



## Stressors of Township Secondary School Teachers: A Management Issue

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**KEYWORDS** Teacher Stress. Learner Performance. School Management Teams

**ABSTRACT** The purpose of this paper is to determine the role of School Management Teams (SMTs) in the stress situation of township secondary school teachers. A study was conducted to determine factors which caused stress for township secondary school teachers. A six-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed and administered to 368 teachers from 36 township secondary schools situated in the Free State Province. A qualitative approach was used to determine the role of SMTs in the stressors of township secondary school teachers. Once the stressors were determined, they were ranked in terms of impact or severity – from the most stressful to the least stressful. Only the highest 30 stressors were considered in this paper. The main stressors were: poor learner performance, poor learner discipline and poor parental involvement in school matters. It was also found that 20 of the 30 stressors were the SMTs' responsibility, six were the parents', three were DBE's (Department of Basic Education), and one was the responsibility of both parents and the SMTs. It was concluded that SMTs of the schools surveyed were still unable to adequately address factors causing stress for teachers in their schools. It is recommended that SMTs should be developed, and then be held accountable for the poor performance of schools.

### INTRODUCTION

The management of schools is generally a complex matter. It is influenced by factors such as the size of the school buildings, the curriculum, funding, staffing and enrolment figures (Blommaert et al. 2006). It, therefore, requires well-trained people to manage schools. The management training, work experience and the leadership qualities of the school managers could play an important role in the management of schools (DeChurch et al. 2010). Lam et al. (2012) state that ineffective school administration leads to a chaotic school environment. In the South African school system the management of schools is undertaken by the School Management Teams (SMTs), which are composed of the school principal, the deputy principal(s) and the Head(s) of Department. The SMTs in the majority of township schools are generally ineffective (Mathonsi 2006). A number of reasons are cited for the poor management of township schools. These reasons include the apartheid system and its impact on schooling, lack of training for school managers, lack of resources, and overcrowding (Jansen 2003; Selod and Zenou 2003). The poor management of township schools may contribute negatively to effective teaching and learning, and may also lead to higher stress levels among township school teachers.

The *apartheid* system ensured that education provision for Blacks was inferior in terms of

content, facilities and funding (Lam et al. 2012). Consequently, poor school management, high failure rates and uninviting school environments were common in the township schools. However, since 1994 the democratic government made some efforts to reverse the injustices promoted by the *apartheid* government. These efforts included the passing of legislation counteracting the unjust practices of the past, making more resources and funding available for education, and encouraging the involvement of parents in the governance of schools (Lewis and Naidoo 2006; Spreen and Vally 2006). The township schools benefited enormously from these changes. The question is whether the SMTs of township schools recognised these opportunities and used them to improve their situation, or they were simply complacent with underperformance and dysfunctionality.

The purpose of this article is to identify the highest 30 stressors of township secondary school teachers, and to determine the role of the SMTs in promoting or prohibiting these stressors.

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

The quantitative approach was used to determine the stressors of township secondary school teachers, and to rank these stressors from the most stressful to the least stressful. The quali-

tative approach was used to determine the role of the SMTs in the stress situation of the township secondary school teachers. This was done by considering all factors around a particular stressor. School policies, DBE's regulations, the South African Schools Act and good management principles were considered in order to determine the person or institution responsible for addressing the particular stressor.

### Population and Sample

The population for this study was Free State township secondary school teachers. The sample comprised 368 randomly selected teachers from 36 township secondary schools of the Free State Province. The sample was made up of 202 female teachers and 166 male teachers.

### Instrument

A six-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed. The questionnaires were left at the school for distribution by the principal or the designated Head of Department. They were collected after a week. The items in the questionnaire required teachers' personal information, their workloads and their stressors. The items that dealt with the stressors of township secondary school teachers were 115.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was both quantitative and qualitative. Descriptive statistics, particularly the means, were used to rank stressors. The means for each stressor was calculated. On the basis of these means, the stressors were ranked hierarchically from the highest stressor to the lowest stressor. The processes of determining which person or institution was responsible for each stressor, and the role of the SMTs in each stressor, were mainly qualitative. By considering all factors around each stressor, the person or institution responsible for addressing that particular stressor was determined. For instance, for the item 'Learners dodging classes' the researcher considered the following: the situations which could be viewed as the dodging of classes by learners; the weaknesses within the school which made the dodging of classes by learners possible; the actions which would be needed to correct these weaknesses, and the person or in-

stitution responsible for correcting these weaknesses. The process required the consideration of school policies, regulations of the DBE and good management principles.

### Ethical Issues

Participation in this study was voluntary. The participants were also assured that data collected would be kept strictly confidential, and only used for the purpose of this study. The participants were also requested not to write their names or those of their schools anywhere on the questionnaire. The participants also agreed to complete the questionnaire in writing.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 indicates the item hierarchy of the highest 30 stressors of township secondary school teachers, their means, as well as people or institutions responsible for dealing with each stressor.

Table 1 indicates that of the 30 highest stressors of township secondary school teachers, 20 could be a direct responsibility of schools and their SMTs; six could be handled by parents; three could be handled by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), and one could be a joint responsibility between parents and the SMTs. For the purpose of this study, the responsible person or institution is viewed as those having, at their disposal, the power and the means to eliminate the stressors or to reduce the negative impact of the stressors.

Each of the persons or institutions responsible is discussed below.

### SMTs' Stressors

As indicated above, 20 of the 30 stressors are the direct responsibility of schools and their SMTs. The major stressors in this category are related to poor learner performance and poor learner discipline.

Good learner performance is the main purpose of schooling which all learners should strive to achieve. In order for learners to perform well, schools need to make circumstances conducive for effective teaching and learning, and to have motivation and support systems which encourage teachers and learners to fulfil their mandates (Yamauchi 2011). However,

**Table 1: Item hierarchy for individual stressors**

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Item number</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
1	5	Learners' reluctance to do their school work	5.19	SMTs
2	98	Parents' lack of control over their child	5.12	Parents
3	21	Learners dodging lessons	5.03	SMTs,
4	22	Having to push/drive learners into class after break	4.99	SMTs
5	17	Poor learner performance	4.94	SMTs
6	4	Poor involvement of parents in school matters	4.90	Parents
7	97	Learners experimenting with and using alcohol and drugs	4.89	Parents
8	33	Cold classrooms and staffrooms	4.80	SMTs
9	16	Poor learner discipline	4.79	SMTs
10	34	Bad smell from blocked sewerage pipes and rubbish dumps	4.70	SMTs
11	96	Learners coming to school with no proper uniforms	4.68	Parents
12	23	Noise from neighbouring classes and corridors	4.67	SMTs
13	2	Too many learners in a class	4.67	DBE
14	111	Parents who expect teachers to work miracles with their children	4.64	Parents
15	115	Children using foul language or being impolite	4.64	SMTs
16	1	My salary	4.55	DBE
17	107	Lack of adequate discipline policies	4.52	SMTs
18	72	The principal's inability to deal with lazy teachers	4.49	SMTs
19	13	Theft of school property such as video machines, stoves, TV's	4.48	SMTs
20	90	The principal's reluctance to discipline misbehaving learners	4.47	SMTs
21	112	Parents' unrealistic expectations of their child's learning ability	4.47	Parents
22	77	The actual teaching starts late every year	4.43	SMTs
23	12	Vandalism of school property	4.43	SMTs
24	20	Teaching learners who are actively involved in crime	4.41	SMTs, Parents
25	61	Poor working conditions in school	4.37	SMTs
26	57	Inadequate staffrooms, personal work places and storage facilities	4.35	DBE
27	32	Poor lighting and ventilation	4.30	SMTs
28	51	Anxiety over my learners' tests or examinations and results	4.29	SMTs
29	78	The struggle to get through the curriculum in time	4.28	SMTs,
30	54	Time pressure	4.26	SMTs

teaching and learning are not effective in many township secondary schools, and good performance is not adequately recognised (Dahar and Faize 2011). The DBE has in place the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), which is an appraisal system by which teachers are evaluated by colleagues and members of the SMTs. Those found to have performed well are rewarded with a salary increase of one percent of their annual salaries (Mathonsi 2006). However, the implementation of this system in many schools is subjected to abuse and favouritism: SMTs use it to punish those who are viewed as stubborn, and to reward friends (De Clerq 2008). Consequently, the IQMS cannot serve as a motivation for educators due to the SMTs failure to ensure fairness in the implementation of the system.

Learner discipline is a major problem in the township secondary schools. The township secondary school learners go through the difficult stage of adolescence; some are involved in crime, while others experiment with drugs (Kiri 2011;

Pahad 2010). These learners need to be treated with understanding and firmness. Disciplinary measures have to be in place to deal with cases of ill-discipline; and support mechanisms also have to be in place to deal with troubled adolescents. However, in the township secondary schools the levels of gangsterism, bullying and drug trafficking are high (Bailey 2008; Pahad 2010). The high level of these criminal activities could be an indication that the SMTs are not doing enough to adequately deal with these problems in their schools.

The issues such as bad smell from blocked sewerage systems, vandalism of school property, poor lighting and uninviting physical environments may be addressed through proper budgeting. The quintile system has classified most township schools as poor schools (between quintiles 1 and 3), and, thus, qualifying for high subsidies per learner per annum (Hall and Giese 2009). This implies that many township schools receive huge financial allocations which they could use to address some of the problem they

experience (Giese et al. 2009; Kajee and Chudgar 2009). However, many township schools are unable to effectively deal with problems mentioned above. The problem could be the lack of financial management skills (capacity) by members of the SMTs in the township schools (Hall and Giese 2009; Wildeman 2008). The school principals, their deputy principals and Heads of Department were not appointed to management positions on the basis of their management acumen, but on other grounds such as many years of teaching, production of good results and high qualifications (November et al. 2010). The lack of adequate management skills by members of the SMT implies that planning may be poor and expenditure may be uneconomical. Consequently, stressors which could be adequately addressed through school budgets may not receive the necessary attention.

The stressors related to time pressure were also experienced by township school teachers. The stressors related to time pressure could be the result of poor planning of activities, as well as failure of teachers to meet due dates. The SMTs could avoid time pressure on teachers by ensuring that all the school's activities, including school functions, tests, sports and all academic activities are captured in the school programme; while support and regular reminders are provided to teachers to ensure compliance with the school programme. Many township schools do not have a functional school programme, and school operations and activities happen in a haphazard and disorganised manner (November et al. 2010).

The stressors related to the loss of school equipment due to theft could also be addressed through the school budget. For instance, budgeting for fencing, employing security companies and using security cameras could go a long way in the safeguarding of school property. The safety of the school premises could also ensure the safety of learners and teachers – and thus eliminate stressors related to safety. However, many township schools do not have these safety features – despite that many schools can afford some of the basic safety features.

### **Parents' Stressors**

Parents were directly responsible for six of the 30 stressors, and together with SMTs, they were (jointly) responsible for one of the 30 stressors.

These stressors included issues such as parents' poor control over their children, parents' poor involvement in school matters and parents' unrealistic expectations of their children's abilities.

Prior to 1996, corporal punishment had been the main form of disciplining children in the African homes and schools (Du Bois 2002). The South African Constitution emphasises children's rights, including children's protection from any form of abuse. The administration of corporal punishment is viewed as abuse, and it is thus prohibited. The banning of corporal punishment in the homes and schools removed from parents and teachers a weapon viewed as most effective in dealing with ill-discipline among children (Morrel 2001). Consequently, the majority of township school parents blame the abolition of corporal punishment for their failure to instil discipline in their children. The implication is that township school parents cannot help teachers in disciplining their children. This situation may contribute to poor discipline among learners in the township schools.

The majority of learners in the township schools have parents who are generally poor and illiterate (Sibiya 2004; Vally 2005). The illiteracy or low level of education of township school parents may also contribute enormously to children's ill-discipline, parents' unrealistic expectations, parents' poor involvement in school matters and learners' not doing their homework. Illiterate parents believe that their children know better when it comes to school matters. Consequently, these children may take advantage of their parents' illiteracy and ignorance by behaving in deceitful ways (such as not doing their homework, going to school late, not wearing proper uniform and lying about school matters). Mpeti (2000) found that uneducated parents were less concerned with school issues, but were mainly concerned with acquiring basics such as food, shelter and clothing. Therefore, due to their illiteracy, township school parents may not be able to effectively motivate and pressurise their children to academically perform, and to behave properly in school.

The SMTs may not be responsible for what children do at home, nor for parents' failure to instil discipline in their children. However, proper handling of issues such as learners' not

doing their homework and arriving late for school may reduce or eliminate such behaviour among learners. The surprise visits to schools by government officials and politicians revealed that up to 60% of school learners and teachers came to school late, learners did not wear proper uniform and learners carried weapons to school (Abramjee 2012; Citizen 2012). If these matters could be effectively handled by members of the SMTs, learners would behave properly, with the possibility of increasing attendance and academic performance. Therefore, effective SMTs could make up for poor parental control of children.

### DBE's Stressors

The DBE is directly responsible for three stressors, viz. poor salaries, overcrowding and inadequate facilities. With regard to salaries, it was found that South African teachers' salaries compared favourably with those of teachers in other developing countries; and were in line with the qualifications individual teachers held (Foca and Worst 2008). Nevertheless, township school teachers still felt that their salaries were not adequate, and this could contribute to their stress situation.

Township schools are known for serious shortages of resources and facilities (Blaser 2008; Hall and Giese 2009). The issue of overcrowding could be a direct result of shortages of teachers, classrooms and equipment. For instance, the official teacher-learner ratio is 1:35 for secondary schools; however, the actual number of learners per teacher is 40 or higher in many township secondary schools (Yamauchi 2010). Dahar and Faize (2011) found that lower teacher-learner ratios produce higher levels of academic performance. Therefore, overcrowding and lack of equipment could be the reason for the high failure rate in many township schools.

### CONCLUSION

From the discussion above it is clear that the learners' performance and the parents' role in the education of their children played an important role in the stress situation of teachers in the schools surveyed. Learners' reluctance to do their schoolwork, learners' dodging of classes, having to push (force) learners into classes (es-

pecially in the mornings and after breaks) and learners' poor performance were ranked 1,3,4, and 5 respectively; while parents' lack of control over their children, and poor parents' involvement in school matters were ranked 2 and 6 respectively. The implication is that learner performance, learner discipline and the parents' involvement in school matters were viewed as very important by teachers of the schools surveyed. Therefore, any problem with these issues contributed enormously to the stress situation of teachers in the schools surveyed.

It is clear that the abilities of members of the SMTs to effectively manage schools and school finances could go a long way in making schools functional. However, the indication is that SMTs of the schools surveyed have failed to adequately address the majority of factors which caused stress for township teachers in these schools – despite that they had the power and means to do so. The failure of SMTs to manage schools effectively has had negative implications on the welfare of teachers and learners. It is important that the Ministry of Basic Education starts holding SMTs responsible for the poor management of schools. It is no longer acceptable to use the deficiencies and injustices of the *apartheid* government as defence against the poor management of township schools.

It was also surprising to find that most of the stressors were not new (they had been there for a number of years before), and that they mainly originated from within the schools. It was, therefore, expected that SMTs would be in a position to deal with these stressors. However, this was not the case. The conclusion is that the SMTs of the schools surveyed have not improved enough to adequately address these stressors. This could be an indication of a lack of innovative and radical management by SMTs in the township schools, and a lack of effective intervention by the Department of Basic Education.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The main reason for dysfunctionality of many township schools is the SMTs lack of management skills. It would be advisable to provide members of the SMTs with effective management training. Once members of the SMTs have undergone management training, they could be subjected to performance management contracts. The performance management contracts would

emphasise the importance of performing and of meeting objectives. The contracts would also help the DBE to regularly monitor schools and to hold members of the SMTs liable for poor management of schools.

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