

**A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INQUIRY INTO THE INFLUENCE OF
FEMALE EDUCATOR STRESS ON THE OCCUPATIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF
FEMALE EDUCATORS IN THE PIETERMARITZBURG AREA**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of
KwaZulu-Natal

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KEYWORDS

Educator stress

Occupational perceptions

Occupational stressors

Educator demand

Educator resilience

Multifaceted role

Sociocultural approach

South African context

Abstract

This qualitative study examined the links between female educator stress and the attitudes of female educators towards their careers. It used data sampled from individual interviews conducted with female educators from two government schools and one private school in the Pietermaritzburg area. This research project is a sociocultural exploration of female educators' experiences of stress and the impact that it has on the way that these educators view their jobs. The purpose of the research was to obtain a greater understanding of the psychological effects of stress experienced in various urban school settings by primary and high school female educators. The results of the study indicate that participants' perceptions supported the literature review on some of the short-term and long-term psychological effects of educator stress on educators' attitudes towards their career. More negative teaching experiences than either beneficial or neutral experiences were recounted by the participants. The socioeconomic context in which the schools were situated, as well as the large number of administrative duties and lack of parental support contributed to the continued experience of high levels of stress by educators in general and female educators in particular.

DECLARATION

I declare that is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the resources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

I, Celeste Janet Matross declare that in regards to the study *A qualitative research inquiry into the influence of female educator stress on the occupational perceptions of female educators in the Pietermaritzburg area*:

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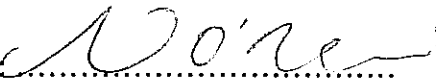
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Research has shown that educators experience the highest levels of occupational stress compared to any other profession (Moodley, 2001; Singla, 2006, in Lath, 2010). Stress not only affects the person experiencing it, but also the schools in which they work (Gaziel, 1993). The perceptions that educators have about their work may determine the effort that they invest in that work, which then has an impact on the quality of education that learners receive. This study allowed the educators to define for themselves what factors or situations they perceived as stressful or whether stress is even a factor in their lives, thus making the research process explorative and co-constructive. Therefore, this study explored what factors educators perceive as impacting on their role and job stress. This research aimed to explore educators' experiences of stress in more depth. It aimed to consider educator stress within a specific context. It begins with an initial broad focus that describes broad themes related to educator stress and the possible sociocultural factors that may contribute to it. From this analysis, exploring the differences between two government schools and a private school, and between primary and high school contexts, developed a greater understanding of the educators' experiences of stress.

This project is a qualitative research inquiry, which is a sociocultural exploration of female educators' experience of stress in schools in Pietermaritzburg and the influence that it has on these women's attitudes towards their careers. A sociocultural perspective has been adopted in this research as it is believed that human action is embedded in a context and therefore cannot be studied in isolation. This is a concept that can be explained by Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory.

An analysis of the overall literature revealed a concern with educator stress as it appeared to act as a demoralizing and disillusioning factor. It was thus felt that it warranted a specific exploration. However, there were a few cases in the literature where educators appeared able to successfully manage their stress and therefore seemed to have retained the same excitement and fulfillment that they experienced at the beginning of their careers. Although the main focus of the study was on the impact that female educators' experiences of work, home and community stressors have on their perceptions of the work, it became evident that the factors that helped

maintain the educators' positive attitudes towards their work were equally important. Thus a brief examination into the possible characteristics or behaviours of these educators was undertaken with the view to obtaining an understanding of their seeming resilience.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There are a number of stressful psycho-social and contextual factors that educators face in their profession that may influence how they perceive their jobs as educators. Female educators in particular face specific psycho-sexual, contextual stressors that have specific influences on their perceptions of their occupations.

Due to the crucial need for well-functioning educators as a means of creating a healthy and productive society, we need to understand the relevant stressors, to help lessen them and thereby make the profession more appealing. This literature review will begin with an overview of educators' reasons for choosing their profession. The demand for educators will then be discussed. Next it will explore stress in the workplace and educator stress. Thereafter, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory will be proposed as a theoretical perspective from which to explain the educator in context. The South African context will also be discussed, especially with regards to changes in educational policy, HIV/AIDS, poverty, Apartheid, violence and vulnerable children.

2.2 Reasons for becoming an educator

Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000, in Barmby, 2006) classify the reasons that educators enter the teaching profession as altruistic, intrinsic and extrinsic. Altruistic reasons deal with seeing teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job, a desire to help children succeed and a desire to help society improve. Intrinsic reasons are those concerned with the job itself, for example, the activity of teaching children, and an interest in the subject matter thus allowing them to use their knowledge and expertise (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000, in Barmby, 2006). Finally, extrinsic reasons cover issues such as long holidays, levels of pay and status.

The main reasons for choosing the teaching profession are altruistic and intrinsic, especially among individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000, in Barmby,

2006). A study by Carrington and Tomlin (2000, in Barmby, 2006) which surveyed 289 PGCE students from ethnic minority backgrounds discovered that they tended to stress the importance of intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors when describing their reasons for wanting to teach. In addition, the students also emphasized social reasons for teaching, such as that they like working with children. However, although intrinsic and altruistic reasons were given by teachers for going into teaching, issues such as workload and pupil behaviour were found to be the most important reasons for teachers leaving the teaching profession and/or stopping individuals from entering the profession (Kyriacou & Coultard, 2000, in Barmby, 2006). Therefore, it is important to understand how these factors impact on the stress experienced by teachers.

2.3 Demand for educators

Peltzer et al. (2005) state that teacher numbers in South Africa showed a decline between 1997 and 2003. They noted that the number of public educators declined from 386 735 in 1997/8 to 366 320 in 2002/3 (Peltzer et al., 2005). This large decline took place mainly during the period of changes in the educational policy. Curriculum 2005, with its outcomes-based education (OBE) and continuous assessment of learners' performance, has created more responsibilities for educators (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002). Educators experience high levels of stress due to these changes in the education profession as they constantly have to upgrade their learning and skills to cope with these changes as well as the heavier workload that they create (Van Zyl & Petersen, 1999).

Two-thirds of educators are women and they dominate the primary teaching force in every province (Peltzer et al., 2005). It is therefore imperative that we protect this essential resource, as these female educators are potential contributors to positive change in this country. The school environment cannot be separated from society as society's power structures also affect the school environment (De Lyon & Mignimolo, 1989). Societal issues such as sexism, racism and class systems are important factors influencing the way women are viewed and treated and the way that they behave towards others (De Lyon & Mignimolo, 1989). This is due to the fact that, traditionally, women have been severely disempowered and marginalized, especially in areas such as the work force where social phenomena such as the glass ceiling exist. In addition, due

to their disempowerment, women have been particularly vulnerable to violence, crime, poverty, HIV infection and so forth. It is stressors such as these and the impact that they have on the individual female educator and her working environment which may lead to burnout. The inability to separate the demands of one's professional life from the demands of one's personal life may also lead to burnout which is caused by stress (Holmes, 2005). It is essential that an understanding of the stressors that female educators experience needs to be developed.

2.4 Stress

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) (n.d., in Cosgrove, 2000, p. 28) offers a dynamic definition of stress as "the physical, emotional and mental strain resulting from the mismatch between an individual and his or her environment which results from a three-way relationship between demands on a person, that person's feelings about those demands and their inability to cope with those demands." Smith, Jaffe-Gill and Seagal (2010) believe that long-term exposure to stress can lead to health problems such as heart disease, infertility, anxiety, depression and accelerate the aging process.

2.5 Educator Stress

Educators often experience higher levels of stress compared to the other professions (Antoniou, Poluchroni & Vlachakis, 2006; De Heus & Diekstra, 1999; Holmes, 2005; Kyriacou, 1989). Stressors in teaching arise from within the school as organizational stressors, or from outside the school setting such as from the educators' and learners' home contexts. Organizational stressors include things such as time pressures to complete the large amount of administrative work that the Department of Education requires from educators. This often creates school-home links of pressure for the educator as she often will have to take schoolwork home in order to complete the tasks required of her (Thomas, Clarke & Lavery, 2003). This in turn may cause her to neglect the needs of her family. Student relationship pressure (relating to poor discipline) found within the school community is also a stressor (Moodley, 2001).

Kaiser and Polczynski (1982) write that educators have to cope with numerous social and environmental factors that impact on their lives. They believe that the ability to cope is becoming increasingly difficult as stress affects the physical and mental well-being of the educator. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002) state that the work of the educator is multidimensional and the task of juggling all these roles can lead to experiences of stress. This is especially true in the case of female educators as they have to balance the demands of their family and their career. De Heus and Diekstra (1999), as well as Holmes (2005) and Kyriacou (1989), list issues such as work load, lack of autonomy, disrespect, inattentiveness, lack of support from colleagues and management, and loss of status of the teaching profession, as a few of the stressors that educators have to deal with and the reasons why teachers appear to burn out more easily than other social professions.

A study by Dunham (1992) has found that reactions to stress can be placed within a framework of successive stages that educators pass through as their work and home pressures become more severe. In the first stage, educators develop new coping techniques or use the old ones. If these coping mechanisms are unable to reduce stress, emotional and mental reactions such as frustration, anger, anxiety, fear, poor concentration and memory loss occur (Dunham, 1992). Later, physical reactions such as heart attacks, high blood pressure, diabetes, ulcers and skin problems develop due to extensive exposure to stress (Dunham, 1992; Peltzer et al., 2005). A study for the Educational Labour Relations Council (ELRC) found that in 2002, 10.6% of educators had been hospitalized in the previous twelve months, compared to 7% of the general population (Peltzer et al, 2005). The Sheffield University conducted a study whose results showed that 58.5% of teachers in that area had sought medical help for stress-related illness (Cosgrove, 2000). Continued exposure to stress without an increase in coping mechanisms causes fatigue, exhaustion, loss of sleep and burnout (Dunham, 1992; Gaziel, 1993).

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) found a positive association between stress and the intention to leave one's job. At the school level, the impact of stress can be seen in the large number of days that a teacher is absent and a rise in the number of early retirements (Gaziel, 1993). The absence of teachers from work is of great concern as it affects the quality of teaching that the learners experience. In addition, teachers who have to go on stress leave are replaced with substitute

teachers, thus potentially decreasing the quality of the education learners receive and increasing the cost to the school through having to pay an extra salary.

The suffering that educators experience due to stress is thus also felt by the learners, as these teachers are unable to give of their best and therefore are doing the learners a disservice by delivering poor quality lessons through no fault of their own (Cosgrove, 2000). Clark (1985, in Gaziel, 1993, p. 67) highlights the impact of educator stress on the learners when he writes, “[t]hese stress-related symptoms often lead students to question whether teachers are able to provide quality instruction or are merely going through the motions with minimal enthusiasm.” In addition, Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) found a negative association between stress and job satisfaction. Educators who are burnt out were found to undermine their pupils’ capabilities, to reduce interaction with them to as little as possible, to be less enthusiastic about positively influencing their lives and to withhold praise (Beer & Beer, 1992, in Moodley, 2001).

Two other factors related to stress are age and marital status. Research findings in the UK, Canada, the Netherlands, Singapore and Finland suggest that age is a determining factor in educators’ experience of workplace stress, with teachers forty-five years old and older more susceptible to negative stress (Holmes, 2005). This suggests that there are cumulative effects of stress in educators’ lives. In addition, having a partner may also increase the experience of stress as one has to cope with two sources of stress, work and home (Holmes, 2005).

High levels of stress often lead to burnout. Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996, in Zalaquett & Wood, 1997, p.192) state that, “[b]urnout is a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity.” It is a form of strain that occurs after the individual experiencing the stress has attempted various coping mechanisms. The key aspects of burnout are emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Maslach and Jackson (1985, p. 837) describe emotional exhaustion as, “a depletion of one’s emotional resources and feelings that one has nothing left to give to others at a psychological level.” Depersonalization may be indicated by the individual’s development of negative and unfeeling attitudes towards the people that he or she works with (Maslach & Jackson, 1985). The potential consequences of burnout are lowered job performance and output, increases in stress hormone, coronary heart disease, circulatory

heart disease, circulatory problems and mental health issues such as depression (Maslach & Jackson, 1985).

Burnout has often been associated with educators' personal characteristics and with their work environments. Studies have shown that worldwide, in traditional or rural areas as well as urban areas, women are twice as likely as men to be affected by depression caused by burnout (Cosgrove, 2000). Differences between male and female educators' experiences of burnout have also been discovered by Burke, Greenglass and Schwarzer (1996) who state that men score higher than women on the depersonalization and emotional exhaustion subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). While men cited red tape and self-doubts as predictors of burnout, disruptive students were cited by women (Burke et al., 1996). Anatoniou et al. (2006) agree and state that female educators rate the following as their greatest stressors: workload, students' lack of progress, emotional exhaustion and their interactions with learners and colleagues.

These differences may be due to the different social roles that men and women play. It is for this reason that this research study chose female educators as its sample group in order to discover in more depth what they experience as stressful and the effect that these stressors have on their perceptions of their occupation. In addition, female educators form the largest sector of the education work force. It is therefore important to understand the stressors that they face in order to protect what are valuable assets to South African society. In order to do this one needs to understand the educator in her context; this can be achieved by using the principles behind Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory of development.

2.6 Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory of development and the teacher in context

Sogoni (1997) states that dimensions of social life are closely interwoven with the result that social life interactional problems in one area impact on other areas. This concept is found in Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory which examines the network of interactions and interdependencies among people, institutions, and cultural constructs to which a developing person must adapt psychologically (Gray, 1999). One cannot understand the development of an individual by extracting him or her from the context in which he or she exists. Rather, the individual's development may only be truly understood by examining the entire ecological

system within which he or she exists and wherein his or her growth occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

This theory is vital in understanding the stress of the educator and has implications for the field of education as a whole. This is largely due to the fact that schools and educators have had to act as support systems to learners who face extreme social challenges which have the potential to act as barriers to learning (Henderson, 1995). The consequences or symptoms of the learners' social context or microsystem often present themselves at school where they become a potential stressor for the educator. In particular, "[t]hese deficiencies show themselves especially in schools as antisocial-behavior, lack of self-discipline, and the inability to provide self-direction" (Addison, 1992, p. 18).

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development is governed by two propositions which describe the properties of the model. The first proposition states that human development takes place through the interaction of the individual and his or her environment and vice versa (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Bronfenbrenner (1994, p. 38) states that,

"in its early phases, and to a great extent throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment."

These are known as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). It is not enough, however, that interaction occurs; in order for development to happen, the interaction has to be repeated often and over a long period of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Proposition two deals with the issue of the varying nature of the proximal forces that elicit change in the individual. Proximal processes differ or change due to a combined influence of "the characteristics of the developing person; of the environment – both immediate and remote - in which the processes are taking place; and the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 38). Thus individual human development cannot simply be explained by studying the individual in an environment with which he or she is interacting regularly and over a long period of time as even the types of interaction or proximal

processes differ depending on the type of characteristics of the individual and his or her environment.

The ecosystem of which Bronfenbrenner (1994) writes is not a single, simple system, but it includes five different subsystems that are interactive and nested within each other. Thus, for example, the local community is placed within the wider community, which in turn is placed within the entire social system. Bronfenbrenner (1994) has labeled these subsystems the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Each of these systems has different characteristics which impact on characteristics of the other systems. Thus human development is a complex process that is supported and guided by the interaction of these subsystems and which may only be understood by taking a holistic view of an individual or group.

The first of Bronfenbrenner's ecological levels is the microsystem which is the layer closest to the individual. This level involves the intimate social aspects of the individual that may influence his or her interaction with the environment. There is a bidirectional relationship between the individual and his or her family, school, peer groups and workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The microsystem is also the subsystem in which proximal processes are working to support and enable development to occur.

The next subsystem which exerts an influence on the individual is the mesosystem, which consists of interactions between different microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). It includes the relationships between, for example, an individual's church and neighbourhood, school and workplace, and home and school. Thus, "[t]he mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). Bronfenbrenner (1986, in Gray, 1999) believes, for example, that the relationship between a child's home and school is as important to a child's development as the influence that these institutions they have as separate entities. A child's ability to learn at school depends not only on how he or she is taught there, but also on his or parents' attitudes about the school, which also influences the child's attitudes about the school. Therefore parental support may be an essential component in the alleviation of some of the educators' stress.

The third subsystem is the exosystem which consists of contexts that affect the child but with which he or she is not in direct contact. Therefore, the term refers to a context which does not contain the individual, although it indirectly influences processes in the individual's immediate context (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The relationship between a woman and her spouse's workplace is an example.

The next level is the macrosystem and this consists of the entire set of beliefs, values, customs, institutions and accepted ways of behaving that characterize the historically connected group of people that includes the individual and his or her family (Gray, 1999). Apartheid can be seen as an important example of the macrosystem that dictated people's beliefs, behaviour and values. Other examples of the macrosystem are the ideology of education upheld by the school or the schools' attitudes towards corporal punishment.

The final system in the theory is the chronosystem which refers to how the individual and his or her context have changed over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This system considers changes over time in terms of factors such as socioeconomic status, employment and family structures as well as developmental changes such as reaching puberty (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Thus, as illustrated by Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory, the teacher is placed within a system with many intersecting and continuously developing levels (Donald et al. 2002). It is therefore crucial to examine these systemic factors in the South African context as issues such as the race, social class, gender, crime, poverty and HIV/AIDS, amongst others, impact on educators in a manner which may influence how they perceive their job and how they position themselves in the classroom. An understanding of the educator's experience cannot be understood by removing her from her context.

2.7 The South African context

Human behaviour occurs within a specific context. It is therefore important to outline some of the factors in the educators' contexts that may contribute to their experience of stress and thus their attitudes towards education. There are multiple factors within the South African context

which contribute to educator stress. Examples of these are the effects of the apartheid regime, poverty, HIV/AIDS, violence, vulnerable children and the changes in educational policy.

2.7.1 Apartheid

The philosophy of apartheid, which espoused the superiority of the 'whites' and the inferiority of people of colour, ensured that black Africans were only able to get access to inferior resources and limited academic and occupational opportunities (Harber, 1989). Alexander (1989, p. 2), writing during the apartheid era, stated that:

[I]n South Africa, both class and racial divisions and discrimination have been structured into the educational system at all levels for purposes of maintaining the socio-economic and socio-political domination of the white minority in general and of the white ruling class in particular.

This has led to poverty, low socio-economic status, crime, educated but unemployed black matriculants and other negative consequences of apartheid (Dodson, 2002). The level of crime, as an example, is so high in South Africa that it leads to the emigration of South African professionals of all ethnic groups (Dodson, 2002).

Apartheid resulted in racial segregation and inequality, especially in regards to education. Results of a study conducted by the Centre for Community Organisation, Research and Development (CORD) (1991) stated that the quality of education differed greatly between the eighteen education departments; for example, the number of primary and secondary pupils per teacher varied between fourteen and forty-nine and the total expenditure per pupil was more than eight times higher in certain departments than in others. Although Africans comprised over seventy percent of the population, they received less than twenty-two percent of the total expenditure on education (Bundy, 1986, in Harber, 1989).

Although apartheid as a formal system ended in 1994, its effects continue to be experienced. The present government has tried to address these and other problems caused by the apartheid regime; however, the effects of apartheid are still felt today. Apartheid may be primarily responsible for the poverty that people of colour experience today. Policies such as the Group Areas Act made it illegal for people of colour to live in any area other than those classified by

the government as 'black' areas (Dovey & Mason, 1984, in Harber, 1989). These were usually areas with poor quality housing, crime, limited resources and other social problems. The incidence of poverty among black and coloured individuals remains incredibly higher than that among whites (Armstrong et al., 2010). This is despite the many policies and initiatives put in place by government and non-governmental organisations. Recent statistics have shown that only 14% of blacks and 17% of coloureds aged over twenty years old have a high school or higher education qualification (South Africa Info Reporter, 2006). This is in comparison to the 65% of white people in the same age group and 40% of Indians who have achieved these levels of education (South African Info Reporter, 2006).

2.7.2 Poverty

Poverty is widespread in South Africa, with 47.1% of people in the country not earning enough money in 2007 to provide themselves and their families with essential food and non-food items (Armstrong, Lekezwa & Siebrits, 2010). Poverty-stricken people are more susceptible to health and safety risks which are often due to the inadequate facilities and resources that they experience (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2001). KwaZulu-Natal is one of the three provinces with the highest rates of poverty (Armstrong et al., 2010).

Colonialism and apartheid and the power relationships entrenched in each of these systems have ensured that certain members of South African society were systematically disadvantaged while some were advantaged. The legacy of this practice continues today. Poverty is to a large degree a consequence of apartheid policies as resources were allocated on a sliding scale according to race groups, with people of colour especially receiving the least resources. In the period between 2005 and 2006, the incidence of poverty among black and coloured individuals remained higher than that of whites (Armstrong et al., 2010). In 2005, 68% of the black population was living in poverty, while poverty was virtually non-existent for whites (Hoogeveen & Ozler, 2005). This is despite the country achieving democracy in 1994. People of colour were also given poorer quality education and thus they did not develop the skills needed to obtain higher paying employment. Thus they often did not have the resources to complete schooling and were therefore denied access to tertiary education. In addition, there are also inequalities in the distribution of other resources such as access to safe water, sanitization and housing (Hoogeveen & Ozler, 2005).

It is therefore not surprising that poverty is often inherited from the previous generation. The endurance of poverty from one generation to another is a result of many factors. One of these is that poverty-stricken people often do not have enough extra money to raise themselves above the poverty line (Frye & NALEDI, 2006). Poverty-stricken people often do not have access to the resources needed to move out of a state of poverty (Armstrong, 2010). In addition, they often do not want to take risks with their existing assets in order to gain more money or assets for fear that they may lose them all (Frye & NALEDI, 2006).

Another factor to consider is that people living in poverty usually do not have insurance to protect them should any unfortunate events occur (Frye & NALEDI, 2006). They therefore tend to cope with these events by selling off all their assets, eating less food and taking their children out of school (Frye & NALEDI, 2006). However, these coping mechanisms have potentially dire consequences. Selling off their assets ensures that they remain impoverished, while reducing their food intake results in health and nutritional problems that may reduce their ability to work well. Taking their children out of school ensures that the poverty cycle is continued as the children lose their access to education which results in them not having the skills that make them employable, which leads to unemployment and thus to poverty.

One of the major causes and markers of poverty is unemployment. There are two definitions of unemployment, the narrow definition and the broad definition and the statistics of unemployment differs depending on which definition is used. Stats SA uses the narrow definition of unemployment. Kingdon and Knight (2001, p. 3) give the following definition of the two types of unemployment:

The narrow definition counts as unemployed all jobless persons who want work and searched for work in the recent past (typically, in the four weeks prior to the survey visit). These people are referred to in this paper as the 'searching unemployed'. The broad definition drops the search criterion and counts as unemployed all jobless persons who report that they want work even if they did not search in the reference period.

Frye and NALEDI (2006) agree with Kingdon and Knight (2001) concerning the narrow definition, but differ somewhat in the broad definition in that they state that all those persons who have not sought work in the last four weeks are not considered unemployed, neither are they

thought to be employed; rather, they are referred to as 'discouraged work seekers'. In 2004, the Labour Force Survey found that 41% of working age South African people were unemployed according to the broad definition of unemployment and 26.2% according to the narrow definition.

Statistics South Africa (2010) reported that four point three million people in South Africa are unemployed. Bhorat's (2010) study of unemployment in South Africa discovered that race, gender, age, location and schooling were the primary factors which defined and explained broad and narrow unemployment rates of the country. Thus, African, female individuals aged approximately between fifteen and twenty four, with an education level only up to grade eleven, were at greater risk of being unemployed. The rates of unemployment are unequally distributed with young, uneducated black Africans living in the homelands and remote areas as the group most likely to be unemployed (Kingdon & Knight, 2001). A person who is still living in a former homeland is 18% more likely to be unemployed compared to people in any other location and rural unemployment rates are higher than urban unemployment rates (Kingdon & Knight, 2001). Teal (2003) wrote that previous studies had attributed large amounts of unemployment among people of colour to culturally possessed characteristics which caused them to be less productive than whites. Teal's (2003) research discovered that this is not altogether true and that the discrepancy in unemployment rates among the various racial groups may be due to factors such as employer discrimination or the quality of education received. Currently, the high school pass rate for African high school learners is approximately forty-eight percent (Bhorat, 2010). This is in comparison to the approximately ninety-five percent pass rate experienced by white learners (Bhorat, 2010). The pupil-teacher ratio for African schools is approximately thirty-one is to one as opposed to the approximately twenty-three is to one of white schools. Even when these inequalities change, it takes an exceptionally long time for disadvantaged, impoverished groups in a society to reach the economic level of other more advantaged societal groups.

The government and its policies have not been able to help much and although the Unemployment Insurance Fund is available to people who have worked in the formal sector and who have paid their money towards the unemployment fund, the funding is not adequate nor nearly enough to help sufficiently with the poverty issue. As noted above, unemployment insurance is only available to those who have worked in the formal sector and therefore those

unemployed people who have worked in the informal sector (of forms the majority of the South African labour force) do not have access to this fund (Frye & NALEDI, 2006). In addition, the unemployment insurance only provides six months of assistance and people are often unemployed for up to three years (Frye & NALEDI, 2006). Grants and other government assistance are only available to children and pensioners and not to working age people as it is assumed that they will be able to provide for themselves through employment (Frye & NALEDI, 2006). Hoogeveen and Ozler (2005) believe that the government needs to distribute the country's incomes more evenly among people in order for significant progress against poverty to occur. They believe that this is essential in ensuring the growth of the country.

Poverty-stricken people are more susceptible to health and safety risks and this is often due to the inadequate facilities and resources that they have (SAIRR, 2001). Walker et al. (2007, p. 145) concurred and believe that children are especially at risk as "[p]overty and associated health, nutrition, and social factors prevent at least 200 million children in developing countries from attaining their developmental potential." Women experience a higher rate of poverty than men, with 45% of female-headed households living below the 'lower-bound' poverty line, compared to only 25% of male-headed households (Armstrong et al., 2010).

Education has been shown to help alleviate poverty and even rescue people out of poverty. People with low levels of education are more likely to be poor than those with a high level of education. According to Armstrong et al. (2010), poverty affected 68% of people who had no schooling and 59% of individuals who had not completed primary schooling. This is in stark comparison to those people who achieved a post-matric certificate and whose poverty rate was at 4.6% (Armstrong et al., 2010). In addition, individuals who achieved a degree or diploma experienced a poverty rate of just 1.2% (Armstrong et al., 2010). Kingdon and Knight's (2001) research uncovered remarkable findings concerning education's ability to combat unemployment and thus indirectly poverty. In their study they state that, "[p]ossession of higher education reduces an African's predicted probability of unemployment to nil. This is also true to a large extent for the coloured group" (Kingdon & Knight, 2001, p. 130). However, they do caution that providing education is not enough and that in order for there to be a decrease in unemployment rates, more jobs have to be made available.

2.7.3 HIV/AIDS

A factor contributing to educator stress is the impact of HIV/AIDS on the classroom and the new roles that educators are suddenly called on to adopt in response to this pandemic. This is especially true of educators from previously disadvantaged and disadvantaged schools as poverty and HIV/AIDS are often closely connected.

HIV/AIDS is a disease that has and will claim millions of lives and affects South Africa on an economic and a social level. In 2009, there were an estimated 5.6 million people living with HIV and Aids in South Africa (AVERT, 2010). The number of people who died of the disease in that same year was 310 000 (AVERT, 2010). Coombe (2000) believes that the rapid spread of the disease is substantially attributable to the legacy of apartheid, the migrant labour system, the rapid spread of the disease to new communities due to the good transport infrastructure and high mobility as well as the disruption of family and communal life. High levels of poverty and income inequality, high levels of STDs, the low status of women, social norms which accept or encourage many sexual partners and the resistance to using condoms, all assist in the spread of this disease. This is apart from the decision between two consenting autonomous sexual partners to engage in risky behavior.

Educators are deeply affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic as they not only have to deal with the consequences of the disease in their schools, but many of them are themselves HIV positive or living with AIDS. In 2004, 4000 South African teachers died of AIDS (Canadian International Developmental Agency, 2007). HIV/AIDS is a major influence on educator attrition or loss of educators from the field of education often because they are too ill to continue to teach. This may have an impact on learners and schools, as ill-health may have an effect on educators' job performance.

Women experience the greatest prevalence of the disease with one in three women aged 25-29 infected (AVERT, 2010). The government believes that women are particularly affected by the discrimination that comes with the disease and states that they are oppressed in terms of race, class and gender (Pembrey, 2007). They are also more at risk for infection due to physiological, social, and economic factors (Canadian International Developmental Agency, 2007). This may

be due to the fact that, traditionally, women have been disempowered and were believed to be inferior in terms of ability and social standing. The disempowerment of women puts them at greater risk of contracting the disease as they do not feel confident enough to negotiate safer sex and condom use with their partners (AVERT, 2010). Research has shown that women who have been physically and sexually assaulted and who are in relationships with controlling men, are at greater risk of becoming infected with HIV (AVERT, 2010). As women form the largest group of educators in South Africa, this could potentially be a major concern for the field of education. Due to the other social challenges facing learners, it is important that they have access to educators who can act as a support base that may increase the learners' resilience.

In addition, educators often have to act as counsellors to learners affected by HIV/AIDS, as there are very few formally trained counsellors (Bhana, Morrell, Epstein & Moletsane, 2006).

Although the task of providing support to learners is an exceptionally important job, it is often unacknowledged and unrewarded as it is not part of the curriculum (Bhana et al., 2006). This exacerbates the emotional toll that educators already experience when teaching learners affected by AIDS.

Poverty is a major contributor to HIV/AIDS as some schools will be more affected by this pandemic depending on their location and the resources that they have access to. Rural areas and deprived inner city areas experience high levels of poverty. These areas are dealing with situations in which more than 30% of African households depend on river water, 16% have no toilet facilities, and 40% of households are women headed where the poverty rate is higher than that of male-headed households (Coombe, 2000). Learners from areas where there is a lack of resources are often more adversely affected by HIV/AIDS as their family circumstances are likely to be more desperate and the schools that they attend are likely to have fewer resources for their care and development (Bhana et al., 2006). Elite schools are better positioned to deal with this pandemic as their learners have family resources available to provide access to psychological support, drugs, nutrition, and so forth (Bhana et al., 2006). In poverty-stricken areas, however, this is not the case and learners often have to rely on their educators for support. In addition, 1.2 million South African children were orphaned by AIDS in 2005 (Pembrey, 2007). These children are more likely to face poverty, poor health and a lack of access to

education (Pembrey, 2007) and they are more likely to depend on the additional care and support provided by kind-hearted educators.

Due to the fact that the most prevalent HIV and AIDS rates are found in individuals between the ages of 15 and 45, many children become orphaned and often have to take responsibilities for their families whilst they themselves are still children (AVERT, 2010). Many children are then forced to leave school to provide financially for their siblings or are frequently absent from school due to having to attend to family responsibilities. The loss of a parent due to the disease does not simply impact on the child emotionally; often they experience secondary trauma due to the loss of a primary breadwinner, having to move out of their familiar neighbourhood or being separated from their siblings (AVERT, 2010). The death of one or both of a child's parents could result in the added trauma of severe financial hardship with 80% of children orphaned by AIDS losing more than half of their per capita income (AVERT, 2010).

2.7.4 Violence

Apartheid has encouraged a culture of violence, not only in society in general but also in schools as these were often sites of protests against the apartheid regime (Van der Riet, Hough & Killian, 2005). In addition, the transition of South Africa from a racist, apartheid-ruled country to a democratic one was riddled with violence. There are many potential consequences of socio-cultural factors like a long history of violence, especially in terms of the effect that this has on society.

One of the societal problems which may be influenced by the legacy of the apartheid regime is violence against women. Four in ten men in South Africa reported to have been physically violent towards an intimate partner and a quarter of men reported to having raped a women (AVERT, 2010). These issues point to the disempowerment of women which may have implications for them in other spheres of their lives, such as their careers. Higson-Smith (1998) proposes a model that is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1994) social ecology model of development and that may be used to understand violent contexts and the effect that they have on individuals and communities.

Higson-Smith (1998) states that people usually view society on two broad levels. These are a macrolevel which deals with the larger social issues (such as lack of housing, food, skilled

teachers, and so on) and a microlevel which deals with individual people and their problems (for example, counseling services that help people deal with issues such as loss, rape, trauma and so on) (Higson-Smith, 1998). Higson-Smith's ecosystemic model is based on Bronfenbrenner's social ecology model of development (1994). The individual is found at the innermost level of the model, followed by the group, then the community and finally society (Higson-Smith, 1998). Higson-Smith (1998) believes that in order for development to occur, emphasis has to be placed at the level of the individual or microlevel rather than on a broad-scale development project found at the macrolevel of society. Thus, in order to improve the standard of education, it is important that research and possible interventions are aimed at understanding female educators' individual experiences of stress and how this affects their occupational perceptions.

Violence affects each level in the ecosystemic model in different ways and with various knock-on effects (Higson-Smith, 1998). An example of a knock-on effect is the lack of trust that exists between members of a community in a violent context where everyone is a potential enemy. This lack of trust becomes a learned pattern of interaction and behaviour long after the violence has ended (Higson-Smith, 1998). Higson-Smith (1998) believes that violence affects the four levels of the eco-systemic model by the processes of fragmenting and disempowering. In the educational context, an example of fragmentation would be the reduction of caring behaviour of educators towards learners and an example of disempowerment would be the loss of resources within a community such as sports and recreational facilities. It is essential to sever these processes at all four levels in order to undo the effects of violence on society and communities. Development interventions should therefore aim at linking (which is the opposite of fragmentation) and empowering (which is the opposite of disempowerment) (Higson-Smith, 1998).

South African children who have been exposed to violence often present with mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and problems of attention as well as aggressive behaviour (Walker et al., 2007). These negative effects of violence are exacerbated in situations where family cohesion or the mental health of a child's primary caregivers is impaired (Walker et al., 2007). Walker et al. (2007) have conducted studies with children in Bosnia and Eritrea whose cognitive and social-emotional competence has been impaired due to exposure to violence and found that these competencies increase with the provision of structured educational

experiences. Thus, education can be seen as not only important in the upliftment of people out of poverty, but also as a means to decrease the effects of violence on the cognitive and social-emotional competence of children. Therefore it is important that educators, who are the tools through which knowledge is imparted, are mentally and physically healthy so that they may effectively carry out their roles in order to bring about change and development in people's lives. Stress therefore is a major threat which threatens to ruin the abilities of educators as tools for knowledge dissemination and by extension a threat to the eradication of poverty and the neutralization of the effects of violence.

2.7.5 Changes in educational policy

Outcomes Based Education (OBE) was a new curriculum that was slowly introduced to the South African context as a joint initiative of the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour (Eshun-Wilson, 2001). The motivation for changing the education system was to bring South African education in line with international standards and to empower people to effectively and actively participate in all the processes of a democratic society (Eshun-Wilson, 2001). The government hoped that OBE would be able to address the disparities in the quality of education received between black and white learners in South Africa. In addition, the government sought to help learners develop better creative problem solving and critical thinking skills (Verity, 2010). However, there were many problems with the implementation of this new education policy and both educators and learners have struggled with the new system. Some educators have felt that they were not adequately informed of the appropriate changes that they had to make to their class in order for them to be OBE compliant (Eshun-Wilson, 2001).

The initial implementation of OBE resulted in very high failure rates due to unfamiliarity with the new education system. These failure rates continued with more pressure placed on educators to produce higher pass rates (Eshun-Wilson, 2001). This pressure adds further stress on educators. OBE was subsequently ended as it was not able to work effectively in a South African context.

2.8 Vulnerable children

Children are made vulnerable by the risk factors that they experience in their contexts. These risks, including those mentioned in the previous section, increase when their families are poor, when children lack access to basic services or are stigmatized within their communities (UNICEF, 2007). Risk factors include national conflict, hunger, ill health, violence, neglect, loss of access to education and to opportunities to play (Save the Children, 2007). In addition, many children are affected by HIV/AIDS and have sick parents that they have to care for (Save the Children, 2007). In 2005, the number of orphaned children in sub-Saharan Africa reached 48.3 million (Save the Children, 2007). KwaZulu-Natal in particular is characterized by high rates of violence, crime, poverty, HIV/AIDS, loss of parents and low quality education (HSRC, 2007). These issues render local children vulnerable and it is often left to the educator to assist these vulnerable learners. These demands put added stress on educators as their role becomes more complex and diverse. However, many educators are leaving the educational workforce, as they are unable to cope with the stress of the multidimensional roles that they are required to adopt.

2.9 Conclusion

South Africa has 12.3 million learners, 386 600 educators (two-thirds of whom are women) and 26 292 schools (South Africa Info Reporter, 2006). The government increased its expenditure in basic education from approximately one billion rand for the period 2006 to 2007, to approximately four billion rand for the 2009 to 2010 period (The National Treasury, 2010). The social responsibility programme, which aims to develop policies and programmes to increase the participation of learners in schools and improve the quality of learning, makes up approximately sixty-three percent of total governmental expenditure (The National Treasury, 2010). Therefore, it can be seen that education is an exceptionally important issue in South Africa, one that a large amount of money is allocated to. Education is important in terms of its costs and because of its potential to achieve social change. When educators leave the profession, are frequently absent or take long leave of absences due to stress and other psychosocial factors, a great deal of financial investment is lost. In addition, learners from unstable backgrounds are without the person who may act as a primary source of support. Educator attrition is also a cause for concern as

education often acts as a means to increase the resilience of vulnerable children and provide them with a means to alleviate their poverty. Learners may be in danger of receiving poor, disjointed education or none at all if educators continue to leave the profession.

It is therefore important to examine the impact of psychosocial issues on educators' perceptions of their jobs, especially in Kwazulu-Natal where schools are generally not as well resourced as the other provinces. It is also important to focus on female educators as they form the largest group in the education workforce. Studying educators working within government-funded schools is also important because government-funded schools have an educator/learner ratio of 32.6:1 whereas private schools have an educator/learner ratio of about 17.5: 1 (South Africa Info Reporter, 2006). Thus working in a government-funded school is likely to lead to higher levels of stress.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Aims and rationale

As suggested by the literature, various contextual, psychosocial factors are likely to cause stress for female educators. The aim of this research was to explore the effect these psychosocial stressors might have on the educators' perceptions of their work.

This study has implications not only for the educators but also for the learners whom they teach. Understanding educator stress can assist in setting up systems to alleviate stress, which in turn will assist educators in being more available for learners. It is recognized that stress often results in depersonalization thus negatively affecting the quality of instruction. Knowledge discovered regarding stress may help reduce stress and increase quality of instruction as well as improve teacher retention

Female educators have possible additional stressors due to the societal roles which they adopt such as wife, mother, homemaker and so forth. Thus, not only do they have potential work stressors, they also have stressors from responsibilities from home. It was therefore deemed important that female educators should be the focus of this study.

3.2 Research design

The research project used a qualitative research design as it ensured that the subjective accounts and meanings of the participants are prioritized (Van der Riet et al., 2005). The goal of qualitative research is to attempt to, as accurately as possible, present the perspectives of the people whom it is studying (Bryman, 1988).

Babbie and Mouton (2005) state that qualitative research tries to describe and understand human behaviour. Qualitative research uses various methods, including semi-structured interviews, in order to gain insight into the experiences of individuals. It aims to develop an understanding of

the research participant's "attitudes, behaviours, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyle" (Patton, 2005, p.1). That is, it tries to empathise with the participant while still trying to retain objectivity in order to accurately understand the ways in which the participant tries to make sense of his or her world. Thus, "such an approach clearly involves a preparedness to empathize (though not necessarily to sympathize) with those being studied, but it also entails a capacity to penetrate the frames of meaning with which they operate" (Bryman, 1988, p. 61).

Qualitative research is often conducted in the actual context of the participants. There is a focus on the process rather than the outcome of the research. Qualitative research emphasizes the subjective experiences and perspectives of the participants. It aims for in-depth, thick and rich descriptions as well as understanding of the participant's behaviour and events (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). In this type of research, the researcher is not separated from the study but is seen as the main instrument in the research process (Babbie & Mouton, 2005).

3.3 Sampling

This project used purposive sampling as it targeted female educators from a several contexts. Purposive or judgment sampling is the most commonly used form of sampling in qualitative research and can be described as occurring when "the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question" (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). This study asked female educators within the participating schools to volunteer their services to the research. It thus also used convenience sampling, as it was dependent on volunteers. Convenience sampling entails using the most accessible participants in order to save the researcher resources such as time, money and effort (Marshall, 1996). The study strategy was to sample educators from a variety of contexts. Although the results are not generalizable because of the small size of the sample, this strategy enabled a range of views and experiences to emerge.

The research study sampled ten female educators from two primary schools and one mixed primary and high school located in the Pietermaritzburg area. Learners who attended these schools included those who lived in previously and currently disadvantaged areas. It is believed that people within disadvantaged communities face additional and specific stressors that are

different from more advantaged areas. The two primary schools (Schools A and C) were government schools and the mixed school (School B) was a private school as the study wished to explore whether there were any differences between types of school in terms of educators' experiences of their work stress.

The educators sampled were of varying ages ranging from thirty years old to sixty-five years old and from varying socio-economic, cultural and historical backgrounds. The three participants from School A were all coloured. All the six participants from School B were white women. There were originally two participants from School C, but one of the participants asked to be excused due to work commitments. The remaining participant from School C was coloured. The grades that the educators taught also varied. The educators also varied in terms of the number of years that they had been in the teaching profession as well as in terms of the kinds of schools where they have taught.

3.4 Data collection

Access to the participants was gained directly, either through scheduled interviews with the principals or through the faxing or emailing of a letter which detailed the purpose, the requirements and the ethical implications of the research study (Appendix A). Five different schools were approached. These included one high school, one combined high and primary and three primary schools. Only three of the schools approached agreed to become part of the study. One of the schools were struggling with management issues due to the unexpected death of their principal and so were unable to help, while the other school did not return the researcher's calls to schedule a meeting and so did not become part of the study.

Qualitative interviews were used in this research study and are open in nature in that the researcher does not enter the interview process with any fixed, preconceived ideas (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Rather, the interviewer, although he or she may have a set of general ideas or hypotheses about the nature of the participants' experiences, allows them to speak freely so that the process can determine the content of the data collected. Babbie and Mouton (2005, p. 289) believe that "a qualitative interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must

be asked in particular words and in a particular order.” This is helpful in gaining information that is a true representation of a participant’s experiences and therefore the researcher does not adhere too strictly to the list of questions which he or she may have prepared.

Interviews are also helpful to obtain information that may be experienced as personal or sensitive for the participant, such as issues around family or relational stress. Another advantage of using interviews containing open-ended questions is that they produce participant responses which are meaningful to the participant, culturally relevant, rich and explanatory and may provide the researcher with responses which he or she may not have anticipated (Family Health International, n.d.).

The aim of this study was to inductively explore whether female educators in these schools experienced stress and, if so, what the nature of the stressors was and what the participants’ individual experiences were of that stress. Therefore, the most appropriate methodology was to use semi-structured interviews. Individual semi-structured interviews were held with the educators as a means to obtain data which were an accurate reflection of the participants’ subjective experiences. They were also used as an opportunity to obtain contextual information.

In order to gather information around the educators’ experiences with stress and how stress relates to their attitudes towards their careers, a list of questions was established as an aid for the researcher in forming an understanding of the participants’ individual experiences. The questions asked in the semi-structured interview included:

- What do you enjoy about teaching?
- What supports you in teaching?
- Do your current experiences of teaching match your previous expectations of teaching (for example while studying)?
- How have your perceptions of education changed over the years?
- Do female educators in this school experience stress or even burnout?
- What makes teaching stressful for you?
- What are the contributors of stress in your life in general?
- How do you experience stress? Do you feel it physically, mentally or emotionally?
- What factors exacerbate your stress?

- What is the interaction between work, home and community stress?
- How has stress contributed to your perceptions of or attitudes towards your occupation?

At the beginning of the interview with each participant, the research study was explained to her. An outline was given to the participant about what would be expected of her in the study by reading the relevant section to her from the letter to the principal (see Appendix A). In addition, participants signed a consent form for their participation in the study (see Appendix B) and the limitations of confidentiality were explained. Lastly, the participant's questions about the research study were answered. Each interview lasted about thirty minutes and was audio-recorded.

3.5 Data analysis

Data was analysed using interpretive or thematic data analysis. According to Aronson (1994), this approach focuses on identifying the themes and patterns of living evident in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) believe that this process enables a greater understanding of the research topic.

3.5.1 Thematic analysis as methodology

Thematic analysis organizes and describes the data set in rich detail and also interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998, in Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of thematic analysis is not passive; rather, the researcher is actively looking for themes and codes. The focus of thematic analysis is the organisation of data into categories and themes (Coolican, 1999). This is done in order to make comparisons between data. A category is a general place where statements that are similar in nature are placed (Coolican, 1999). It is from these categories that themes are generated. A theme emerges when several categories are joined or when a general idea that is found across many categories begins to form and is noted (Coolican, 1999). The existence of each category or theme that is generated will have to be justified, by including verbatim samples from the data (Coolican, 1999). These are often samples of a participant's exact speech in the interviews or focus groups. These examples from the data help the researcher to note the variety of the participants' perspectives throughout the data set (Coolican, 1999).

During the process of recording categories, it is important that the researcher realizes that the categories are not fixed entities (Coolican, 1999). Rather, they are constantly revised the longer and more in-depth the data are analysed. Therefore, several categories may be eliminated, others added and some amalgamated into other categories. The researcher may keep a record of all the changes that he or she has made to the categories, as well as his or her reasons for making the changes (Coolican, 1999). In certain circumstances the researcher may decide to gather further data during this stage.

It is also important to scrutinize and analyse the fit between data and the categories that have been developed (Coolican, 1999). Consideration should be made of whether the categories are full of relevant statements or relatively empty, whether there are deficiencies in some categories, whether tentative links can be made between categories or whether opposing categories might emerge if more data was gathered or different people interviewed (even if further data collection is impossible at this point due to time constraints or lack of resources) (Coolican, 1999). Statements that do not fall into any category should be noted as odd or categories should be changed or developed so that these statements can fit somewhere (Coolican, 1999).

Individual cases can be analysed to screen for any inconsistencies or contrasts to the categories developed by the researcher (Coolican, 1999). Variation in the statements made by participants can be an indication that the issue being discussed is complex in nature (Coolican, 1999). It is also helpful in assisting the researchers observe the different ways in which people construct their views through their choice of words (Coolican, 1999).

Once categories and themes are found, the process of coding can take place. The traditional method of coding is making photocopies of each statement and placing them into files labeled with a theme or category (Coolican, 1999). A cross-referencing system is used to keep track of statements that pertain to and are placed in many files (Coolican, 1999).

3.5.2 Transcribing the data

Data was in the form of interviews which were recorded via an audio voice recorder. These interviews were then transcribed verbatim by hand and later typed out. Transcription often acts as the initial point of analysis as it helps the researcher gain a better understanding of the data as well as assisting him or her develop the skills needed for the actual analysis process that follows

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was certainly true for the researcher of this project. The typed word documents of the recordings were later printed and copied so that they could be analysed using thematic analysis.

3.5.3 The data analysis process

The first step of the interpretive data analysis approach is familiarisation and immersion (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Kelly, 2006). This entails the transcription of the data, repeatedly reading the data and writing down one's initial ideas (Braun & Clark, 2006). Once this is completed, the researcher should be familiar enough with the data to know what kinds of things can be found there, what kind of interpretation can be supported by the data and which cannot (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The researcher therefore worked through all the data from the semi-structured interviews, first focusing on how the educators experienced stress and later focusing on whether their experience of stress had affected the perceptions and the attributions they make of their occupation.

The second step begins with generating initial codes and is completed when the researcher is developing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This is achieved by systematically attaching brief descriptions to small chunks of data (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The codes that are developed constantly change as the researcher develops more ideas which help him or her get as close as possible to an accurate understanding of the participants' experiences. Thus, "[t]he idea is really to get as close a fit of the codings to the data as possible without having a plethora of idiosyncratic codings" (Howitt & Cramer, 2008, p. 333).

Here the researcher analysed the transcribed audio tapes, looking for themes and codes in the transcripts. Photocopies of the transcripts were made so that they could be cut and grouped together after coloured marker pens were used to highlight pieces of text that were relevant pieces of code, as is suggested by Terre Blanche et al. (2006). The researcher's interest was not only whether stress affects the participants' perceptions of their job, but also the roles that the different stressors of work, home and community play towards affecting that perception. What was also interesting to note was whether the disadvantaged context that the participants were in, the number of years that the educators had been teaching and whether they taught teaching primary or high school learners, had an effect on educators' stress levels.

Step three involved searching for themes where the researcher analysed the generated codes and discovered those that are similar in nature. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) suggest five steps that the researcher may use that allow him or her to analyse the data and note the organising principles that naturally underlie it. The first is to use the language of the participants and not to alter it to the language that the researcher uses. The second is not to just summarise the data; it is important to think in terms of processes, functions, tensions and contradictions (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Thirdly, the researcher should find the optimal level of complexity, so that he or she does not have too few or too many themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The fourth step encourages the researcher to not just accept one system; rather, he or she should observe what occurs when different themes are explored (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Lastly, the researcher should remain focused on the aim or objective of his or her study.

The generated codes were then combined to create similar themes (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). This is a fluid process and the construction of themes entails change and adjustment with previously generated themes being discarded, retained or adjusted as required (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). Taylor and Bogdan (1989, in Aronson, 1994) describe themes as units obtained from patterns in the form of conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings or proverbs. Themes bring ideas or points of view together so that meaning or coherence can occur (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They allow the researcher to more accurately and fully understand the patient's experiences. A clear definition of each generated theme needs to be provided in order to ensure that its nature is fully understood (Howitt & Clarke, 2008). The researcher needs to identify examples of each theme to illustrate what the analysis has achieved (Howitt & Cramer, 2008).

The researcher analyzed the transcripts of all the participants in order to develop themes by examining if any patterns could be established. The objective was to determine if female educators were experiencing stress, how they described their stress, what they thought were the causes of their stress and whether their attitudes towards teaching had changed because of that stress. Issues such as the educators' reasons for entering the field of education, factors that helped them cope with stress and what they enjoyed about their job were also examined. A number of themes were established and a discussion of these follows in the next chapter.

The fourth step is interpretation and checking. It entails the building of a valid argument as to why one chose those particular themes (Aronson, 1994). A written account of the phenomenon that has been studied is given. It is at this stage that constantly referring to literature and incorporating it into the data analysis is important. This adds to the merit of the research by backing up one's findings with fact and previous research rather than relying on the researcher's possibly biased views or observations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is an important step in the data analysis process. The final interpretation must be acutely analyzed so that it is cohesive, does not point to another interpretation, or to instances when one has over interpreted or instances where prejudice has occurred.

3.5.4 Assessing reliability and validity

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olsen and Spies (2002) believe that it is the process of verification which is essential to the establishment of reliability and validity in a research study. In the opinion of the aforementioned authors, verification helps the researcher in the decision-making process of data collection so that mistakes made at this stage may be noted and corrected before the data is analyzed (Morse et al., 2002). The researcher is presented as having an essential role in the establishment of reliability and validity as it is he or she who decides what constitutes a code or theme and what does not. Thus, "[it] is his or her "creativity, sensitivity, flexibility and skill in using the verification strategies that determine the reliability and validity of the evolving study (Morse et al., p.5)". He or she is also responsible for ensuring that the question formation, literature, sampling, data collection and data analysis are congruent with each other (Morse et al., 2002). The verification methods that ensure reliability and validity are: ensuring methodological coherence, sampling sufficiency, developing a dynamic relationship between sampling, data collection and analysis, thinking theoretically, and theory development (Morse et al., 2002).

Coolican (1999) states that researchers conducting qualitative research use terms such as rigour, good practice and research evaluation rather than those of reliability and validity. He suggests several methods that researchers can use to ensure that their data, research findings and interpretations are considered reliable and valid. Examples of this includes checking inter-observer reliability, gaining validation from the participants that the findings of the research study accurately reflect their meaning and repeatedly returning to the research setting to gather fresh data using questions gained from the early hypothesis (Cooligan, 1999). Another useful

method of ensuring validity and reliability is through the process of triangulation. This entails comparing the various methods used to gather data from a participant to determine if there is consistency in their answers. Inconsistent answers can be very useful to the researcher as a means to determine the different perspectives of a participant (Cooligan, 1999).

Bryman (1988) suggests that in order to uphold reliability and validity it is important that researchers make their field notes and transcriptions publically available for inspection so that other researchers can come to their own conclusions about the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985), on the other hand, suggest that it is helpful to keep a log or 'reflexive journal' which records all problems, ideas at various stages of the research, one's own reactions and values and their possible influence on the progress of the research. This is sometimes known as reflexivity - the practice of reflecting upon the ways in which the research progress may be influenced by one's own attitudes and personal insights. Such reflexivity enables other readers to see what led to certain conclusions and to suggest alternative interpretations. Pidgeon and Henwood (1997, in Cooligan, 1999) believe that checking the fit of data to categories or theory is an important method in ensuring reliability and validity. All the data should fit into categories and themes or there should be some discussion in the report of the data which did not fit. The data of this study fit the themes.

3.6 Ethical considerations

3.6.1. Vulnerability of participants

All the participants were over the age of 18 years; therefore, they were potentially not as vulnerable as child participants are. However, the subject of stress and the impact that it may have on one's life is potentially a very sensitive subject. Participants may be reluctant to speak about the adverse effects that stress has on their lives and the way that it has potentially created a negative perception of their job. Participants may also be hesitant to admit to disliking their jobs, especially since teaching is often perceived as a noble occupation involved in shaping young minds. The participants thus might be distressed by the interview process as well as stressed by it using more of their already limited time. It was decided that any distressed participants would be referred to a psychologist if needed. In addition, less threatening questions were asked at the

beginning of the interview. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that they were allowed to withdraw at any time.

3.6.2. Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all the relevant parties involved in the study. A meeting detailing what the research entails was held with the principals of the schools before consent was given to approach the educators. In some schools, the principal approached the educators instead of the researcher and then relayed the volunteers' details to the researcher. See Appendix B for a copy of the consent form.

3.6.3. Confidentiality

The terms of confidentiality were negotiated with the participants. Pseudonyms were used within the data analysis to further ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The limitations of confidentiality were also discussed.

3.6.4. Beneficence

Beneficence as an ethical principle refers to the need for research to be of social benefit (Van der Riet et al., 2005). Although no direct benefit was gained by the participants and the community, for example, in the form of interventions, the information that this study generated may potentially be very beneficial to the teachers who read the research report as perhaps they can create and implement their own interventions based on the information found in the research findings.

3.6.5. Non maleficence

This ethical principle refers to the need for research to not have a harmful effect on the participants or their communities. The researcher has to ensure that he or she in no way inflicts physical and emotional harm on the participants or expose them to any increased risk of harm (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). The study was granted ethical clearance by the relevant ethics board of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and all the research data is being kept in a safe place. The data will be kept for at least five years. The data may only be used for further research with the consent of the participating educators and schools, the researcher and her supervisor. The

researcher used her professional training to ascertain whether any participant was adversely affected by the interview. However, none of the participants appeared to have suffered any emotional harm from the interview process and to the knowledge of the researcher no physical harm was inflicted on them due to their participation in the research. The participants were protected by the researcher's commitment to upholding the previously mentioned ethical principles, thus ensuring that no harm would be experienced by them through this process.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described the aspects of the complex and time-intensive data collection and analysis phases of the study. This process was embarked upon by being cognizant of the requirements of the research methodology framing the research study as well as the ethical requirements of the profession of psychology. This ensured that the data collected was extremely rich in nature.

Chapter 4

Results and discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the results of the data analysis and will include discussion of the results in each section. Educators' reasons for entering the teaching profession differed for each participant. Reasons listed for becoming an educator included being influenced by a friend or family member, often already in the profession; a suggestion made by someone in the community; lack of choice at the time; being influenced by the political climate and context that they were in, for example, in regards to sexism, racism, politics and apartheid; love of children and some previous exposure to the teaching profession.

All of the educators in the study reported experiences of stress. However, some reported that their stress was only experienced on a subconscious level. Educators appear to experience stress both physically and psychologically. Issues such as lack of support from the educators' family, friends, society, the learners' parents, government and the schools' management team were identified by the educators as the career challenges that contributed to or increased their levels of stress. Other equally important stress-exacerbating factors included a high administration work load, lack of learner discipline, lack of resources such as time and money and the personal financial strain that female educators experience. The various social issues faced by the learners, and the multifaceted role that they cause the educator to adopt, are also major stressors.

The educators who appeared more resilient when faced with stress appeared to employ strategies such as maintaining a positive attitude, finding activities that helped them to relax such as gardening and ensuring that they keep their home, work and community contexts apart as much as is possible.

Other factors that assisted the educators in coping with stress were a supportive principal and/or management team as this influenced factors such as how much administration work the educators had to complete and how much extra free time they could obtain to deal with unexpected personal problems. Educators also found supportive colleagues to be helpful in coping with stress.

Opinions differed on whether there was a difference in female and male experiences of stress. There appeared to be an interaction between the educators' home, work and community contexts and this interaction did appear to have more of a potentially negative impact on the educators' experiences of stress. That is, more interaction between the educators' contexts appeared to increase the level of stress that they experienced.

Opinions also appeared to differ regarding the stress experienced by primary school educators in comparison to high school educators. However, the educators reported that the ages of the learners that they taught may contribute to their levels of stress, with primary school educators experiencing higher levels of stress than high school educators.

Overall, most of the participants reported that they believed the attitudes that they currently have towards their work have not changed compared to how they felt about teaching at the beginning of their careers. Therefore, the stress reported by the participants did not appear to have had an impact on the educators' attitudes towards their career. The participants did not form negative opinions about their career but stayed positive. The reasons for this appeared to be, among others, a continuing love of children and a belief that there is no other work that they would enjoy more.

A number of excerpts from the interviews are included in the following sections.

Key:

R stands for researcher

P stands for participant

PA stands for Participant A

PB stands for Participant B

PC stands for Participant C

PD stands for Participant D

PE stands for Participant E

PF stands for Participant F

PG stands for Participant G

PH stands for Participant H

PI stands for Participant I

School A, B, or C denotes which school the participant teaches at. School A is a co-ed, private mixed high and primary school which bases its academics within the Christian faith; School B is a co-ed government primary school which historically was a 'Model C' school with a majority of white learners and School C is a co-ed government primary school with a learner base consisting largely of coloured and black students.

4.2 Reasons for entering the teaching profession

4.2.1 Influence of a friend, family member or community member of the participants

The influence that a significant person in the participant's life exerted on her varied in its nature. Some family members, community members or friends exerted influence by suggesting that the participant would do well in the field of education. For others, the influence was more vicarious in that the participant became a teacher because a friend or family member was a teacher:

P: And at church I would always be involved with the little people. And [pause] they said to me, you know you really would be a very good teacher. (PH, School B)

P: Um, my mother worked at the training college here in Maritzburg ... and so I used to go from school. Often in the afternoon I'd go and you know, see her there [pause] (deep breath) and got to see what the girls were doing and you know, what it was all about ... and um, ja, it just became and just became interested from there and I had a very good friend that was going um said that you know that's what she was gonna do after school. So ja, I looked into it more and I've always enjoyed little children. I was always the family babysitter etc, etc (laughs). Um, ja so kind of just got into it from there. (PI, School B)

P: Then my sister was a lecturer at Bechet College and I was staying in Durban and then she said, "You know what". I just thought, well, I'm going to be a house wife; I didn't think that I was going to be anything I just thought that I would stay at home and look after the kids and that was it. Then she came to me, she said, "Wouldn't you like to become a teacher?" (PB, School A)

The participant, as an individual existing in her particular microsystem according to Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), can be seen as perhaps having come to her decision to enter the field of education through the reciprocal interactions that she has with the people in her microsystem such as a friend, family member or member of the community. The bidirectional relationship between some of the participants and their family and friends appears to have informed their decision to become educators.

4.2.2 Exposure to the teaching profession

The decision to become a teacher was often taken because the participant had some exposure to the field of education. This excludes the influence of family, friends or community. The exposure was often in the form of the participant's own experiences of school:

P: Um and then as I grew older, I went to Bechet High School in Durban and those days the high school was on the bottom level [pause] and I always watched them and then the junior primary classes. They used to call them KG those days, and then the KG department, always just looked so colourful and, and I always wanted to work with children and it just kind of grabbed me. (PC, School C)

According to Bronfenbrenner's social ecology theory (1994), the bidirectional relationship between the participant as an individual and the various microsystems that form the mesosystem, appears to have informed her decision to become an educator. Some of the participants stated that they became interested in education through their own experiences of school and by observing activities in other educational institutions. Thus, the relationships between the participant and her school, and between her school and her home, appear to have had an important role in helping her decide to enter the field of education.

4.2.3 Lack of options

Several of the participants reported that they had entered teaching because of a lack of other options. The cause of the perceived lack of job options available to the participants is unclear. It may be surmised that the wide variety of different types of careers that women enjoy today were not open to them at the time they entered teaching. The political climate of the time and the various social challenges that it created, such as poverty, may have made it difficult for the coloured participants of this research study to pursue career options in which they were interested. In addition, the advent of the technological age created a variety of different types of careers that may not have existed at the time when the participants were making their career choices:

P: And I liked it. I thought ah, you know I think that maybe I can't get to England; maybe I'll look at teaching. (PC, School C)

P: You know, playing schools and all that kind of thing and um when I was in grade ten, I sort of started looking around and I couldn't find anything else or I was kind of feeling pressure so I just went into teaching because that's always what I've wanted to do. (PG, School B)

It is possible that the perceived and experienced lack of options was partly the result of the apartheid regime which ensured that people of colour were only able to get access to inferior resources as well as limited academic and occupational opportunities (Harber, 1989). Therefore, if women of colour wished to enter a profession they were limited to careers such as teaching, nursing and so forth. This may have also been influenced by global historical limitations on the working roles of women.

4.2.4 The political climate and educators' context

The previous theme, stating that women often chose a career in education because there were no other avenues open to them, may have been a result of the political climate of the time and/or the context within which the participants were situated. The decision that women made to become educators, although multifaceted, was often affected the other decision-making factors in that process. Due to various social factors such as stereotypical gender roles, apartheid, racism and

socio-economic status, the career options open to females at the time of deciding on a career path were limited:

P: Well, we are the products of apartheid, unfortunately, and so there were no opportunities for coloureds in...Durban, where ever. (PC, School C)

P: And I so wanted to go but in those days nobody travelled away from home really, especially females. And growing up in the community and in the family, in the home I was in, um people were just or, or parents were very protective and I was the youngest girl, so there was no way my Dad was gonna let me go overseas even though it was his sister that offered it (an opportunity to enroll in a course on airhostessing). (PC, School C)

The interdependencies among people (microsystems), institutions (exosystem), and cultural constructs (macrosystem) to which a developing person must adapt psychologically affects that individual's career choice (Gray, 1999). This also illustrates how the different levels of Bronfenbrenner's interact to affect development. Thus, values, customs, accepted ways of behaving, sets of beliefs and institutions also impact on the individual and help to shape her personality and thus the decisions that she makes concerning her life. Policies such as apartheid determine the scope of decisions that the participants could make concerning their career.

4.2.5 Love of children

This was perhaps one of the most commonly cited reasons for entering the field of education. Often the participants who gave a love of children as their reason for becoming an educator viewed their careers as a vocation and had an altruistic approach to teaching:

P: And that's where I think the seed was really sown. Um, and I always used to have little kids coming to our house. The little cousins, those that were younger than me, when I was in high school and they would always come and I would play schools with the little ones and um I always wanted to be there to help to guide ... so I think it was a stirring, ja. (PC, School C)

Kyriacou and Coultard (2000, in Barmby, 2006) state that intrinsic and altruistic reasons for entering the field of education were the most common given by educators, especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds. Some of the most important characteristics for intrinsic motivation

for becoming an educator are the joy of the actual activity of teaching and using one's skills to impart knowledge. Altruistic motivators for entering the profession included a desire to help children succeed. These two reasons were the most commonly cited by the participants as motivators for choosing their careers. However, it appeared that it was not just the educators from an ethnic minority background who based their career decision-making on altruistic and intrinsic factors as the white participants of the study also cited these as motivators for their becoming educators.

4.3 Manifestations of stress

The participants' stress appears to fit well with the Royal College of General Practitioners definition of stress as it appears to manifest itself in physical and psychological strain. The definition states that, "the physical, emotional and mental strain resulting from the mismatch between an individual and his or her environment which results from a three-way relationship between demands on a person, that person's feelings about those demands and their ability to cope with those demands (n.d., in Cosgrove, 2000, p. 28). Participants stated that their stress became manifest in ways that were physical and psychological in nature. It appeared that physical and psychological symptoms of stress were equally reported by the participants. Stress also appears to affect the participants in more complex ways, in that some participants experienced a combination of both physical and psychological manifestations of their stress.

4.3.1 Acknowledgement of experiencing stress

A few of the participants stated that though they believed that female educators experienced stress, and felt that they themselves have often been stressed, they generally were not aware of their stress until a later stage:

P: I don't think so, afterwards I'll [pause] pick up, sjoe, I am tired or now I'm feeling emotional. But at that stage, I'm, I'm quite [pause] fine handling you know stress, ja. I kind of, I don't know, I grew up on, with that you have to handle things and that's it. Nobody's going to do it for you; you will have to do it. Afterwards I'll back up, you know (laughs). So ja. (PI, School B)

It would appear that although the educators did not believe that they were experiencing stress in the moments of pressure, they did experience physical and psychological symptoms of stress afterwards. The reasons for their not being aware of the stress could be that they were too busy to take note of their psychological and physical states or that their familial or contextual norms did not allow the participants to admit to themselves that they were experiencing stress as this may have been interpreted as a weakness or not being able to cope.

4.3.2 Physical manifestations of stress

The participants stated that they know that they are stressed when they begin to feel pain in parts of their bodies:

P: I think you feel it, you, you know really had a blow; say you've come to blows and your whole body feels like you, bus had hit you. ... Physically you ... your back will ache, your headache gets sore. Other times it's just a bit of tension, your neck gets sore. (PE 1, School B)

P: I mean I was so stressed in 2006 that I actually, my neck went into spasm. I ended up in a collar...but that was because of my daughter's circumstances and ... what was expected of me at school. (PH, School B).

There are numerous physical symptoms of stress and the participants appear to have experienced some of these, such as fatigue, muscle tension and pain. Dunham (1992) and Gaziel (1993) have included these as symptoms of exposure to stress without an increase in coping mechanisms. In addition, they have also included loss of sleep and burnout which was not reported by the research participants. Smith et al. (2010) state that the long-term effects of stress include increased aging and heart disease; however, these were not explored with the participants.

4.3.3 Psychological manifestations of stress

Often, the participants stated that the stress which they experienced left them feeling very emotional. The participants reported feeling very tearful and ill-tempered without apparently having a solid reason for feeling these emotions. They also reported knowing of colleagues who were being treated medically for depression:

P: More mentally, em, no more emotionally, ja ... I can have mood swings constantly. And there's days I can cry and I think, what am I crying for (laughs). (PA, School A)

P: Um. Sometimes if, if I'm very, very stressed, I become very emotional (PH, School B).

P: Ja. And there are teachers even who are on antidepressants. I'm lucky I'm not. (PE, School B)

Van der Linde, Van der Westhuizen and Wissing (1999) found that almost one-third of educators suffered from a high degree of emotional exhaustion. Dunham (1992) believes that if the coping mechanisms that individuals use to reduce stress are ineffective, psychological reactions such as frustration, anger, anxiety, fear, poor concentration and memory loss occur. Smith et al. (2010) believe that poor coping strategies also lead to depression. The experiences of the participants in this study certainly appear to concur with these findings with anger, depression, frustration and anxiety being the emotions most commonly reported.

4.3.4 Physical and psychological manifestations of stress

Stress is a complex illness that can affect an individual in a variety of ways. This seems to hold true for some of the participants who reported experiencing stress on both physical and psychological levels:

P: Mmmm. You can feel ok, one of the things that I know that I'm stressed out, um, is that I go to bed tired and I get up tired. I'm just tired all the time, you understand. And then that feeling that things are crawling in your head (laughs). You know what, and I actually say you know things are crawling in my head. I can feel that there are, there's, there's like stuff crawling in my head now and I just feel that I need time out; I need to get away from the situation, um. But I think that there are some terms that are more difficult than others. ... The second term and the third term are always the hardest. (PB, School A)

P: And I see a lot of teachers crumbling and falling to pieces physically because of what they suffered mentally. And I thought I'd, I just don't want to be one of them. (PD, School A)

Kaiser and Polczynski (1982) believe that educators find it difficult to cope with their stress as it affects their physical and mental well-being.

4.4 Factors that make teaching stressful

The factors that are reported to make teaching stressful are numerous and varied. One of the most widely reported stressors is a lack of government support and in understanding the educators' needs. The continuous changes in educational policy and lack of an understanding on the part of the Department of Education of what will and will not work in the educators' contexts appear to be major stressors. The Department of Education further imposes stress on educators with the intensive administrative tasks that it requires of them. Some educators believe that this may have possible negative consequences for the learner in that it cuts down the teaching time as educators are preoccupied with administration duties and are unsure of the current correct policy to follow as it is constantly changing. In addition, educators reported that they did not feel supported and understood by the government.

Other stressors include lack of learner discipline, lack of support from learners' parents, lack of support from society, lack of support from the educators' own family and friends, lack of support from the school management team, lack of personal and school resources thus leading to financial strain, the multifaceted role which educators adopt to cope with the many social challenges faced by learners, and the difference in the cultures of the educator and the learners whom they teach. These will be discussed and illustrated in the following sections.

4.4.1 Lack of support from government

There appears to be a belief amongst educators that the Department of Education and government in general do not have a clear understanding of the needs of the educators and learners whom they govern. In addition, government is seen as prescriptive and directive in a way that does not enhance the profession. Educators have reported feeling unsupported by the government. They appeared to believe that the constant changes in education policy have left them feeling bewildered and overwhelmed as they are often left feeling unsure of what is required of them.

P: I've been to one or two of the workshops where ... they will dictate to you and they will say, this is what must be happening A, B, C, D, E. And to come and implement it in the class, it's a completely different ball game. And I think the cry of me and many teachers are the people from the top need to come into the classroom situation. Come, come down to grassroots and say let's see if this is gonna work. Don't sit up there and say let's try that and then oh no, no this here didn't work this year, let's go back next year and let's see, next year we'll try that one. And stop trying but come down to grassroots. Put the teachers first and say, "Teachers, what is working in your class? How are you implementing in your class?"
(PA, School A)

The implementation by government of Outcomes Based Education and continuous assessment of learners' performance created more responsibilities for the educators (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; Moriarty, Edmonds, Blatchford & Martin, 2001). The new curriculum approach and the constant changes to this curriculum have raised the stress levels of educators (Van Zyl & Petersen, 1999; Jonas, 2001; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; Olivier & Venter, 2003; Saptoe, 2000). The constant changes leave educators feeling incompetent professionally, which impacts on their levels of stress.

4.4.2 Large amounts of administrative work

Administrative work seems to be most influential contributor to female educator stress. The large amount of administration required by the government from the educators is a major contributor to their stress and they are uncertain as to whether the government actually checks the paperwork that it insists the educators submit. Educators have reported that it robs the learner of receiving valuable, quality teaching time. Some educators have also stated that the requirements of the administration are unrealistic in the context of their schools and are thus difficult to meet:

P: Admin, take away the admin. Admin, admin we are doing admin and I think we are doing less than other schools. They are still all doing every L, every LO, every little thing they're still writing down and we're not even doing that as it is. I mean it's the money in the morning, you have to, you know, tick off [that] this child came back with the letter. That is killing because it's time. It's teaching time that's going somewhere else. (PH, School B)

P: Oh ja, ja. So it's, I think it's a variety of things is first of all trying to do all this tick, tick, tick stuff and organize that and making sure all your paperwork is in order...and ah, you know, I think they demand too much paperwork, you know. And our school is trying to make it less low key because I'm a teacher, I wanna teach. I don't wanna sit and tick, tick, tick and ta, ta, ta, you know... I mean you can ask me about any child in my class and I'll be able to tell you. I don't need to open my tick book and see you know, where they're at. (PG, School B)

The issue of too much administrative work does not appear to be solely that of the government schools, but private schools are also affected:

P: So this here I think is the major strain on us teachers over the years that I've found. Because this term we writing prep this way and next year they don't want our prep that way, they want it this way. And, and this is what's been going on and it's the paper. The, the, the, the load of the paperwork on the teacher. Where the teachers are finding we can't give our all to the kids because you've got deadlines and mark cycles and everything. We've got ... to because the government wants that. And it's a piece of paper but the heart for the child we neg, not neglect as such but we finding it stressful because we've got to try and keep our one hundred percent there, plus try and put our one hundred percent on paper. Which the government doesn't even come round and check anyway. (PA, School A)

De Heus and Diekstra (1999) as well as Wilson and Hall (2002), Holmes (2005) and Kyriacou (1989) list a heavy work load as one of the main stressors that educators have to cope with and the reasons why educators appear to burnout more readily than other social professions. Work overload includes classroom-related problems, large classes and curriculum-related problems (Olivier & Venter, 2003). The issue of the large amounts of compulsory administrative tasks that the educators have to complete and the impact that these tasks have on their work load, was a common stressor listed by all the participants irrespective of race, socio-economic background or nature of the school at which they taught. Workload formed part of a list of the top five stressors experienced by educators as well as a list of risk factors for work-related stress (European Trade Union Committee for Education, 2007).

Educators resent the additional administrative work not simply because it adds strain and pressure on them, but because it reduces the time available to spend with their learners and meet their needs (Moriarty et al., 2001). In addition, the increased workload makes it more difficult for educators to reach their own professional goals in terms of achieving the standards of teaching and learning for which they aim (Moriarty et al., 2001).

4.4.3 Lack of support from the school's management team

Some educators stated that they felt that they did not receive the support from the management team that they needed. They felt that the management team often did not listen to the educators' needs and thus made their jobs more difficult:

P: There are some stressors with the bosses sometimes. ... You're not always understood and you, sometimes you feel, you know, not quite free to give your own opinion because of this and it's a challenge if it's not... in accordance with the viewpoint, then. (PE, School B)

A lack of support from management is listed as a major contributor to educator burnout by De Heus and Diekstra (1999), Holmes (2005) and Kyriacou (1989). Jacobsson, Pousette and Thylefors' (2001) findings concurred with other studies and showed that lack of support from the school's principal caused educators to be stressed. Cox and Griffiths (1996) cited lack of support and cooperation as a source of educator stress. The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) (2007) concurred and listed bad school management or lack of support from management as one of the top five stressors for educators. Educators who do not feel supported by the principal of the school at which they work have more stress-related physical and psychological symptoms than those with support (Rout & Rout, 2002).

4.4.4 Lack of support from the educators' family and friends

The educators stated that they often not only have stress from their work context but they are often also solely responsible for the running of their homes. They appear to often feel frustrated that their families do not help to lighten the load:

P: You've got no support from home, so you doing everything on your own and you hope it's going to work. (PI, School B)

Researchers have found that people who lack support from family and friends experience, more physical and psychological symptoms of stress than those who have this form of support (Rout & Rout, 2002).

4.4.5 Society's misconceptions about the teaching profession

Educators stated that there is a misconception that they have an easy job. They seem to feel that society does not give the same level of respect to those working in the field of education that they give to other professionals, for example, those working in the medical field. There appeared to be a feeling among some educators that society lacks an understanding of the challenges of the profession and tends to focus on what it believes to be the perks of teaching, such as long holidays and shorter working days:

P: Mmmm and you have a half day job [society's belief] so you can do this, do that and then a person can't understand why it's not [possible to complete work]. (PD, School A).

Holmes (2005) states that the decline in status of the teaching profession acts as a stressor as society does not understand the reality of the participants' work and believe that it is a half-day job with lots of benefits and long holidays. This makes it difficult for the participants to speak freely about their stress and the challenges of their jobs as they feel people are judging them. This contributes further to the educators' stress levels.

4.4.6 Lack of support from the learners' parents

Female educators often reported feeling overwhelmed and alone due to the lack of or poor parental support received by them from the learners' parents. The educators were often left feeling as if they were the sole source of responsibility for the learners whom they taught:

P: Um, we don't get a lot of parental support in a lot of cases, um, we don't get a lot of information and feedback from the parents ... so you kind of carry everything. ... Ja, and it's that it causes stress cos you don't know what you dealing with. And it's just [pause] you kind of feel that you're fighting a losing battle (clears throat). You doing what you can at school...And a child goes home and it's not, there's no continuation or...back up. (PI, School B)

P: I think other schools are different, I think you've got more parents nagging. Why's my child only getting ten and not twenty? You know, that kind of stress ... of keeping them off your back the whole time. Here's the opposite; you actually want to get them involved ... and they're not. And for the kids' sake you want that. (PI, School B)

Educators clearly often feel that they are not supported by the learners' parents. A lack of parental support from the learners' family causes stress in the educator and acts as a barrier to learning (Motseke, 1998; Van der Linde et al., 1999). It is important to remember that the learners' parents are also influenced by the political, historical, societal and economic factors within their contexts. These factors impact on them in ways which may determine the attitudes that they have towards their children's educators and education in general (Steyn & Kamper, 2006). Steyn and Kamper (2006) believe that issues such as unemployment and the occurrence of HIV/AIDS may contribute to the learners' parents' general feelings of negativity. Changes in family values and marital ethics are for Motseke (1998) also a great source of educator stress.

It is important that the educators receive the support of the learners' parents as the parents' attitudes towards education are likely to influence their children's attitudes towards school and their educators (Shulze & Steyn, 2007). This has implications for learner discipline.

4.4.7 Lack of learner discipline

As suggested in the previous section, there is a link between parents' attitudes towards education and learner discipline in the school context. In addition, if parents do not discipline their children, the educator is likely to struggle to discipline those learners at school. Some parents may even reprimand the educators for disciplining their children, which makes it very difficult for the educator to teach and is likely to add to her stress:

P: Like I said, this class I've got is much sort of more sensible ... if I can use that word. Last year there were just too many boys that were naughty... that you had to spend so much time trying just to ... quiet them down, you know. (PG, School B)

R: So it [learner discipline] changes all the time?

P: All the time. But that keeps us on our toes but um, it would be better if the changes were all for the better. They're not necessarily positive changes ... they make my job extremely hard. And the hardest thing is that the children fear nothing and no one because of the abolishment of corporal punishment ... that is when I started seeing chaos coming into classrooms. You can threaten them; you can use other nicer forms of punishment. I've, I've done it all. I've called their parents in. Half the parents aren't interested anyway and then a quarter of them that do come and see you are coming to fight on behalf of those same rude children. I think they like their children to be that way. And what bothers me the most is that this is the future of the country, the future of the world that we dealing with. (PD, School A)

P: It becomes difficult in the way the ... children are [pause] ... less respectful in some ways, less disciplined so you've gotta try and find ways of [pause] dealing with that. (PG, School B)

Disrespect on the part of the learners towards the educators has a major influence on educator stress, second only to increased administration tasks (De Jesus & Conboy, 2001; Jacobsson et al., 2001; Kyriacou, 2001; Olivier & Venter, 2003). Unacceptable learner behaviour was listed by ETUCE (2007) as one of the top five stressors experienced by educators. Educators suggest that lack of learner discipline may be a result of the abolishment of corporal punishment and its replacement with more respectful (and in their view, less efficient) techniques for managing learner discipline (Schulze & Steyn, 2007).

4.4.8 The multifaceted roles of female educators

Female educators seem to have to adopt many different roles in dealing with the many social challenges faced by the learners whom they teach. These learners are often coping with complex social issues. This forces the educator to adopt various roles such as that of a lay counsellor or social worker in order to assist their learners. These additional roles may affect the educator emotionally, financially and in many other ways. For example, there may be transference of emotions from the learner whom the educator has been assisting. The educator's emotional state may then affect her home life, with her being ill-tempered or angry towards her partner or

children. Alternatively, she may be so emotionally fatigued that she is unable to attend to the needs of her own children:

P: Another thing which I didn't say before is the stress that they bring their emotional baggage to school or whatever and that is also something that you take on ... you know. ... There's things that happen that you've got to try and remember and deal with and sit with a child... That's also ah stuff you take with you. (PG, School B)

P: And over the years I've definitely seen a change in our kids. Children live much more stressful lives today than what they lived those years ago ... because we've gotta be more aware. We've gotta be more sensitive. Um, no more are you just a teacher. A teacher cannot walk into the class and say one plus one is equal to two, abracadabra. She's got to be all round. And, and I'm praying, maybe I should say the word, praying is that the teachers that are studying today will realize that it's not a career. (PA, School A)

P: That's one of the challenges. And then illnesses (voice gets louder). I mean, I just, one of my girls passed away during the holidays ... [she] had TB. And they didn't do anything about it ... first term she didn't come to school, second term she came and I said to Mum, there's something wrong, you've got to take this child [to the doctor]. I don't have money [the mum said] ... so end of the day ... I paid [pause] and I took them to the taxi and say, you will go now. I dropped them off and they went. Came back, ja it's TB. But they kind of just accept what people tell them. You have to come back in a month's time, why only in a month's time? You know that kind of thing. So you have to almost educate that part as well. So ja so she passed away, it's quite, it's hard. And I have to come back and tell the kids in class. (PI, School B)

Bronfenbrenner's social ecological theory is vital in understanding the stress of the educator and it has implications for the field of education as a whole. This is largely due to the fact that educators have had to act as support to learners who face extreme social challenges at home which have the potential to act as barriers to learning (Henderson, 1995). Due to the many social challenges experienced by learners, such as divorce, child-headed households, poverty and so on, the educator often has to adopt many different roles. The educator may find herself caring for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS or those with ill parents (Bhana et al., 2006). Thus, these roles

could include being counselors, social workers and parents, while also trying to be effective educators (Motseke, 1998). As a result, educators often experience role-based stress due to the multiple roles which they have to fulfill (Motseke, 1998). Motseke (1998) and Nhundu (1999) believe that these multiple roles could lead to role ambiguity and role conflict which in turn act as stressors.

4.4.9 Financial strain for schools and educators

Some of the educators who participated in this study teach in schools where there is a scarcity of resources. The participants have stated that this makes teaching extremely difficult and lessons often have to be planned with the availability of resources in mind:

P: It [lack of resources] does [impact on your job] because now your planning is different in [names the school for which she previously worked]. For instance, you could say that you would have to have this and this because we are doing a project. Here you can't. You have to buy it if you want to or I'll just do something else. So you're doing less almost, you know, um. If you wanna build something in a project, you can't ask them to bring it. Two will and the other thirty won't have anything, so you rather go and buy the paint ... or you don't do it. (PI, School B)

Shortages in school resources have the potential to add to educator stress (Kyriacou, 2001; Olivier & Venter, 2003). These shortages include inadequate teaching materials, not enough desks and not enough textbooks (Moriarty et al., 2001; Wilson & Hall, 2002). The shortage of resources makes it difficult for educators to utilize their skills fully and to provide their learners with high quality lessons with which to improve their progress. The inability to perform their job to the best of their abilities so that learners progress well academically, may contribute substantially to educator stress (Antoniou, Polychroni & Vlachakis, 2006).

In addition, a few participants stated that the low level of pay which they receive contributes to their stress levels. Constantly having to struggle with finances may leave educators feeling demotivated:

P: Financially it's just not the most best paying job. So, you know, you've got to just make do with what you've got. (PG, School B)

Inadequate salaries are a major contributing influence to educator stress (Engelbrecht & Eloff, 2001; Jonas, 2001; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; Olivier & Venter, 2003; Saptoe, 2000). In the past, Lartie (1975, in Suryanarayana & Luciana, 2010) argued that teaching is rather limited in its available extrinsic rewards such as salaries and that if educator job satisfaction is to be increased efforts need to be made to improve educator rewards. Suryanarayana and Luciana (2010) stated that job satisfaction improves when educators believe that they are receiving rewards in proportion to their performance. Thus, it is important that educators are properly compensated for their work in order to reduce their levels of stress.

4.4.10 Challenges of teaching different grades

Some educators have taught a variety of grades and believe that some grades are more manageable and therefore perhaps easier or less stressful to teach. There appears to be more work performance pressure on the educators who teach lower grades than those who teach higher grades. This may be due to the fact that learners of this age are at the foundation stage of their learning and have to learn concepts and ways of thinking that they have not being aware of before they started schooling. These fundamentals need to be well taught as they form the building blocks for all future learning. This could potentially lead to an increase in the levels of stress experienced by the educators.

However, some educators in the research study believed that the lower grades are easier to teach compared with the higher grades, despite the added work performance pressure. This seems to largely be due to the fact that younger children appear more respectful towards the educator, they show better discipline compared to learners in higher grades and also that they are still excited about the prospect of learning:

R: What grades do you teach?

P: Two, little people ... don't give me Grade 7s, please. ... They drive me crazy (laughs). (PH, School B)

P: A bit of both... I would say um, when I taught Grade 3, they were much more babyish and you had to spoon feed them a lot more. And Grade 5 - they kind of start getting more boisterous and what have you, but it also depends on the class. (PG, School B)

P: When I started teaching, I was teaching pre-primary as well, which was a totally different ball game. And then for the last eleven years I've been teaching Grade 1. And obviously pre-primary's a lot more relaxed. (PI, School B)

P: And I absolutely love it [teaching both primary and high school learners]. I'm enjoying it because one lesson I've got Grade 4s and ... they're just little babies and then the next lesson the Grade 9s walk in and they think that they're all big and macho because they've all just been through puberty. And ya, so I've just got to adjust myself to ...,all the ... different levels as I go along. (PD, School A).

Gorrell, Bregman and McAllister (1985) found that primary school teachers reported significantly higher levels of stress than high school teachers which supports the claims of some educators that teaching primary school learners is more difficult.

4.4.11 Cultural differences between the educators and their learners

The educators and the learners whom they teach are often from different cultural backgrounds and, at times, this can make their interactions with each other difficult and stressful:

P: It's just got more stressful with the different cultures, you know. We're just different and, well, the loudness is the one thing. (PE, School B)

P: I think they ... I don't know if it's the Zulu culture but they kind of respect the men more and the women aren't. (PG, School B)

Apartheid forced different race groups to live apart through the enforcement of the Group Areas Act; therefore, the opportunity to interact and thus learn the cultural norms of different cultural groups was lost. This history of enforced separation often makes interactions between learners and their educators difficult when they are from different cultural groups. Such troubled educator-learner interactions often contribute to educator stress (Antoniou et al., 2006).

4.5 Educator resilience and coping

4.5.1 A positive attitude

Many of the participants in this research study reported that maintaining a positive attitude helped them to cope with their stressful careers. They appeared to believe that having a negative attitude about the challenges that they had to face in their careers was counterproductive as this attitude ultimately increased their stress:

P: Ja ag, you can't let yourself get negative, then you going to kill yourself. You're going to make yourself sick; I've got an attitude of [pause], why. Why worry about it? Try and sort it out and don't sulk about it. Don't [pause] doesn't help getting negative, you just have to go on and try again. (PI, School B)

Maintaining a sense of humour, remaining optimistic and positive allows the educator to cope with stress by controlling the emotions linked with stress (De Jesus & Conboy, 2001; Kyriacou, 2001; Rout & Rout, 2002).

4.5.2 Hobbies

The participants felt that hobbies such as gardening, exercise, scrapbooking and so on were very protective for them and helped to decrease their stress:

P: I've got things that I do like I scrapbook, and by doing that I'm so involved in the picture that I'm creating with all my little bits and bobs that everything else just sort of washes off and floods away. It's, it's very good destressor ... I also garden [pause]. I swim at home and I do that because if I'm in the garden and I'm planting plants and I'm, I'm forgetting about what's pushing down on me and by the time I'm finished, it's gone [pause]. (PH, School B)

Developing mental health through relaxing hobbies is conducive to building a resistance to stress (De Jesus & Conboy, 2001; Kyriacou, 2001; Rout & Rout, 2002). Therefore having a hobby is conducive to experiencing reduced stress.

4.5.3 Keeping the work context separate from the home and community contexts

The participants stated that they tried as much as possible not to take schoolwork home with them and not to let their home and community commitments influence their work. They appeared to feel that this was necessary as a stress management, although there is often an emotional spillover:

P: But I um try not to let, take it home with me...when I drive out of here, I just try and shut it off. (PG, School B)

4.5.4 Health protective behaviours

Some participants felt that maintaining a healthy lifestyle acted as a protective factor against stress. This was achieved through healthy eating patterns, taking nutritional supplements and adhering to an exercise regime:

P: I do walk or run or, you know, exercise a lot in the evening. Ja, to get rid of whatever. (PI, School B)

P: You know, you gotta make sure you eat right and maybe have good vitamins and tonics ... so that you keep strong ... you can't afford to get sick, because when you sick then you can't cope. And sick I mean keep well mentally to you know ... vitamin B, whatever makes you healthy because the minute you're not feeling well, then you feel worse. (PE, School B)

Clearly, a primary method in developing resistance to stress is to achieve physical health (De Jesus & Conboy, 2001; Kyriacou, 2001; Rout & Rout, 2002). Kyriacou (2001) stated that educators cope with stress either through palliative or direct action. Palliative action does not deal with the source of the stress but rather tries to address its symptoms. Therefore, palliative action may be ineffective in the long-term and is often maladaptive. Behaviours such as excessive alcohol consumption as well as smoking are among common unhealthy methods embraced as stress relievers (Kyriacou, 2001). However, healthy methods, as reported in the excerpts above, clearly adaptive and helpful in the long term. Educators who use healthy palliative action to cope with stress attribute their success to individual disposition or mental health strategies such as regular exercise, hobbies and relaxation techniques (Howard & Bruce, n.d.).

Direct action methods of coping attempt to alleviate the source of stress through strategies such as keeping their feelings under control, seeking support from colleagues and/or the principal, having significant adult relationships, organizing time and prioritizing tasks, and being competent (Kyriacou, 2001).

4.6 Factors that female educators find supportive

4.6.1 A supportive boss or management team

A supportive boss or management team appears to be helpful in decreasing educator stress. In some schools the management has decreased the amount of paperwork that educators have to complete to just the most essential. They also understand when the educator has a personal emergency that they need to attend to:

P: Ja. But I have to say that (names the principal) is excellent. If there's really a problem that's coming up, he will say, "Do it quickly" or ...you know. I think in other schools you don't always get that.

R: So for you that's helpful having a boss who's, ok.

P: That's wonderful ja. (PI, School B)

Howard and Johnson's (1999) research found that educators who were better able to cope with stress often cited a strong, caring leadership as a major source of support. A supportive principal and management team may thus help to relieve some of the stress that educators have to cope with. It may do so through possibly providing a positive atmosphere of social support, reviewing the workloads of the educators, improving relationships through team building and managing conflict (Jacobsson et al., 2001; Kyriacou, 2001).

4.6.2 Colleagues

Peer support appeared to be very important to the participants who reported that they found it easier to talk to their colleagues about their work stress rather than their families because their colleagues were better able to empathize. The participants felt that it provided a type of debriefing to speak with their colleagues:

P: You know I think it is people you work with. You know, if you're unsure about something, you can always go and they help me, am I doing it right? ... especially for a young teacher, first-year teacher. I know when I was first teaching, they sent me out to Matatiele ... I was the only one and I had a combined class ... it was very difficult ... and often talking to colleagues and you bounce ideas off and they've tried that so you've tried. I would say that probably is [pause] the greatest support, ja. (PG, School B)

Social support refers to help from people and can be administrative and collegial (Rout & Rout, 2002). Support from one's colleagues can act as a protective factor from stress (Engelbrecht & Eloff, 2001; Jonas, 2001). Peer support from colleagues was found to be a powerful stress reliever for participants in Howard and Johnson's (1999) study. The educators in this research study appeared to feel similarly, and stated that speaking to a colleague whom they trusted was sometimes easier than speaking to a friend or family member as the colleague had similar experiences of stress and thus could better empathize with their experience.

4.6.3 Family and friends

In contrast to the above, some participants felt that their families were their greatest source of support and were helpful in aiding them in managing their stress:

P: Um [pause] well, I suppose I've got a very good family, family unit [pause] which I think is also important. (PH, School B)

Educators who cope better with their stress, are often more resilient because they have a strong support base of people whom they know care about them (Howard & Johnson, 1999). Jonas (2001) stated that men have lower levels of stress compared to women due to the higher perceived social support that they receive from families and friends. This shows the importance of a trusted support base from personal relationships outside of the work environment.

4.7 Aspects of teaching that female educators find enjoyable

4.7.1 Progress made by learners

The educators who participated stated that their greatest source of joy and one of the main reasons for their remaining in the field was the learners' excitement about learning and seeing how far a learner has developed:

P: It's nice to see the children going, well, doing Grade 1 ... they come and then they can't read, they can't write, they can't [pause] you know. There's very little ... that they can do. Um, and by this stage of the year they are reading, they are writing. You know, you get to see a lot of progress especially at that age ... As they get higher up you, the progress isn't as holistic [pause] ... ja, and they become little personalities and they, you know, they develop (PI, School B)

P: Up until today I still find it exciting where children come in and they, they don't know anything really...and you train them and you teach them how to write, how to hold the pencil. (PC, School C)

Educators have stated that they experience personal fulfillment when watching learners achieve and develop (Moriarty et al., 2001). They appear to feel that this is a reflection on their personal competence as an educator and this sense of competence helps to reduce feelings of stress.

4.7.2 Variety of tasks offered by teaching

Educators also find the variety of their work enjoyable. Having a job that was not mundane appeared to help the educators to remain motivated:

P: You know, I enjoy that every day is something different ... you don't like going in to an office and you have to do the same thing, you know. And you make it fun and go outside. (PG, School B)

4.8 Differences between male and female educators and their experiences of stress

There is a feeling among the participants that although they believe that educators of both genders were stressed, cultural factors, societal norms, gender roles and other factors may

contribute to an increase in female educator stress compared to male educator stress. In addition, the aforementioned factors may mean that females experience a different kind of stress or experience stress differently:

P: Oh, ja. I think we tend to take them on [emotional aspects] more than the men. I think that they don't get emotionally involved ... you know, a lot of the time. Whereas we do, you know. We ... want to see that they're alright. Whereas the men just get the facts or, or you know... so I would definitely say that we take on more of the emotions. (PG, School B)

Educators also spoke about how male and female staff experience different reactions and behaviour from learners. It seems that authority is traditionally invested in males and this dynamic carries over into the school context:

P: I think men have an advantage in that, if [I'm] in the hall on my own with a lot of children ... ah you know, it takes a bit longer to get the kids quiet ... whereas a man just goes, "Hey!" and there's something about a male voice that makes the children quiet ... whereas we, our voices are too high pitched. They don't always hear, or they ignore or I dunno what it is but they definitely respond better to the men. (PG, School B)

One educator felt that women make more effort in their classrooms which may also be a source of pressure and resultant stress for female educators:

P: I think from my observations that the women tend to work harder. They do more in the classroom on the whole to look nice ... whereas the men will let that kind of stuff go ... and I think in the classroom they sort of wing it more if I can use that (laughs)... that's just my personal opinion, ja. (PG, School B)

However, another participant believed that the experience of stress was the same for both the genders and she felt that female educators do not have more stressors:

P: I don't think it's especially the female teachers, it's everybody. (PI, School B)

One-third of female educators suffer from a high degree of emotional exhaustion (Van der Linde et al., 1999). Cosgrove (2000) writes that irrespective of geographical backgrounds, women were twice as likely to be affected by depression as a symptom of stress. This may be due to the fact

that women experience higher levels of stress when compared to men (Collins & Parry-Jones, 2000; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; Van Zyl & Petersen, 1999). The additional gender roles, related to work in the home, add to female educators' stress levels (Lundberg & Frankenhaeser, 1999; Rout & Rout, 2002; Thomas, Clarke & Lavery, 2003). Van Zyl and Petersen (1999) found that married women in particular experienced high levels of stress due to the pressure from their multiple responsibilities as a wife, mother and educator. In addition, work and home commitments sometimes overlap or clash, thus causing additional stress for the female educator (Rout & Rout, 2002).

Men appear to have lower levels of stress as they feel more supported by family and friends in comparison to females (Jonas, 2001). In addition, responsibilities for the running of the home and the care of the children were unequally divided, with women receiving more responsibility for the upkeep of the home and the family. This is despite the belief by the participants in the study conducted by Rout and Rout (2002) that these tasks or responsibilities were divided equally between the partners in a relationship.

Burke et al. (1996) stated that disruptive students were their main predictor of burnout for women, whereas for men it was red-tape and self-doubts. Female educators also listed as their stressors, interaction with their colleagues, workload, students' progress and emotional exhaustion (Antonioni et al., 2006).

4.9 Interactions between the female educators' home, work and community systems

There appears to be a strong interaction between the different systems of the individual. Educators often have to juggle numerous demands on them at any one time. This appears to impact greatly on their levels of stress. Participants have stated that this stress sometimes causes them to not perform as well as they should at school because they are constantly thinking of the many other tasks that they have yet to perform. In addition, the participants' various contexts appeared to converge and impact on each other thus becoming a great source of educator stress. This is despite the fact that the participants stated that they tried as much as possible not to take schoolwork home with them and not to let their home and community commitments influence their work. They appeared to feel that it was necessary as a stress management strategy to keep their different contexts separate:

P: And then of course you must remember, you don't just have [pause] a, you don't just teach, you don't just have your family. Then there's church, you know and, and you, you have cell group running ... There's so many different things that [are] happening at the same time. And it feels like your head is just about to burst. Because it's end of the term and um pastors are calling for certain things and there's something happening at church. There's something at school and there's something at home. So it can be very, very stressful. And then the time, um [pause], 'me' time, very little or hardly if ever there is any me time because you are so involved with everybody else's life ... you don't have time for you. You know, you actually don't have time for yourself. (PB, School A)

P: You know you're bringing your baggage with you because you have personal problems ... children's illnesses ... um [pause], living apart from a partner, from your, your husband. ... I've had a daughter who's been desperately ill on two occasions now ... where you are living in hospitals, living in hope. And I think um that, that, that, will affect you ... in any way your teaching career and sometimes also ... what you have to do for the children who suddenly are experiencing trauma themselves. (PH, School B)

P: That's now personal, because I'm, at the moment, I'm a single mum, so I've got my own kids to transport ... So it's for the last two years I'm on my own. ... Having an eighteen-year-old son, daughter's thirteen (laughs), it's not the easiest thing for (laughs) ... Um, ja and that's also adding on ... trying to keep it separate. Home stuff is home stuff but I mean you sit at school you think aarg this must happen today and this child needs to be there and (sigh) ... so that's also adding up. I mean we've got our lives. It's not, I mean you don't stop and start at school and stop and start at home you know.

R: So, so they sort of do in a way impact on each other?

P: It does yes, yes, yes. (PI, School B)

The participants' experience of home, work and community stress appears to confirm Holmes' (2005) finding that the ability to separate the demands of one's professional life from the demands of one's personal life may also lead to burnout which is caused by stress. It is due to the multidimensional role that the educator embraces and the struggle to balance all the different roles that contributes to their level of stress (Donald et al., 2002). Rout and Rout (2002) believe

that female educators' experiences of high levels of stress are due to the disproportionate share of household chores, with women having to do far more in the home than men. This is often due to the historical social roles ascribed to females.

4.10 Changes in the female educators attitudes to her profession

There were differences among the participants concerning whether they feel the same motivation and enjoyment of their careers as they did when they were starting out. However, more participants appeared to be just as excited about their careers as those who stated that they would like a change in career if their circumstances allowed it or who stated that if they had to choose again, they would choose not to become educators. For one educator, coping with the difficulties was compensated for by her enjoyment of the challenges:

R: So how are you able to juggle all of these ... different things?

P: It's, it's a lot ja but I won't do anything else. ... I enjoy this kind of thing. It's a challenge though. It's almost like you can't go without it. (PI, School B)

Other educators were less happy with their work situations and expressed disappointment that their dreams and expectations of the teaching profession were not fulfilled:

R: Ok, um, what did you think about um, teaching? So what did you expect your experiences of teaching are going to be (unclear).

P: I expected more time, more contact time with the children.

R: And has that been your experience?

P: No, no, no. Those, those are I think. I think what I actually mentioned was my disillusionment.

R: Ok

P: Ja. Those are the three things where I have been disillusioned over the years. And the admin that keeps changing, and the system that keeps changing and the syllabus that, that the curriculum that keeps changing. And then new laws come into it. And then corporal punishment was abolished, it's just a totally different to what it used to be. (PD, School A)

Another educator seemed very ambivalent about her profession, expressing that she does enjoy teaching but also expressing doubt about 'allowing' her son to become a teacher. She also expressed a willingness to leave teaching if something better came up.

R: And the ah experiences, did they match up to what you expected it?

P: Um, ja, to a certain extent ... but you don't always realize ... the other pressures and the discipline and you know, those kind of things. So in some ways it did you know, but in other ways it was you know very different ... You know I, if my son at one point told me that he was gonna be a teacher and I said under no circumstances will you be a teacher (laughs) ... just because I don't know that I would have chosen it again ... probably not but um, I can't say for sure but I probably would have looked at something else ... And as far as staying in teaching, I probably will... but just because first of all I couldn't stand to study again (laughs) and you know, I kind of have to, financially need to stay where I am. Unless something came up...that really interested me. You know and it could, you know, it would be an increase in salary or ... then I would definitely reconsider leaving ... I don't dislike it [her job]. I do enjoy it ... but there, there's a lot of things that I, you know wouldn't make me come back here. (PG, School B)

Given that Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) found a positive association between stress and the intention to leave one's job, it is not surprising that some educators feel that they would not choose education as a career if given the choice again. Research has shown that, over time, the educators' responses to stress may affect their long-term commitment to teaching (Nhundu, 1999; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

4.11 Conclusion

Overall, the research results appear to concur with various other studies concerning what female educators conceptualize as stressors, the impact that these stressors have on them physically and psychologically as well as what strategies help them to cope with their stress. In addition, the findings on the differences between high school and primary school educators and between male and female educators appear to be aligned with previous research studies.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to investigate whether female educator stress had an impact on job perception. The results showed that, in some cases, educator stress did indeed have a negative impact on female educator job perception, while for other female educators, a positive attitude concerning stress and their career ensured that they maintained the same motivation and enjoyment of their career as they did when they first entered the field.

There appeared to be a difference in the stress experienced by female educators who taught younger children, for example, in primary school compared to female educators who taught older children or those in high school. Largely, educators stated that the nature of the stress was different in the lower grades and the level of stress experienced was greater than that of high school educators.

There was also a perception amongst participants that male educators have a different experience of stress compared to female educators. Many of the female educators believed that although male educators also experienced stress, it was less than that experienced by female educators. The female educators believed this was due to a number of reasons, including different societal roles, difference in personalities and cultural differences on behalf of the learners in according respect to the educators.

Respect and power were historically and culturally given to men as they were often seen as having predominantly leadership roles in the home and in the workplace. Thus, men have often been ascribed more respect by society and were often seen as having more power than women who assumed roles that were viewed as being more menial. Women and children, historically, have been extremely disempowered. The societal view of the males assuming dominant roles requiring respect still persists today, especially in more traditional cultures such as the Zulu and the Muslim cultures, despite access to education and political movements promoting gender equality.

Female educator stress is also influenced by multiple roles they are expected to fulfill.

Traditionally, women were assigned domestic roles which were not ascribed very much power

and respect. Gender roles have changed somewhat due to the feminist movements among others; however, there has been only limited sharing of roles. Although many women are now employed full time, they often carry their 'traditional' domestic roles as well. Thus in many cases, women have had to adopt both domestic roles as well as roles traditionally seen as those of leadership, for example, in education. This has led women to have to juggle both these roles in order to maintain balance in their lives. This juggling of roles is what often leads to women experiencing high levels of stress.

5.1 Limitations of the study

In reflecting on the research project as a whole the following points can be noted:

Qualitative research cannot be generalized to contexts and situations other than the one that was studied. Thus it is difficult to be sure that the experiences of the ten female participant educators sampled here would be the same or similar to female educators of a similar demographic from other contexts. The study is only helpful therefore in highlighting the factors which potentially contribute to female educator stress and the potential differences of these amongst male and female and primary and high school educators, how this stress affects these particular educators, the strategies which they use to manage their stress and the potential consequences of these stressors on the participants' attitudes towards their careers.

The study only sampled ten participants, four coloured female educators and six white female educators. It may be useful to sample a larger group from more diverse contexts in order to better examine if context plays a role in educator stress and whether educators of different contexts view their careers in a similar way to those sampled in this study. In addition, it may also be useful to sample male educators to determine if there are indeed differences in their experience of stress compared to female educators.

5.2 Strengths of the study

This project used a qualitative research approach. This meant that it was aware that the participants were embedded in the world as well as in a specific context. As qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, naturalistic approaches to the world, this research project used extracts that were obtained from female educators in their own contexts to try and understand how they interpret and make sense of their stress and, more specifically, how that stress impacts on the attitudes that they have towards their careers. This meant that the true voices of the educators were heard and an in-depth, situated understanding of the phenomenon of female educator stress and its role in job perception was obtained by the researcher.

5.3 Implications of the study

This study highlighted the need for government and the Department of Education as a governmental organization to review the methods that they use to monitor the effectiveness of their educators. Large loads of administration and paperwork appear to decrease the amount of teaching time that educators have with their learners. In addition, the financial situation both in terms of educator salaries and school resources needs to be reviewed by the Department of Education. The low salaries that teachers receive are inadequate positive reinforces and motivators to ensure that educators consistently perform their jobs well. The constant strike action taken by educators for pay increases amongst other needs highlights the dissatisfaction of educators regarding this issue. It is essential that these issues of high administration task loads and poor salaries need to be explored as they impact on the quality of education that learners receive.

It has become increasingly apparent throughout this study that the multiple roles which educators embrace have adverse effects on their mental and physical health through stress. Although educators have experienced some level of psychological training in their educational studies, often they do not have adequate skills, time, and resources to effectively handle the multiple social challenges which learners face. The multiple roles which educators play increases their level of stress considerably and this area needs to be further explored in order to protect the educator as a valued asset of society.

Despite all of the challenges facing female educators, it would appear that many of them continue to remain positive about their careers and stress does not appear to have an impact on their attitudes towards their careers. There are a few, however, who have left the teaching field, wish to leave the field of education or are no longer as passionate or feel a bit disillusioned about the field. This needs to be explored further.

5.4 Implications for further research

It is important that further research be conducted in other contexts with participants of a different demographic to distinguish if there are similarities between their experiences and those of the educators in this study. It is important to ascertain whether culture plays a role in educator experiences of stress and attitudes towards their career. It is also important that studies be conducted to explore what factors make some female educators more resilient compared to others. This would help put in place strategies and processes that help female educators to manage their stress better and, in so doing, perhaps ensuring that they remain motivated and positive in their attitudes around their work. This has implications for schools and learners as more motivated and more effective educators leads to a better quality of education.

Factors around the age of the educator and the number of years that she has spent teaching also need to be explored further to determine the impact that these factors have on the stress levels of the female educator and thus her perception of her career and job satisfaction.

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Appendix A



To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Celeste Matross, a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I'm currently in my Masters year studying Psychology. As part of this course I am required to conduct and report on a research project. I write to you because I am very interested in using a sample of your educators in this research.

Objective of this study

The objective of this study is to explore the influence of female educators' experiences of psychosocial and contextual stressors on their perceptions of their work as educators. It is hypothesized that the many changes in the South African education policy and in the South African context as a whole has resulted in an increase in the demand for qualified, competent teachers. However, educators face high stress in their work especially in regards to their changing roles. It is therefore useful to explore the interaction of psycho-social stressors and their impact on the educators, especially in regards to how they perceive their job. Research in South Africa has shown that educators experience the highest levels of occupational stress compared to any other profession. Stress not only affects the people experiencing it, but also the schools in which they work. This study will explore what factors educators perceive as impacting on their role and job stress.

Research Process: Methods, Participants, Time, and Place.

To achieve the desired ends of this project, it is hoped that 6 or 7 educators from your school might be allowed to volunteer to take part in this research. These educators would be required to take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher of this project. During these interviews, participants will be asked to answer a series of questions and discuss issues around the topic of this research. This process will be closely monitored, but it is not expected that any of these questions or issues will distress or negatively impact on these participants. A copy of the proposed schedule to be used in these interviews can be made available to yourself and any other relevant parties at your school. It is anticipated that each of these interviews will take no longer than 60 minutes each.

The researcher of this project understands and respects the heavy commitments and pressures educators are faced with. Accordingly, it is proposed that these interviews take place at your school, and at a time (during or after school hours) that is convenient for participants, and your school. I would be interested in conducting this research as soon as possible.

Ethics:

A proposal outlining the purpose and nature of this research has already been submitted, and gained clearance from, an internal ethics review board at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Participating learners will be required to sign a consent form. This form will outline what is required of participants, the researcher's intentions, as well as the rights of both participants and the researcher during the research process.

Each interview will be recorded on audiotape. However, five years after the completion of this research, these will be destroyed. The information gathered during this process will be presented in a report. This report will be submitted for marking and made available for consideration amongst members of the University community. A copy of this report will be made available to yourself and participants. In this report, the identity of your school and the participating learners will remain strictly anonymous.

Although the researcher of this project respects the importance of confidentiality, and will make every attempt to keep the information gathered during this process confidential, confidentiality is

limited. If participants disclose information during this process that ethically demands the researcher to notify relevant authorities, confidentiality will be abandoned.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could give this proposal some thought, and respond with your school's decision as soon as possible.

Yours Faithfully,

Celeste Matross

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PSYCHOLOGY MASTERS RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FORM

1. I..... hereby consent to participate in a research study exploring the effect of psychosocial stressors on educators' perceptions of their occupation.
2. I have been fully informed of what is required of me and enter into the research study with a full understanding of what it entails.
3. I am aware that if I wish to withdraw from the study at any time, I am free to do so.
4. I am aware that the information shared during the research study will be kept confidential and no identifying characteristics of the participants will be used in the dissemination of the data.

SIGNATURE: _____

WITNESS: _____

DATE: _____