

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND LEVEL OF BURNOUT AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN NAKURU MUNICIPALITY, KENYA

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Abstract

Teachers in society have been faced by circumstances that force them to perform their duties below expectations. They have been the subject of criticism that has failed to take into consideration situations beyond the teacher. Blame for the shortcomings of the education system has therefore rested squarely on teachers. Stress, teaching overload and burnout are consequences of working under difficult conditions that include excessive pressure with minimal regard to the teachers coping threshold. The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is relationship between social support and the level of burnout among primary school teachers in Nakuru Municipality. Ex-post facto research design was employed with the target population being primary school teachers. A sample of 140 teachers was chosen at random for the study. A questionnaire with a burnout inventory was used to collect data. Results obtained indicated that social support showed a significant relation to burnout among teachers. It was recommended that a proactive approach is required to counter stress related symptoms and keep them within the coping threshold of the teacher rather than allowing their buildup over time resulting in burnout. This would help in keeping the costs of working in the teaching service in terms of stress related problems at a low level, contributing in the long run to a more effective and productive educator.

Keywords: Social Support, Burnout, Primary School Teacher

I. Introduction

As the world undergoes profound political, social, economic as well as cultural changes, teaching as a profession has become more complex than before. Teachers today have to learn to teach in ways they themselves were not taught (McLaughlin, 1997). Teachers have also to respond more sensitively to increasing cultural diversity especially in urban areas, accommodating new technology and incorporating new teaching strategies. Teachers have to cope with increased parental demands, working closely with colleagues and implementation of new reforms. The content of what needs to be taught and what children need to learn is changing, which puts the profession at a crossroad (Hargreaves, 2001). Many policy debates highlight divisions within the educational community, however agreements have remained on the need to improve on the working life and career conditions once a teacher joins the profession (Louis & Smith, 1990). Burnout is the end result of heavy demands which is an occupational hazard which affects members of all professions, including teachers (Silsil, 2010).

The free primary school education policy initiated by the Kenyan Government to achieve universal access to basic education has led to an upsurge in enrollment with an increase of 1.1 million children at the beginning of the year 2003. With the high levels of enrolment, teachers have had to deal with unprecedented levels of indiscipline, with some of the newcomers being hard-core juvenile delinquents. The national pupil teacher ratio rose from 34:1 in 2002 to 40:1 in 2003. With the new challenges, education stakeholders expected teachers to create order out of the mess, therefore increasing the levels of stress among teachers (Kioko, 2003; GoK 2004).

Blase (1992) remarked that the process of burning out could be cumulative, as working under long term pressures leads to the gradual erosion of one's coping resources. Nias (1989) in an analysis of the sources of teachers' dissatisfaction found that teachers in their first decade of teaching outlined the lack of direction and problems in communicating with the administration as their major causes of stress. Teachers working in their second decade cited conflicts within their lives, conditions within schools and conflicts with individual principles as their causes of stress.

II.Objective of the Study

To determine whether there was a relationship between social support and the level of burnout among primary school teachers in Nakuru Municipality in Kenya.

III.Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between social support and the level of burnout within the teaching profession

IV.Literature Review

Teacher Stress and Burnout.

Dunham (1992) asserted that a growing number of teachers were apparently aware of the presence of severe stress reactions among their colleagues as numerous reports suggested an increasing unwillingness of teachers continuing in the profession. Estimates on the extent of teacher stress and burnout has been achieved by means of various objective measures. While a variety of objective measures have been employed, each is subject to several shortcomings and limitations. Physiological measures for instance are easily influenced by factors other than stress or by the differences between individuals on how they reflect on stress. As a result of the difficulties in obtaining objective measures of teacher stress and burnout, research on the area has relied on self-report questionnaires (Kyriacou, 1989).

Organizational and Occupational factors leading to Burnout

Andersen & Johnson, (1991) identify key areas of organizational stress that inhibit self-care which include communication problems with the administration and colleagues, role ambiguity, conflicting goals of staff and the administration, the nature of the system or institution and the lack of institutional support. The nature of teachers' involvement with students, colleagues, parents and members of the community are suggested as affecting self-perceptions of burnout. If teachers experience tensions and difficulties associated with this involvement, then this may be reflected in their behaviour towards others. At the organizational level, ways in which the school setting contributes to burnout include vague rules and regulations, large classes, poor availability of resources, poor working conditions and lack of privacy. The effects of burnout at the school level may be reflected in staff turnover, absenteeism and teacher dissatisfaction. Employer contributions to burnout include poor communication and implementation of decisions that affect teachers without having consulted them, inflexible policies on staffing and leave, inadequate teacher welfare services, and a general lack of formal social support systems for teachers. Other effects of burnout at the employer level may include high resignation rates with a consequent loss of trained and experienced teachers and increased numbers of leave without pay. Inexperienced teachers may have problems coping with more competent colleagues creating pressure on the new staff, as they may be uncertain on how to relate in the school.

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Exposure to suffering is inherent in all human service work and teachers see a great deal of it. Low teacher morale has been found to result in high rates of teacher absenteeism and attrition and undermining even the most committed and capable teacher's enthusiasm for teaching. Low salaries, poor working conditions as well as the lack of career advancement opportunities have been cited as key conditions that demoralize teachers and discourage their professional commitment. A survey in Indonesia, Liberia and Somalia found that primary teachers hold second and third wage earning jobs as a means of supplementing incomes earned from teaching (World Bank policy paper, 1990).

Teachers and other health care workers can find satisfaction in meeting the needs of those in physical, psychological and spiritual distress. Such workers are seldom given recognition for their work. Andersen & Johnson, (1991) argue that such workers may be unable to acknowledge how they feel about these and other dimensions of their chosen profession. The professional who has the skills to do so, develops strategies to identify and manage the factors that lead to burnout. The professional who fails to develop coping skills, or those working in situations for which their existing coping skills are inadequate, may begin to show signs of repeated unmanageable stress. A study of public school teachers in Iowa- U.S.A. (Russel, 1987), found that the greater the number of stressful events teachers experienced, the more likely they were to suffer burnout. Teachers who felt that they were receiving social support from supervisors were less vulnerable to burnout.

The Teaching Profession in Kenya

Teachers in Kenya play an essential role in the realization of the country's educational goals. In addition, teachers enjoy a high social status and must continue doing so as the teaching profession has placed them in a situation of permanent public scrutiny. Management styles and support systems for teachers should be put into consideration such as recognition, job satisfaction and security, a conducive working environment, career development, promotion prospects and remuneration (Third Teacher education conference, 1995).

Njoka, (1994) notes in the new millennium, teachers would be expected to play a more decisive role in placing emphasis on continuous assessment as teaching becomes more learner centered. Head teachers would also take up further responsibilities in the management of their schools such as the introduction of cost saving measures and income generating projects to raise funds. However, if more will be expected from teachers, they in turn will reasonably wish to see improvements in their careers, such as access to training and upgrading. These changes are already in motion with the implementation of the free primary education policy following recommendations of the Jomtein World Conference on Education for All in 1990 and the World Forum in Dakar (2000) towards the achievement of Universal Primary Education (GoK, 2003).

Sifuna (1980) asserts that the status of the teaching profession has been on the decline partly as a result of the fact that as the younger generation becomes literate, the teacher's superior knowledge has lost its scarcity value and can no longer enjoy the prestige held in a community of illiterates. He further noted that teachers were constantly subjected to the vagaries of school boards not only in matters concerning their profession but also their personal conduct. The teacher more than anyone else has been subjected to pressures of conforming to codes of ethics laid down by the employer. On the issue of staff development,

the initial teacher training is not adequate for continued professional growth. The trend has been for teachers to expect centralized training programmes.

Karim (1994) notes that transfer of teachers has been a costly exercise with varying degrees of social effects, ranging from social equilibrium, functional and dysfunctional actions to disruption of psychological and economical constructs. Teachers on transfer experience varying degrees of cultural shock such as confusion, insecurity and anxiety caused by the strangeness of the new environment. The lack of dedication among primary teachers has been cited as resulting from their being overworked as they are usually in charge of over 50 children for 9 periods a day. The same teacher is also expected to prepare visual aids, set tests and mark, pay individualized attention to pupils and be present at games and sports activities.

Success in examinations has been equated with effective teaching and learning which is a serious distortion of the proper process and goal of teaching and learning. The teachers' burden is worsened by their terms of service. Though teachers enjoy generous vacations, leave, allowances and job security, upward mobility through promotion is severely limited. Visits by education officers such as the School Inspector whose major role is to give guidance to practicing teachers, are seen when there is a crisis and when his advice is least likely to be sympathetic to the plight of the teacher (Sifuna 1980).

V. Research Methodology

The study adopted the ex post facto co relational research design. It was carried out in randomly selected public and private primary schools in Nakuru municipality. An accessible population of 1198 teachers took part in the study. The sample size of 140 primary school teachers was obtained using stratified and proportionate random sampling. A sample size of 100 respondents for the major subgroup (public schools) and 40 respondents for a minor subgroup (private schools) was selected. Data was collected using a questionnaire with a burnout inventory adopted and modified from Richmond (2001). The data collected from the questionnaires was organized, coded and analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods using the SPSS version 17 software package. This then allowed for percentages, means and standard deviations to be made. Quantitative analysis of data was done using chi square distribution χ^2 . All tests of significance were computed at $p = 0.05$.

VI. Results and Discussions

Relationship between Social Support and Level of Burnout within the Teaching Profession

According to the objective, the researcher sought to determine whether there was relationship between social support and burnout. The aspect of provision of social support was based on each teacher's own assessment of his or her schools provision of services that had a bearing on enhancing teacher motivation and productivity. The support services outlined included cash incentives, field trips and outings, promotions, end of term or year parties and sponsored workshops and seminars. Teachers were expected to indicate whether these services were provided or not. A contingency table was prepared to help establish the results of the relationship between social support and the level of burnout and the results are given in Table 1.

A calculated χ^2 value of 16.44 with a significance level of 0.05 was reported. The critical χ^2 value was 7.815 value that was less than the χ^2_c . On the basis of the calculated χ^2 of 16.44 the stated Null hypothesis was rejected. This therefore meant that there was relationship between

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social support and the level of burnout within the teaching profession at 0.05 level of significance. The results had the implication that social support may be an integral element that requires to be factored in within the primary school policy framework. There is a need by stakeholders in the primary schools to realize the need to improve the teachers welfare and social support as a means of countering the buildup of stress and burnout among teachers

Table 1: Observed And Expected Responses On Provision Of Social Support And Burnout Levels.

Social support	Burnout level				Total
	Low	Moderate	High	Very high	
Yes	Fo = 33 Fe = 26.5	Fo = 35 Fe = 35	Fo = 1 Fe = 8	Fo = 1 Fe = 0.5	70
No	Fo = 20 Fe = 26.5	Fo = 35 Fe = 35	Fo = 15 Fe = 8	Fo = 0 Fe = 0.5	70
Total	53	70	16	1	140

n=140 χ^2 value = 16.44 df. = 3 χ^2 critical = 7.815 Significance at 0.05

Results from this study showed that half of the respondents (50%) experienced moderate feelings of burnout. This further implies that if teachers continue contending with the large classes and working under difficult conditions without a marked improvement in social support, the teachers experiencing moderate levels of burnout could easily slide into the category of those experiencing high and very high levels who according to the study accounted for 11.4% and 0.71% respectively. The same scenario could also face respondents who recorded a low level of burnout who could also slide upwards. There is a need for education stakeholders to consider factoring of social support within the institutional framework to relieve levels of exhaustion as a mechanism of reversing stress reactions among teachers.

The study was able to establish that primary teachers were experiencing some degree of burnout. Respondents in the category with high levels of burnout accounted for 11% while only 0.71% recorded a very high level of burnout. Teachers with low levels of burnout comprised 37.9% while those experiencing moderate level of burnout accounted for 50% of the sample. This implies that those with minimal feelings of burning out are bound to slide to the next scale where serious burnout levels may be registered if control measures are not taken to arrest the situation. The costs of working in the Education sector in relation to burnout among teachers need to be evaluated in order to enhance a proactive approach in dealing with stress and burnout. There is a real risk that the costs of stress reactions and burnout could become much greater with time and difficult to reverse.

VII. Conclusion

The aspect of social support also showed significant relationship to burnout. The results from the study allow for the conclusion that social support, as a resource for coping with stress associated with teaching and burnout is essential in making teachers more committed to their work. Further research into other forms of social support is necessary such as team teaching between colleagues, family and spousal support and relations with friends outside the school may shed light on their relationship to teacher stress and burnout.

VIII.Recommendations

There is a need for teachers' unions and school authorities to sensitize teachers on programmes, facilities, clubs and retreats that teachers may form or join to seek help, unwind and relax in an attempt to reduce stress overload as a result of their work. The need for schools to device activities for teachers as it is done for the pupil has been disregarded by educational stakeholders in Kenya. It has been erroneously assumed that since teachers are remunerated, they thus do not require any form of social support initiated by the employer. This study however shows that the teachers' welfare requires urgent attention to help raise the status of the teaching profession to the level of others like accounting, engineering and lawyers. This may help reduce the levels of attrition to other fields and encourage new entrants to the noble profession.

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