - Parental involvement in children's education and discipline.
- ✓ - Teamwork : sharing and communicating.
- ✓ - Counselling/Psychological support services. Respondents strongly feel that such services should be rendered by the department of education.
- Code of Conduct : Such a document should be completed during admission and should address issues pertaining to learner behaviour
- Admission policy : Should exclude criminal offenders and over-age learners.
- ✕ - Reduced workload and equal distribution of work be maintained.

4.3.3.3 Measures that need to be implemented by the school management team to reduce the levels of stress experienced in the workplace

With regard to measures that need to be implemented, participants responded as follows (refer Question 3.1, Section C, Appendix A, p.104)

- Reduce educator workload, especially paperwork and administration.
- Ensure an equal distribution of work among staff.
- Plan in advance at school, as departments and as individual staff members.
- Provide constant guidance, counselling and psychological assistance.
- Apply consistency as regards the treatment of staff in general, more specifically when it comes to decision-making and the application of authoritative powers.
- Work in close cooperation with all stakeholders.
- Ensure open lines of communication : Operate along the lines of consultation and involvement of all stakeholders.
- Managers need to be equipped with sound managerial skills.
- Constantly propagate parent involvement and render guidance in this regard.

4.3.3.4 Measures to be implemented by authorities at provincial and/or national level to alleviate stress experienced in the current school situation.

Participants, suggested the following measures (refer to Question 3.2 Section C, Annexure A p.104).

- Provide psychological support services.

- Implement a system of constantly monitoring conditions at schools and provide the necessary support.
- Stop drafting policies that aim at disempowering educators.
- Foster realistic expectations of academic results in historically disadvantaged secondary schools.
- Do not rush implementing new policies or measures only to meet political deadlines. Rather plan well in advance.
- Ensure that officials are equipped to do the work they are responsible for and capable of doing.
- Provide the necessary and relevant teaching and learning resources.
- Stop managing schools by intimidating, threatening and imposing decisions on educators in a top-down manner.

#### 4.3.3.5 Thoughts that came to mind as participants worked through the questionnaire

Responses to Question 4, Section C, Annexure A, p.105, indicated that quite a number of participants expressed the view that they felt a little better now that they have been afforded the opportunity to air their views about their situation. Some voiced the opinion that through this experience they now realise that they need to look for signals indicating stress and take the necessary precautionary measures. Furthermore, participants expressed their concern as to why top education officials, who are surrounded by knowledgeable experts, are not advised to take note of the stress experienced by secondary school educators in the workplace.

#### 4.3.4 Conclusion with regard to questionnaire study

It seems as if secondary school educators believe that they are fully equipped to be successful in the teaching profession. However, because of the impact of stress experienced in the workplace, they are no longer certain that they will indeed remain teaching if they could find an alternative job. This is supported by the fact that many educators experience that their enthusiasm has dwindled over the years and that they lack the necessary conviction to recommend the teaching profession to school leaving matriculants.

Educators also experience that a major portion of the day of any school week is devoted to school related matters, leaving little time for personal fulfilment. This could have negative consequences for the family and one's career. It could reach a stage where educators suffer exhaustion, fatigue, or even burnout. Working oneself to the limit could lead to major depression and burnout.

Notwithstanding the foregoing signals of distress, it was pleasing to notice that educators are willing to engage in positive coping strategies such as, collegiality and sharing experiences, seeking vocational information through seminars or workshops, attending religious meetings to acquire spiritual strength and not indulging in too much drugs or medication. The need for assistance from the education department in the form of psychological programmes or psychological services was fully endorsed by all participants.



#### 4.4 VERBATIM FEEDBACK OF PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES DURING THE RESPECTIVE INTERVIEWS

##### 4.4.1 Introductory remarks

As regards the constitution of the interviewee group and interview procedures, the following approach was implemented.

The interviewee group consisted of five participants randomly selected from the twenty participants who participated in the questionnaire study. The free attitude interview approach was adopted as it is a non-directive controlled in-depth interview (Meulenber-Buskens 1997:1).

With regard to the biographical details of participants (refers to table 1, p.53), the researcher could identify the participants based on the codes used, because "researchers have a dual responsibility of protecting the participants' identity and participants' confidences from other actors in research settings" (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:399).

##### 4.4.2 Section B : Questions posed to participants regarding stress experienced in the workplace

At the outset readers need to be made aware of the fact that all participants in this study are second language speakers of English originating from a historically disadvantaged community.

QUESTION 1 : *Would you say teaching is one of the most stressful professions?*

Participant D : "Yes. There are so many demands made on educators that they have to complete a master within a short period of time. Apart from teaching there are administrative tasks and meetings one have to attend. Most stressing is the high failure rate of learners beside efforts educator put on the work."

Participant A : "Yes. There are too much unrealistic demands put on educators and their job security is no longer guaranteed."

Participant N : "No, as long as educators can accept things as challenges and just do their work. I think educators need to be positive and they would not perceive teaching as a stressful experience but a challenge."

Participant K : "Definitely yes. We are led by people who master paperwork and policies but not the real issues that we as practising educators experience. We are blamed and threatened when learners do not pass exams."

Participant M : "Yes. Especially with the kind of learners we teach. They lack discipline and commitment to their school work. We do not enjoy the status and recognition we deserve from education officials, parents and the community any longer."

## SUMMARY

**From the responses above it is quite clear that teaching is a stressful experience. To partially overcome this problem it requires people who are positive and committed to what they do. However, educators need support cooperation and recognition for the effort they put into their work.**

QUESTION 2 : *Would you recommend the teaching career to a matric learner who is about to leave school?*

Participant D : "No, I would not do such a thing since I myself will like to quit it due to unrealistic demands put on educators. Teaching is no longer the same like it was used to be. I can give advise about other careers and definitely would discourage him/her to follow teaching career."

Participant A : "No, the only thing that I could do is to discourage him/her. Teaching is no longer an exciting experience."

Participant N : "Yes, however, I would encourage them to take scarce subjects that are in turn marketable and need in the country."

Participant K : "Yes, but only to equip himself to gain experience of working with young people. To have an exposure of dealing with people and experience working in a profession with little chance for upward mobility/promotion."

Participant M : "Yes. Only because there is a need to provide basic knowledge before anyone can follow any specific career. But it is a difficult profession to follow due to its problems."

## SUMMARY

**Although the majority of interviewees said 'Yes', it was stated with a proviso. Those who said 'No' created the impression that teaching has changed to be a nasty experience - to such an extent that some prospective educators could be lost to other professions.**

QUESTION 3 : *Mention some of the things you consider as causing educator stress.*

Participant D : "Too much work, that is, variety of tasks. Lack of recognition by officials. High failure rate of learners. Discipline of learners."

Participant A : "Lack of communication between school management and ordinary educators. Lack of cooperation from learners and late communication from LF's which in turn result in time pressure when one have to complete tasks."

Participant N : "Transition is a challenge to everyone. Therefore, educators have to be positive to meet the needs of transition. Transition requirements if are seen subjectively, may lead to a situation where one perceive these as stress factors."

Participant K : "Too much high expectations from education managers and parents. Many demands on educators within a short time notice. Being led by officials who underestimate the problems experienced at schools, especially in the townships.

Participant M : "Lack of support and recognition by both parents and the education officials. Lack of discipline and commitment of learners toward their school tasks."

## SUMMARY

**Participants cited a range of contributory factors to educator stress, ranging from education officials to learner behaviour.**

QUESTION 4 : *How do you cope with the demands of teaching?*

Participant D : "By trying to be positive and sometimes ignoring some minor issues."

Participant A : "By sharing and talking with friends/colleagues about problems I experience at work. Sometimes when I am pushed far enough I take sick leave or dodge some periods."

Participant N : "By being positive and believing that I will ultimately cope with the demands. Taking things as challenges towards personal growth."

Participant K : "Getting along with colleagues and relaxing at social places. Just ignoring some of the unrealistic demands."

Participant M : "I take time to relax with friends or engage in sport activities. To boost my mind I engage in other activities that will take my mind off from work problems."

#### SUMMARY

**Everyone has a unique way of solving or coping with stressing issues in the workplace. Being positive even when things do not go well or as expected, is a sign of professional growth in educators. However, the deliberate ignoring of assignments, taking sick leave and dodging classes are not good for one's job and the patrons of the school.**

*QUESTION 5 : How do the demands of your work situation affect your health?*

Participant D : "Negatively. Sometimes you feel like not going to work and that is not an acceptable attitude. At times you are very tired and had to take some medication to boost your energy."

Participant A : "I sometimes loose interest in doing my school work, feeling

stressed-up, tired and sick.”

Participant N : “Not really. I am a sportsman and I always do things accordingly. I am most of the time in control of work demands.”

Participant K : “I sometimes becomes forgetful when pushed to the limit. Constantly making mistakes due to lack of concentration is a sign of health problem according to me.”

Participant M : “One would never exactly know the impact of work stress on health, however, I sometimes experience headache. What usually happen when I am under pressure is to loose interest in the teaching and feel very tired after work.”

#### SUMMARY

**The demands of the workplace have a variety of ill-effects, some may get very tired, others suffer stress, get bored, loose concentration and even fall ill.**

QUESTION 6 : *How does many current demands in teaching affect your performance?*

Participant D : “Very badly. Sometimes I go to class very tired and this disturbs my teaching of a lesson. At times when I take medication to calm my nerves, I oversleep or become drowsy and at the end do not have enough time to prepare for the next lessons.”

Participant A : “Having to complete some administrative tasks during school hours affect my class teaching badly. At times one has to neglect teaching matters in class only to catch-up with paperwork that one has to produce.”

Participant N : “I believe at the moment I am doing well irrespective of numerous task that one has to fulfil. What is disturbing is that product (meaningful learning and passing assignments) we expect from learners sometimes are not positive. However, I am prepared to play my role as educator.”

Participant K: “While one is teaching, concentration fluctuates because at the same time one must remember to soon thereafter to attend tasks that are behind in terms of time. Teaching different grades or different subjects in one day is not helping for one to teach effectively.”

Participant M : “Negatively. Many times I have to skip classes to attend meetings, learner problems or do some work in the office that is required at the district offices.”

#### SUMMARY

**Having to attend to so many tasks during any single school day is not conducive to effective teaching. Normally it would be expected of educators to engage in tasks that are manageable so that their productivity and work efficiency can be enhanced. However, as participants have indicated, it appears that the many activities they have to fulfil are really disturbing their teaching performance.**

#### 4.4.3 A concise summary of the overall feedback obtained from the interviewees

##### PARTICIPANT D

This interviewee has clearly indicated that the numerous demands in the teaching

profession has led her to view teaching as one of the most stressful professions and that she would not recommend it. The many additional tasks that she has to perform has a negative impact on her school work. The situation is worsened by the lack of recognition from education officials.

#### PARTICIPANT A

She perceives teaching as a stressful occupation since there are so many unrealistic demands that sometimes force one to miss classes or take sick leave. Lack of support and cooperation from learners and education officials add to stress she experiences at work. She relies on problem sharing to survive the negative consequences of stress.

#### PARTICIPANT N

This gentleman is very positive and accepts the demands of the current era as challenges that men and women must face. In the current climate he is confident that the right thing to do is to simply accept the consequences of transition and only those who look at things positively and objectively will survive.

#### PARTICIPANT K

He has very strong feelings about education officials. To him they lack real knowledge and experience of what is happening at schools, hence their unrealistic expectations. He also has serious misgivings about the many tasks educators have to fulfil within a very short space of time.

## PARTICIPANT M

Educator M is very concerned about the discipline of learners in schools and the necessary support which seems to be lacking from both parents and education officials. He would only recommend teaching, as a career to young people for the mere fact that the nation needs to be educated. However, conditions at school are not conducive to establishing a climate where prospective educators can be guaranteed a satisfactory and challenging work environment.

To conclude, the information gathered by means of the interviews, supplements and confirms what was reported by means of the questionnaire feedback. Teaching is a stressful experience characterised by lack of cooperation among parents. Furthermore, there are a multitude of demands and expectations that impact on educators with little support or encouragement from superiors to motivate them to produce their best. One of the interviewees frankly said that she would not recommend teaching to anyone because she herself wants to quit the profession. It is clear that there are many aspects of the teaching profession that impact negatively on the educators' work, health and their perception about the teaching profession.

### **4.5 AN OVERVIEW OF THE DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCESSES**

All in all twenty participants were involved in the self-report questionnaire exercise. As a follow-up five of these respondents were interviewed as part of the qualitative study. The respective results were analysed and interpreted accordingly.

The data collected by means of questionnaires and interviews, as it was reported

in the aforementioned paragraphs, will be used as a framework in the last chapter to synthesise the responses supplied. With the aid of this synthesis, recommendations as regards future coping strategies for stress among secondary school educators will be made. In the event it is anticipated that the last chapter will provide possible answers to the following questions:

- To what extent does stress experienced in the workplace negatively affect the educators' attitude, performance and health?
- Which stressors seem to be the major contributors to stress experienced by educators?
- Which coping strategies can be implemented effectively by educators to cope with stress induced by working conditions?
- What measures need to be implemented to reduce the intensity of stress experienced by educators in their work environment?

## CHAPTER 5

### CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

#### 5.1 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study was to explore the nature and implications of work stress experienced by secondary school educators within the climate currently prevailing at schools. This was to be explored with the aim of identifying the conditions in the workplace that affected educators negatively.

The research conducted, commenced with a thorough literature review on the topic of stress. The different approaches to stress and the response moderators in terms of the different personality types were researched to constitute a sound framework for this study. In chapter 2, for example, the nature, the sources and the effects of stress were alluded to.

Chapter 3 of the study focused on the research design, which explained to the reader how the participants were selected and what procedures were implemented to collect information from them. In this qualitative study two methods for gathering information were implemented, namely questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 4 elucidated that data collection techniques and the data analysis strategies implemented in this research study.

## 5.2 GENERAL FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The pertinent findings and its implications that have been disclosed by this research, will serve as a rationale for making recommendations.

### 5.2.1 Findings from Chapter 2

As regards approaches to stress, response moderators, effects of stress and coping strategies implemented by educators, the following findings emerged :

- Stress is the need to adjust to new conditions that originate from within the individual or from the surroundings.
- How an individual responds to demanding or stressful situations depends on his or her personality type and previous life experience.
- Stress can affect both the mental and physical well-being of the individual
- Stress can also impact on educators' performance and productivity in a negative way.
- Excessive stress can lead to the complete breakdown of the individual.
- Coping with stress is a way of meeting contextual demands and is influenced by what one wants to achieve, that is, either to solve a problem or to understand the situation, or to control one's emotions.

### 5.2.2 Findings from questionnaire and interview studies

From the questionnaire investigation in Chapter 4, the following has been derived:

#### A Major stressors identified in the workplace

The following major stressors, in order of impact, were reported.

- Lack of parental support or parental involvement in the education of their children.
- Lack of discipline and commitment among learners.
- Inadequacy of resources at schools. This is also in line with the findings in other research reports (Abel & Sewell 1999:292).
- Work overload and overcrowded classrooms. This stress factor was also alluded to by Byrne (1998:88).
- Poor relationships between post level one educators and school management teams (SMT's).
- Lack of security in the workplace (general safety) and job security.

#### B Educators' attitude and perception toward the school situation

- Most educators rated themselves as successful under the current conditions prevailing at schools.

- A high percentage of participants felt upset when they do not manage to complete planned tasks during any single week.
- Many educators are contented with their ability to perform their tasks within the current school climate.
- Educators believe that through proper prior planning they can be excellent achievers.
- Half of the participants indicated that they are no longer enthusiastic about their profession.
- The majority of respondents are no longer excited about their future in the teaching profession and would not recommend it to school leavers (matriculants).

**C Stress effects on educators' work productivity and efficiency**

- Educators feel that they devote a major portion of their time during the week to work-related matters, other than their academic responsibilities, and at stages neglect the latter due to time constraints and pressure.
- Sixty five percent of participants indicated that due to prevailing circumstances at school they cannot perform optimally at their level of proficiency.

**D Effective coping strategies implemented by educators to reduce stress**

- Sharing problems with colleagues, friends and family members.
- Attending workshops or seminars that equip one with knowledge that is needed to function effectively in the current situation.
- Seeking guidance and support from the school management team.
- Emotion-oriented coping strategies such as relaxing activities, physical exercising and spending time on hobby(ies), although very few participants implemented these coping strategies.
- Engaging in religious activities provide spiritual strength to cope with stress.

**E Support rendered or support programmes in place**

- Educators expressed a strong need for psychological support by the Department of Education. This could be brought about by organised counselling meetings or by subsidising individual educators to consult private counsellors, psychologists or therapists.
- Seventy percent of participants indicated that learning facilitators (LF's) do not timeously communicate to educators what is expected of them and this contributes to increasing levels of stress experienced by educators.

## F Stress effects on mental and physical health

- A substantial number of educators seem to experience sleeping disorders and concentration problems (refer to p.64).
- On the other hand only 30 % of the participants felt their general physical and mental health has deteriorated over the last five years of teaching.

### 5.2.3 Synthesis : Overall findings from Chapters 2 and 4

According to this research, multifaceted variables have been identified which adversely influences the level of stress experienced by educators in the workplace. This includes, among others, the numerous stressors that affect the way in which educators experience their work, the different personalities which moderate how an individual would respond to work demands and the approach used to cope when faced with a problematic situation. The reasons why educators are increasingly experiencing stress in the workplace are complex and requires a common understanding from both practising educators and office-based education officials. Efforts to keep educators satisfied and able to perform to the expected level should be based on proper and timeous communication, a common understanding of situations prevailing at schools and the concomitant problems encountered by educators.

It is therefore concluded that the problem of stress experienced by educators warrants a holistic approach, which not only addresses sources of stress but also equips educators to function effectively in an environment which is stressful of nature.

#### 5.2.4 Personality of the participants

Many of the participants are challenged by the current state of affairs in their schools in which their control of the situation is threatened. They nevertheless had to maintain certain levels of work efficacy and keep up their control over their surroundings by responding to demands in a constructive manner. From the research data analysed it became clear that the respondents, generally speaking, displayed Type A personality characteristics. They have a desire to be recognised, to compete with time, are frustrated in the work situation, have long working hours and often take work home just to keep up with the demands of work. Stress experienced by the interviewees owing to work conditions often result in the deterioration of the quality of teaching. Interviewees expressed their anger by verbally attacking the education officials' poor understanding of the school situation in general.

*Handwritten notes:* nursing, staff members, Management, Hospital

#### 5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF STRESS

The above discussion clearly indicates that stress experienced by educators have a negative influence on their productivity and work efficiency. Many a time they have to sacrifice their teaching only to cover a colleague, who for example, has to leave his/her class to attend to administrative tasks. This in turn contributes to a decline in the level of performance with regard to facilitated learning and remedial lessons. Stress experienced by educators should be managed and pro-active measures need to be taken by educators, by implementing appropriate coping strategies to ensure that they function at an optimal level of efficiency and satisfaction.

*Handwritten notes:* nurses, nursing, word, one, staff members, staff members

*Handwritten note:* staff members  
Educators need to be empowered to face the challenges of their work. They need

to be educated on how to approach demanding situations and be afforded the opportunity to seek counselling or psychological support that will motivate them to effectively cope with their work burden.

A disturbing feature is that participants to this study acknowledged that stress does have a negative influence on their health. This includes physical disorders such as feeling exhausted, sleeping disorders, drowsiness and frequent headaches.

In conclusion, it appears that the majority of the participants suffered from behavioural or physical complications of stress, which quite often results in physical discomfort and possible absenteeism due to illness or avoidance. The above-mentioned consequences are not healthy and may lead to lowered productivity and the impairment of general well-being. It is therefore important to control stressors and effectively manage work stress.

#### 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Now that the research project has elucidated and confirmed the various frustrations and stress experienced by educators in the school situation, the following are recommended:

All stakeholders who have a vested interest in public education must note the seriousness of these research findings, in particular the detrimental consequences of stress on the quality of performance and work efficiency of educators. Furthermore, the impact of stress on any individual educator's health could harm the school institution as a whole.

The managers in education based in schools, in district offices, provincial offices, and at the national office, must take note of the findings of this research project. The negative influence of stress experienced by secondary school educators and its adverse influence on the quality of their teaching must be viewed as a matter of urgency and should be addressed without delay.

The Department of Education should view the outcomes of this research study in a serious light. The situation necessitates the need to involve psychologists in implementing preventative measures to reduce the impact of stress on educators' health and performance.

Furthermore, the National Department of Education should liaise with universities and colleges of education to introduce programmes that would prepare student-teachers for stress in the workplace and how to control or manage it. This is crucial before they start their careers as practising educators.

School Management Teams (SMT's) must take it as their responsibility to encourage a mutual understanding of accountability among parents, educators and learners whereby a climate is established that will ensure that educators function in an environment characterised by limited levels of stress.

More research still needs to be done on how best township parents, with their inadequate level of literacy, can be empowered to play a contributory role in the learning process of their children.

In the last instance, timely communication must be a golden rule in all areas of education. This is of crucial importance when it comes to the effective implementation of new policies, programmes and educational responsibilities.

## 5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research study clearly elucidated the detrimental influence of unacceptable levels of stress experienced in secondary schools. Factors contributing to these high levels of stress experienced by educators are complex in nature and requires the urgent attention of higher authorities in education. The impact of such levels of distress experienced by educators have a negative influence on educator's performance and health, as well as the learning and development processes of learners. School management teams should render support and encourage educators to share their problems with colleagues. Furthermore, educators should be motivated to remain positive and open-minded and view the things that they are not comfortable with in the new dispensation as part of transition. The Department of Education should play a significant role to ensure that stressors in the workplace are minimised and that the much needed psychological services and support programmes are introduced to assist educators.

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Out

## ANNEXURE A

### VISTA UNIVERSITY □ WELKOM CAMPUS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

EDU8050 MEd : COGNITIVE EDUCATION

RESEARCH PROJECT

### QUESTIONNAIRES : WORK STRESS EXPERIENCED BY EDUCATORS IN THE WORKPLACE

#### INTRODUCTION

The present period of transition, transformation and rationalisation in the field of education in South Africa and the concomitant problems and uncertainties contribute to increased levels of stress experienced by secondary school educators (teachers).

Unhealthy levels of stress among educators could have a negative impact on the culture of teaching and learning in schools. Van der Linde and Van der Westhuizen (1999 : 196) elucidated the fact that emotional exhaustion among educators has a significant impact on their work efficiency.

*The end result [of teacher stress] is that many talented men and women with high expectations of achievement are dispirited and disillusioned. Some leave the profession, others stay but are plagued by a multitude of physical, emotional and behavioural stress-related manifestations.*

-Milstein and Golaszewski 1985.

The **purpose** of this questionnaire is to obtain information as regards :

- the variety of *stressors* within the workplace to which educators (teachers) are exposed to on a regular basis
- *coping strategies* that are implemented effectively by some educators, or that can be implemented in an effort to achieve performance levels at an acceptable level of job efficiency.

The questionnaire, once completed, is **completely confidential** and **the anonymity of respondents will be protected** when the data is analysed. Your name and contact address and telephone number is required for the sole purpose of a follow-up interview (only if additional information is required).

#### **INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS/RESPONDENTS**

- Place note that there are *no right or wrong responses* to the items or questions in this questionnaire.
- Complete the questionnaire *as honestly as may be possible* (the first response that generally comes to mind is often the most valid response to a given question or item).
- Only *one response/answer to a question* is permitted.
- Also note that through your responses you will be making a valuable contribution to the study and understanding of *levels of stress* experienced by educators/teachers in schools in the Goldfields region.

## INFORMATION AS REGARDS QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire consists of three (3) sections which should all be completed.

**SECTION A** requires some biographic information concerning participants/respondents

**SECTION B** consists of a questionnaire containing 36 questions. Please answer all these questions.

**SECTION C** seeks a *honest/candid view* of your opinion on :

- What constitutes the SIX major stressors in the work environment of the educator/teacher?
- What coping strategy(ies) should educators implement to overcome the negative impact of the aforementioned stressors?
- How should the school management team as well as the educational authorities at provincial and/or national level respond (or what precautionary measures need to be implemented) to alleviate or solve the problems mentioned above?

\*\*\*\*\*

**SECTION A**

Please furnish the following *biographic information* :

1 **NAME** : .....

2 **SCHOOL** : .....

3 **TELEPHONE** : ..... (W)

.....(H)

.....(C)

4 **GENDER** :

M	F
---	---

(Make a X in the appropriate block)

5 **AGE** : .....

6 **QUALIFICATIONS** :

6.1 Specify degree, diploma, certificate : .....

6.2 Mention major subjects : .....

7 **TOTAL NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE** : .....

8 **CURRENT RANK** : .....

**PLEASE NOTE** : All the above information will be treated confidentially

## SECTION B

In this section you are presented with statements covering many **aspects of stress**.

- Against each statement is a scale of 1 - 5.
- **Read the statements carefully, because not all statements will elicit a positive response.**
- If you **strongly agree** that the statement describes you (or your approach), then **draw a ring around 5**.
- If you **strongly disagree**, and the statement does not describe you at all, then **draw a ring around 1**.
- The **value 3** accords with a **neutral view** of the statement.

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SECTION B (continues) : LIKERT SCALE

strongly disagree → strongly agree

1	I rate myself as a highly successful teacher/educator in the current school climate.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I devote a major portion of my energy and time during the week to my school work.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I spend a great deal of my leisure time on my hobby/hobbies.	1	2	3	4	5
4	When I experience excessive levels of stress in the workplace, I tend to become sulky/bad tempered.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I have acquired knowledge about how to cope with stress in the workplace during my years of professional training as a prospective teacher/educator.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I am convinced that the poor sleeping habits that I experience in recent times can be contributed to abnormal levels of stress experienced in the workplace.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I will strongly recommend teaching as a career to school leavers(matriculants).	1	2	3	4	5
8	My daily/weekly teaching/facilitation activities are based on thorough advanced planning.	1	2	3	4	5
9	On average I sleep at least eight hours per night during weekdays to overcome stress experienced in the workplace.	1	2	3	4	5

strongly disagree → strongly agree

10	Attending workshops and seminars where one is exposed to innovative educational approaches assists one to effectively cope with the demands of the teaching-learning activity.	1	2	3	4	5
11	The department of education provides psychological support programmes to teachers/educators who suffer excessive stress.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I get very upset when I do not manage to complete the work planned for any single week.	1	2	3	4	5
13	After school I spend at least FOUR hours of any school day on planning, preparation and marking.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I devote at least a half an hour per day, for at least four days of the week, to physical exercises.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Learning facilitators (LF's) do not always timeously communicate to teachers/educators what is expected of them.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Due to the fact that I experience a high degree of stress in the workplace, I find it difficult to concentrate for a lengthy period of time.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Due to the prevailing circumstances at school I am no longer excited about my future in the teaching profession.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Due to prevailing circumstances at school, I cannot perform at the level of proficiency that I know I can achieve under normal conditions.	1	2	3	4	5

strongly disagree → strongly agree

19	I smoke at least twenty (20) cigarettes per day when I experience stress (non-smokers encircle option 1).	1	2	3	4	5
20	The school governing body do not seem to understand that the teaching-learning conditions in our schools are deteriorating. They are also reluctant to render support to alleviate the problem.	1	2	3	4	5
21	When I experience excessive stress in the workplace I occasionally suffer palpitation (rapid increase in heartbeat).	1	2	3	4	5
22	To me, as teacher/educator, only my level best is good enough.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I frequently work until late in the evenings to get my school work done.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Collegiality and openly sharing experience can reduce the level of stress experienced by educators/teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I often tend to overindulge in food when experiencing high levels of stress.	1	2	3	4	5
26	In the current teaching-learning situation I am of the opinion that access to psychological support programmes is an absolute necessity.	1	2	3	4	5
27	I dislike procrastination, I therefore make a concerted effort to keep the marking of assessment activities up to date.	1	2	3	4	5

strongly disagree → strongly agree

28	To ensure that my teaching responsibilities and activities are properly structured, I make use of a well-planned work schedule.	1	2	3	4	5
29	I regularly take medication in an effort to effectively cope with my daily activities/responsibilities in the workplace.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I am in full control of my daily tasks and responsibilities and do not require any support to cope with stress.	1	2	3	4	5
31	My enthusiasm for the teaching profession is dwindling due to the continuous impact of stress on my life.	1	2	3	4	5
32	Circumstances in the school setting quite often lead to a situation where I get to class not fully prepared.	1	2	3	4	5
33	I frequently indulge in above average intake of alcohol to relax from stressful/strenuous activities/incidents experienced at school.	1	2	3	4	5
34	As teacher/educator I can rely on the assistance and support of the school management team when excessive stress is experienced.	1	2	3	4	5
35	Engaging in religious activities provide a firm spiritual foundation to effectively cope with stress.	1	2	3	4	5
36	My general physical and mental health have deteriorated over the last five years due to increased levels of stress experienced in the workplace.	1	2	3	4	5

### SECTION C : OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

1 Refer to Appendix A. In your view, what constitutes the SIX major stressor in the work environment of the educator/teacher? Arrange in order of impact i.e. highest to least impact on stress. **Simply write down the number of the stressor** reflected in Appendix A (e.g. 18).

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2 What coping strategy(ies) should educators implement to overcome the negative impact of the aforementioned stressors?

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3.1 What measures should the **school management team** implement to reduce the levels of stress experienced in the work place?

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3.2 In your view, what measures need to be implemented by **authorities at provincial and/or national level** to alleviate the general phenomenon of stress experienced by a major portion of educators in the current school situation.

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## APPENDIX A

Refer to Question 1, Section C (p.103).

The following list represents some of the **major stressors** that effect educators/teachers in the workplace:

- 1 lack of discipline among learners
- 2 excessive administrative work
- 3 general work overload
- 4 being involved in extra-mural activities of which one has little or no experience
- 5 time pressure
- 6 poor relationships among staff
- 7 poor relationships between staff and the school management team
- 8 lack of communication between staff and the school management team
- 9 lack of understanding and support from supervisors (subject heads, HOD's, LF's, SMD's)
- 10 lack of job security
- 11 lack of recognition
- 12 lack of security in the workplace (general safety)
- 13 lack of resources to execute one's task properly
- 14 the administration of continuous assessment activities
- 15 facilitating the learning process in overcrowded classes
- 16 frequent meetings during and after school hours
- 17 teaching subjects/learning areas at the same grade level with colleagues who are uncooperative
- 18 lack of support from parents as primary educators to ensure their child's success at school
- 19 the school management team lacking direction and clear vision
- 20 overburdened by the responsibility of too many different subjects/learning areas.

## ANNEXURE B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

#### SECTION A : BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Gender	Age	Qualifications	Teaching Experience
A	F	29	SED	5 years
D	F	28	SED; BTech PTD	4 years
N	M	34	BA	8 years
K	M	29	STD PTD	8 years
M	M	29	BA; STD PTD	7 years

#### SECTION B : QUESTIONS POSED TO PARTICIPANTS REGARDING STRESS EXPERIENCED IN THE WORKPLACE

##### QUESTION 1

*Would you say teaching is one of the most stressful professions? Substantiate your viewpoint.*

##### QUESTION 2

*Would you recommend the teaching career to a matric learner who is about to leave school? Substantiate your conduct.*

QUESTION 3

*Mention some of the things you consider as causing educator stress.*

QUESTION 4

*How do you cope with the demands of teaching?*

QUESTION 5

*How does the demands of your work situation affect your health?*

QUESTION 6

*How does many current demands in teaching affect your performance as educator?*



## ANNEXURE C

8335 ST Helena 9988  
1431 Meloding Location  
9463

1431 Meloding Location  
**VIRGINIA**  
9430

22 August 2000

The Principal  
Meloding Secondary School  
Private Bag X35  
**VIRGINIA**  
9430

Dear Sir / Madam

### RE : PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT

I, **Ramone Simon Moduka** would like to be given permission to conduct a study among your educating staff. The study is about educators' experiences of work which may suggest whether they work under pressure or not, and what they do to cope.

If given permission and there is a positive response from educators, the study will consists of:

- (1) A self-report questionnaire.
- (2) Few interviews conducted with some educators (not more than ten) from your school.

**NB:** In all information seeking process identify of informants will not be disclosed.

I hope my request will positively be attended to. The promise is that the findings of the study will be disclosed to the school as soon as external moderation are made by my university and they are accepted.

Yours faithfully

**R S MODUKA**