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Research Article

Mental Disasters: A Case of a South African Education Sector, Thaba Nchu High School, Free State, South Africa

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Abstract

This study was conducted in one of the schools in Thaba Nchu region in Free State Province in South Africa, where 21 teachers were given questionnaires to complete in order to assess their work-related stress which give rise to mental illness. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were followed in order to determine major sources of stress and to calculate the stress vulnerability index. Findings revealed that teachers' majors sources of stress emanate from large number of learners in classes which lead to poor academic performance as well as large number of learners progressed into next classes without necessarily passing their previous grades. The vulnerability index was found to be 0.4925 which indicated that truly teachers prone to stress effects which might adversely impact on their health status.

Keywords: *Vulnerability; Disaster; Worked-Related Stress*

Introduction and Background

World health organization (WHO) states that there are presently 450 million people in the world that are affected by mental/neurological disorders and that mental ill-health is likely to be a major cause of death in 2020 [1]. Moreover, South Africa ranks seventh (7^{th}) highest prevalence in mental disorders [1]. Education is one of the sectors affected by stress and educators have vital role to play in the effectiveness of the school system [2]. South African education curriculum changed from report 550 (1997, C2005, NCS (2002) and finally to NCS (CAPS) (2012), in this manner different roles and responsibilities by both learners and teachers are implied [3]. The current curriculum (CAPS) is not different from NSC except that it came as an amendment so that the curriculum is accessible to educators and in this curriculum, details of what to teach and assess are stipulated unlike in the NSC where a teacher would decide what to teach based on outcomes resulting in differences in learners when they moved to other schools [4]. Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) came as response to four main concerns two of which are; teachers being overburdened by administration and poor performance of leaners [3]. Contrary to this above statement, a learner may only be retained once in a Further Education and Training phase (FET) and multiple repetition of grades 10 and 11 should not be used for keeping purposes and such repeating learners must receive appropriate support in the subsequent grades [5]. Has teachers' administration really decreased as proposed by CAPS? Most schools in the Free State Province are in their first or second year of the implementation of this new "learners progression law". Mathematics and Physical science are lowest performed subjects at the national level in grade 12 in 2013 examination [6,7]. This study proposes to assess the extent to which teachers are vulnerable to mental illness induced by worked-related stress which may lead to disasters, through calculation of work-related stress vulnerability index.

Research Objectives

- Determine sources of stress of teachers
- Demine the extent to which teachers are vulnerable to work-related stress through vulnerability index calculations.

Review of Literature

Hazard is defined as a potential source of harm to people that has adverse effects their health [8]. Work-related stress in this study is considered as hazard to educators' health and it is defined as a response people might have when faced with pressures and work demands that do not match their knowledge and abilities which challenge their ability to cope [9]. The following equation links hazard and vulnerability. Vulnerability is defined as diminished capacity of group, system, or individual to cope with, resist and recover from impacts of natural or man-made hazards [10]. A disaster risk is potential losses, in lives, health status, livelihoods, assets and services, which could occur to a particular community or a society over some specified future time period [11].

Disaster risk = hazard X Vulnerability

Conceptual Framework

This study used Bohle's Vulnerability model as conceptual framework, which views vulnerability as having both external and internal structure.

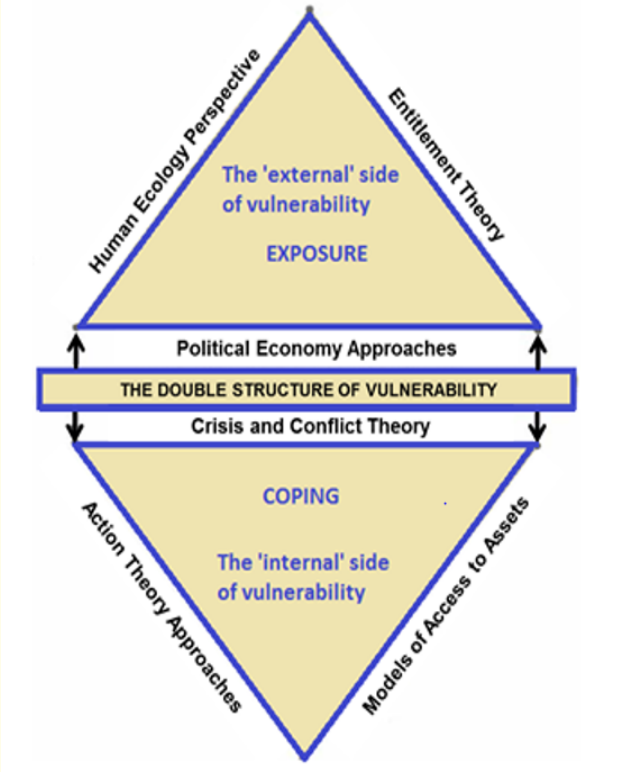

Figure 1: *Bohle's Vulnerability model. Source: (Birkmann, 2006).*

Political economy

South African constitution and South African School Act emphasize the issues of equal access to quality education, equal facilities and opportunities by all learners [12]. He continues to say that some areas lack infrastructure such as, classrooms, water and electricity, land telephone lines, internet and public libraries and these are directly linked to socio-economic issues such as poverty and unemployment owing to the apartheid education system that favoured whites through funding and resources leaving blacks disadvantaged. Moyo [13] also adds on the above to say that as of 2011, 14% of South African public schools had no electricity, 10% no water supplies, 46% used pit latrines, 90% no computer centres, 93% no libraries and 95% had no science laboratories.

Human ecology

Free State Province ranks third lowest in terms of percentage of qualified educators that is at 96% with a learner-Educator Ratio (LER) of 27.1 in 2012 (Department of basic education, 2013:54). There is high competition amongst parents in accessing certain schools in South Africa and these are former white schools (Model C) where resources are not a problem and powerful networks emerge. In these schools, high performing learners are attracted and pay quite astronomical fees. The average number of learners in class is comparatively low to that in rural areas where there are 116 learners per class as well as shortage of qualified teachers and lack of funds [13]. Naidoo., *et al*. [14] indicates that several studies show that educators experience high levels of occupational stress from learners recalcitrance, excessive demands on teachers as well as high numbers of leaners in classes.

Coping strategies against stress by teachers

In a study conducted by Semra [2] in Turkey the following strategies were found prominent; blaming of other people, distance from everything, smoking of cigarettes, use of sedative drugs and drinking of alcohol. Similarly, Richards [15] in his study in United States of America (USA), California, teachers exhibited the same coping strategies against stress such as, drinking of alcohol to keep calmer and taking a day off when stress level escalates.

Methodology

Data collection: Data collection was by means a questionnaires that were self-administered to teachers.

Sampling: This study was carried out in one High school in Thaba Nchu region that consisted of 30 educators, out whom 21 were randomly selected to partake in the study. The sample composed of 4 HoD's and 1 deputy Principal.

Ethical considerations: The principal of the school was approached for permission and teachers were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could choose not to fill the questionnaires. Data collected was recorded in Microsoft Excel and In SPSS for analysis, where frequency tables and charts were used to display results.

Part of the data collection instrument contained work-related stress vulnerability indicators which were scored on a four-point likert-scale for vulnerability index calculations. Firstly, scores were recorded as percentages and later the scores were normalised.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows both age and gender at the study area, in which majority of the respondents were those above 46 years old. Culo [16] shows that vulnerability increases with age and gender.

Age and gender	Female	Male	Grand Total
21 - 25	1	2	3
26 - 30	2	3	5
31 - 35		2	2
36 - 40		1	1
41 - 45	2		2
46+	6	2	8
Grand Total	11	10	21

Table 1: *Age and gender.*

The average number of learners in a class is 30, however figure 2, that many classes consist of 51 - 60 learners in class which is quite an overload for teacher to effectively.

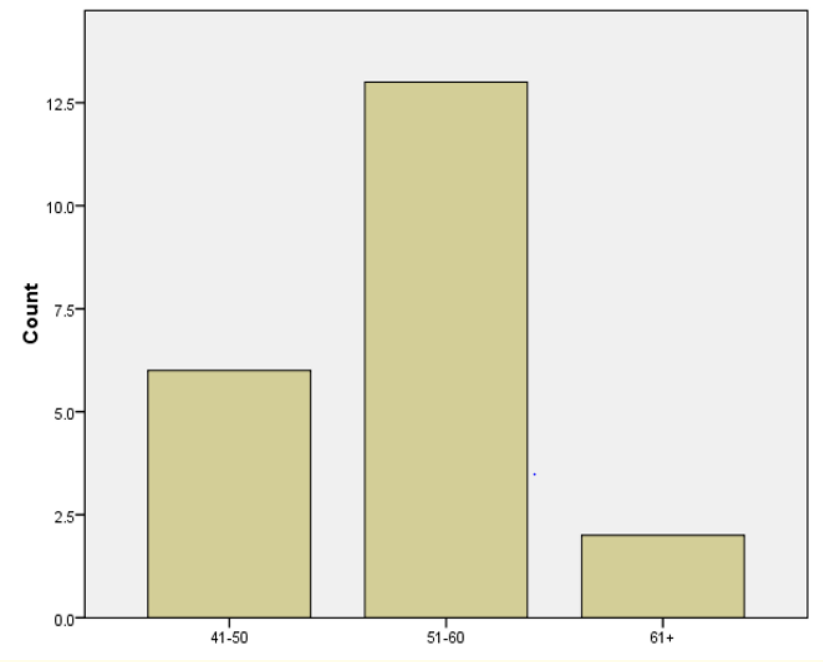

Figure 2: *Number of leaners in class.*

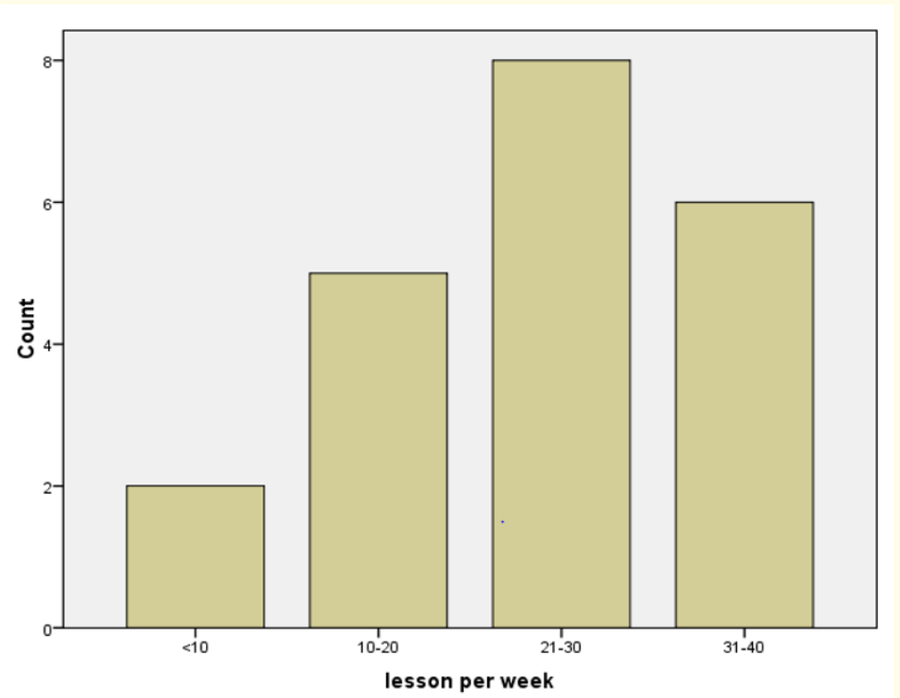

Figure 3: *Lessons per week.*

Teachers are expected to teach about 30 lessons per, however; the above figure shows that teachers at this school are allocated moderate number of lessons per week.

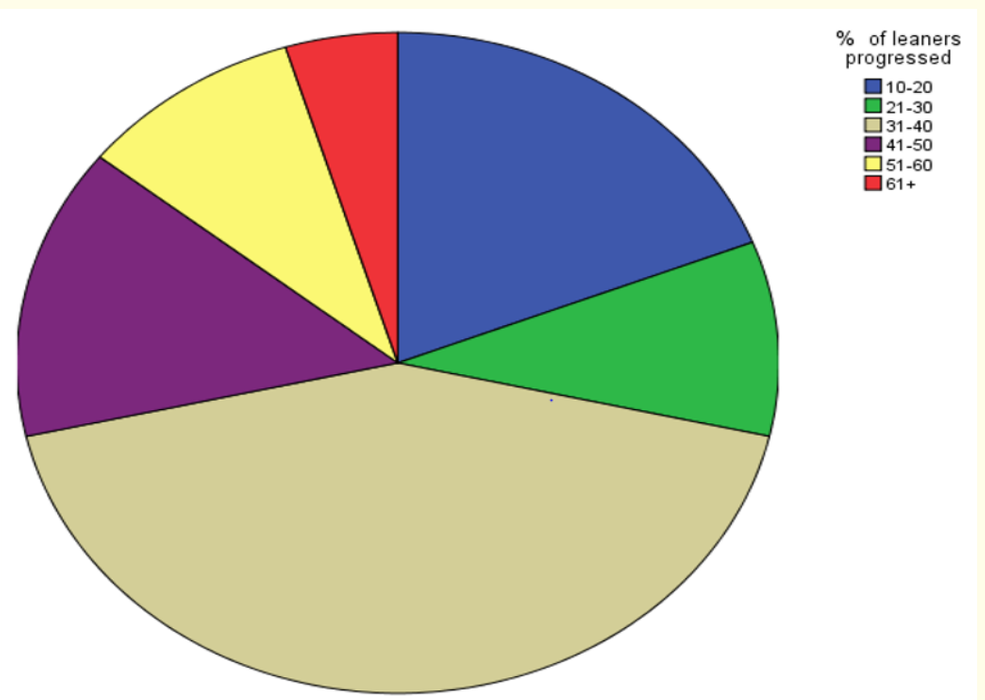

Figure 4: *Progressed number of learners into subsequent classes.*

31 - 40 learners were progressed into subsequent classes, which have probably caused problems of overgrowing.

Functional relationship with vulnerability	
Work demands	
Work control	
Relationships	
Roles	
Changes	
Support	
Coping capacity	

Table 2: *Indicator Functional relationship with vulnerability.*

The above table shows the effect on vulnerability, ⇈ shows that vulnerability increases with increase in indicator, while ⇅ indicates indicator has a decreasing effect on vulnerability.

Raw Indicators Scores in %						
Work demands	**Work control**	**Relationships**	**Roles**	**Changes**	**Support**	**Coping capacity**
51	44	25	28	33	33	58
63	53	83	53	55	92	48
60	56	56	44	40	39	36
60	61	61	53	55	47	82
97	100	100	100	100	100	70
56	50	50	50	48	50	76
71	81	78	91	65	78	73
50	61	64	119	60	72	45
64	58	47	53	53	58	48
71	94	83	109	88	94	45
69	83	75	78	65	81	61
64	75	81	81	68	81	61
60	56	58	66	53	56	45
58	58	64	72	90	69	42
78	39	61	66	63	78	36
96	36	58	63	60	42	39
78	42	69	47	73	44	27
56	72	72	50	70	47	30
57	64	83	72	65	58	33
72	61	86	100	533	56	39
76	83	69	81	63	64	45

Table 3: *Raw indicators scores in %.*

Work demands	Work control	Relationships	Roles	Changes	Support	Coping capacity	Sum of scores	Average scores
0.030	0.132	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.444	0.607	0.087
0.266	0.262	0.778	0.349	0.336	0.883	0.609	3.483	0.498
0.207	0.306	0.407	0.219	0.112	0.095	0.830	2.176	0.311
0.207	0.392	0.481	0.349	0.336	0.220	0.003	1.989	0.284
1.005	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.007	1.007	0.224	6.243	0.892
0.118	0.219	0.333	0.306	0.224	0.261	0.113	1.574	0.225
0.443	0.696	0.704	0.870	0.485	0.676	0.169	4.042	0.577
0.000	0.392	0.519	1.260	0.410	0.593	0.664	3.839	0.548
0.296	0.349	0.296	0.349	0.299	0.386	0.609	2.583	0.369
0.443	0.913	0.778	1.130	0.821	0.925	0.664	5.674	0.811
0.414	0.740	0.667	0.696	0.485	0.717	0.389	4.107	0.587
0.296	0.609	0.741	0.740	0.522	0.717	0.389	4.014	0.573
0.207	0.306	0.444	0.523	0.299	0.344	0.664	2.787	0.398
0.177	0.349	0.519	0.609	0.858	0.551	0.720	3.783	0.540
0.591	0.045	0.481	0.523	0.448	0.676	0.830	3.594	0.513
0.975	0.002	0.444	0.479	0.410	0.137	0.775	3.222	0.460
0.591	0.089	0.593	0.262	0.597	0.178	0.995	3.305	0.472
0.118	0.566	0.630	0.306	0.560	0.220	0.940	3.339	0.477
0.148	0.436	0.778	0.609	0.485	0.386	0.885	3.726	0.532
0.473	0.392	0.815	1.000	0.306	0.344	0.775	4.105	0.586
0.561	0.740	0.593	0.740	0.448	0.468	0.664	4.214	0.602

Table 4: *Normalised indicators scores.*

The vulnerability index was calculated from simple average of normalised scores and was found to be 0.4925 which is approximately 0.5.

Rating scale as proposed in Iyengar and Sudanrshan's method of vulnerability index calculation:

- 0 < VI < 0.2: Less vulnerable
- 0.2 < VI <0.4: Moderately vulnerable
- 0.4 < VI < 0.6: Vulnerable
- 0.6 < VI < 0.8: Highly vulnerable
- 0.8 < VI < 1: Very highly vulnerable

Findings

From the above results it is evident that teachers stress is mainly contributed by large number of leaners in the classrooms which hinder control of leaners' work as well as paying attention to individual learners. On the other hand, the progressed learners have contributed a lot to teachers stress as this type of learners need special attention since they have not passed their previous grades. This is also exacerbated by increased administration of teacher since every teacher is expected to develop what is Subject Improvement Plan (SIP) that stipulated how and when each learner's academic performance will be improved, this with large class sizes and more learners progressed becomes a difficulty that translates into stress. The Stress Vulnerability was calculated to be 0.4925 or 0.5 which is within a "vulnerable" range.

Conclusion

If the learners' progression is to be a success, the government ought to decrease the number of lessons per week in order to cater for teachers to give these learners more attention, decrease class sizes to be more manageable.

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