

Demographic Variables, Work-Stimulated Stressors and Coping Strategies of Pre-school Educators: A Concept Paper

C. I. O. Okeke, J. Shumba, S. Rembe and N. Sotuku

Faculty of Education, University of Fort Hare, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT This paper reflects on the initial literature reviewed in the course of an on-going research. The motivation resonates from the researchers' initial findings on the paucity of stress research within the context of early childhood education (ECE) in South Africa. Reviewed literature suggests that information about the events of stress associated with the teachers' race, age, marital status, gender, qualifications and location of school remains very scanty. No empirical study was found to have jointly taken-up these demographic variables in a single study. Although plethora of literature exists on stress coping strategies among teachers in general, no literature was found on coping strategies among preschool educators. In the absence of data from a single study on the association of stress and teachers' demographic variables, it would be difficult to reflect on how these variables put together impact on how particular teachers may be coping with stressful events at work.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of early childhood is context bound. Porter (2014) claims early childhood refers to the period from birth to 5 years of age. Britto et al. (2011) have a different view as they refer to early childhood as a period from birth to 8 years. However, the White Paper on Education and Training (DoE 1995) and the Interim Policy for early childhood development (ECD) (DoE 1996:3) contend that ECD is "an umbrella term which applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least 9 years grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially". Another dimension proffered by Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (DoE 2001:7) is that in South Africa ECD is "a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to 9 years with active participation of practitioners, their parents and other caregivers". South African Children's Act 38 of 2005 (DoJ 2006) definition differs from the White Paper definition as it refers to ECD as "...the process of emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development from birth to school-going age" (Chapter 6: Section 91:1).

ECD is therefore a multi-sectoral initiative, with a focus on the full range of sectors which

impact the child's development, including health, nutrition, education and social protection. Similarly, Sutton (2009) and Canter and Brumer (2012) view early childhood development (ECD) as the initial stage whereby lifelong growth, development and learning are created. This shows adequate attention should be given to ECD to lay a firm foundation for the young learners. It was therefore important for the researchers to investigate the link between demographic variables, work-stimulated stressors and coping strategies of preschool educators through the on-going larger study. This paper therefore aims to rationalize the urgency for further studies in this area of research.

THE CONCEPT OF STRESS

Stress is one of the main problems affecting workers today the world over. However, although this phenomenon is well-known and has also received huge research attention, it nonetheless remains very difficult to define. According to Onchwari (2009: 391) "stress is the non-specific response of a human body to any demand made upon it. The situation is considered stressful when the demands to cope exceed an individual's ability to cope". Stress must be understood as that unavoidable aspect of our everyday work life and even the individuals' domestic situations. Austin et al. (2005) contend that stress is the totality of the responses to the individual's environmental demands and pressures. Stress is also a combination of physio-

Address for correspondence:
Prof. C.I.O. Okeke
E-mail: cokeke@ufh.ac.za

logical and psychological reactions that negatively affect individuals as a result of the conditions in their environment (Samad 2010; Okeke and Dlamini 2013; Dlamini et al. 2014; Okeke et al. 2014). It should be noted that stress is individualistic and situational as an individual reacts to a situation in a unique way different from another and contexts determine one's reaction to stress.

Teacher Stress

Many studies have shown that teaching is a very emotional, difficult and complex work (Burchielli and Bartram 2006; Dlamini et al. 2014). Teacher stress has been a subject of attention for many years. Teaching appears to be one occupation with the highest incidences of stress (Mintz 2007) and ranks among the most stressful occupation in the world. Studies equally show that teaching experiences stress more frequently than any other profession (Froeschle and Crews 2010). Teacher stress has been conceptualised by Lhospital and Gregory (2009: 1099) "as an outcome variable, a measure of a teacher's psychological distress in response to a stressor". Kyriacou (2001) defines stress as the degree of mismatch between the demands made upon an individual and the individual's ability to cope with the demands. Research suggests that teacher stress can have significant effect on the teacher performance and can equally impact on the learners' performance (Schaubman et al. 2011). Teacher stress can also impact on teacher collegial relationship (Mkhize 2002; Kyriacou and Chien 2004; Mintz 2007; de Witt and Lessing 2013). Teacher stress when left unattended may significantly impact the health of the teacher (Burchielli and Bartram 2006; Azizi et al. 2007). Different studies have identified the following panoply of causes of teacher stress: an unhealthy school climate; management of learner discipline; school management practices; high workload; resource constraints; redeployment of teachers; low remuneration; low status of the teaching profession; interpersonal conflicts; changes in curricula and the resultant new skills required in dealing with new curricula; physical aspects of the school environment, such as noise and poor ventilation; role ambiguity, fear of failure (Department of Social Development 2005; Bennel and Akyeampong 2007; Ballet and Kelchtermans 2009; Aacha 2010; Ejere

2010; Kerr et al. 2011; Motseke, 2011; Salem Al-Amarat 2011:37; Sarmah and Baruah 2012; De Witt and Lessing 2013).

EFFECTS OF EDUCATOR/ TEACHER STRESS

Van Dick et al. (2001) assert that stress is a major contributor towards job dissatisfaction, job-related illnesses and early retirement in countries like England. This is consistent with the views by Jarvis (2002) that teaching has become that of a highly stressful occupation. Some of the effects of teacher stress are discussed in this section.

Effect on Teacher Performance

Caprara et al. (2006) advance the view that teachers can only positively influence learning if they are committed and satisfied with the job. It, therefore, means that since stress reduces job commitment and satisfaction, teachers who suffer from occupational stress have higher chances of not performing well in their teaching and learning duties. Similarly, Klassen and Chiu (2010) argue that teacher stress has a negative effect on teacher self-efficacy, which entails individuals' beliefs about their capabilities to carry out a particular course of action successfully. Through stress, teachers feel inadequate and incapable of executing their duties to the best of their abilities and this inevitably, negatively affects their performance. A teacher stressed by learners' disruptive behaviours may consider him or herself unable to deal with disciplinary issues and this belief only serves to worsen disciplinary problems in the classroom. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) argue that the teachers' self-efficacy influences the way they teach and motivate the learners; this may also have direct implications on the learners' attainment. Betoret (2006) claims that teachers with reduced or low self-efficacy experience greater difficulties in the way they teach.

Khan et al. (2012) state that teacher performance is of very important concern in educational institutions, yet performance is negatively affected by stressors that come from different and many sources. Khan et al. (2012) further note that teacher performance affected by stress in turn results in negative effects for learners and institutions. Learners do not learn well and

achieve desired outcomes because the facilitators for learning will not be in their best frames of mind to ensure quality facilitation of learning. As Tahir (2011) posits stress can result in poor teaching quality. To this end, institutions will also not be able to meet their set targets and goals.

Effect of Teacher Stress on Learners

Stress may result in teachers changing their personality to one that may not be very positive in promoting effective teaching and learning. Khan et al (2012:24) observe that:

The teachers' personality has a significant role in the success or failure of students. If the teachers are exhibiting positive personality traits, which support the students learning, share knowledge in multiple ways, create an environment of learning and cooperation, and encourage the students to come forward and show participation in the class activities then the students will learn more. Their skills and competencies will increase and their level of confidence on the teacher will increase and vice versa.

It is, therefore, clear that once the teacher's personality changes for the worse due to stress, it has a negative effect on learners as some personality traits exhibited by teachers will not assist them to learn better.

Stress may cause teachers to be frequently absent from work and this affects the way learners learn. Mwamwenda (1995:85) observes that "a lack of job satisfaction leads to frequent absence from work; behaving aggressively; inclination to quit one's job; and psychological withdrawal from work". Job dissatisfaction because of stress, therefore, has serious consequences on teaching and learning and it is the learners who suffer as teacher absenteeism affects learner achievement (Whelan 2008). Teacher stress is also a contributor to teacher attrition. Due to frustration, some teachers quit the teaching profession for other professions. Pitsoe and Machaisa (2012) suggest generally nearly half of all teachers who enter the field leave it within a mere five years and the best and brightest teachers are often the first to leave. The issue of teacher attrition is a cause for concern because it is mostly the disadvantaged schools in remote areas which are affected by teacher shortage. Pitsoe and Machaisa (2012) also advance the view

that poor working conditions lead to teachers quitting the profession.

Effect of Work Related Stress on Teachers

Cooper and Dewe (2004) note that effects of stress on people are categorised and these include physiological, psychological and behavioural. Physiological effects of stress are evidenced by stomach-ache, headache, and tiredness, problems associated with indigestion and stomach ulcer. Others include physical exhaustion, increased heart rate, sweating, chest pain, back ache, and being out of breath. This view is also shared by Wiley (2000) who observes that teachers' health can severely be affected by stress.

On the other hand, Conley and Woosley (2000) and Bradley (2004) state that psychological/emotional effects of stress are marked by anxiety, anger, depression, boredom, frustration, job dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, feelings of inadequacy, among other feelings. In this view, a teacher's character or personality often changes for the worse. This could be evident in changes in attitudes towards learners, school managers, colleagues and the job itself. Hargreaves (2001) notes that stress can manifest itself in behavioural changes such as restlessness, over or under eating, alcoholism, absenteeism, lateness and sleeping problems. Black (2003) mentions that physical and emotional exhaustion as one of the most important stress outcomes for teachers. Brown and Ralph (1998) also note that stress has negative effects on teachers' job performance and the teachers affected may exhibit numerous challenges related to non-performance or low performance. Relationships with colleagues may also be severely affected as one may become aggressive, withdrawn or easily irritable (Black 2003).

STRESS COPING STRATEGIES

Literature indicates that as stress forms part of the daily lives of the educators, it is important that they devise and identify strategies for coping (Maphosa and Shumba 2010; Kaur 2011; Richards 2012). Coping is defined as the effort to control situations of harm or any kind of challenge when automatic reaction cannot be possible (Zedan and Bitar 2012). Such approaches are used to reduce or minimize stressful events. Ef-

fective coping strategies have been found to ameliorate the effects of stress (Murray-Harvey 1999). It is also known that effective coping strategies make it possible for the leaders in the education system to help teachers develop adaptive ways of handling stress (Mapfumo and Chireshe 2012). These help teachers improve their professional skills and competencies and understanding to identify sources of stress and learn how to deal with stressful events and circumstances. Coping strategies are defined as the person's constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources (Dlaminini et al. 2014). There is also an understanding that coping strategies have been shown to vary by region, community, social group, age, influence by individuals' previous experiences (Sarmah and Baruah 2012; De Witt and Lessing 2013).

MAIN CATEGORIES OF COPING STRATEGIES

Literature has identified two main categories of coping strategies. These are active and passive coping strategies (Murray-Harvey 1999; Zedan and Bitar 2013).

Active Category

This may include cognitive strategies, which may be in changing perspective on how to look and react to the stressor. Furthermore, this may also be characterized by rational distancing of oneself and determining borderlines to the job. This may also include engaging in relaxation exercise and strategies on developing teachers' personal coping skills for the self-management of anxiety (Murray-Harvey 1999). The bottom line about this model is that there is an action, be it cognitive, physical and emotional actions taken by the teacher to minimize the effects of the stressor. Zedan and Bitar (2013:91) identify relaxing after work, understanding and control over the subject being taught, devoting time to oneself, and thinking about coming vacation as some of examples of active personal and professional level. In the study by Zedan and Bitar (2013:95) teachers believed that the active category was the most efficient.

Passive Category

Passive category may include resignation, drinking to forget, and wishful thinking (Richards 2012). The underlying issue of this particular model is the lack of engagement with the stressful condition, and lack of ability to confront the source of stress. Some examples of the passive personal and professional levels may include psychological counselling, deep breathing, practising activities associated with religious beliefs, and isolation (Zedan and Bitar 2013).

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH STRESS

A number of classifications of stress coping strategies have been identified by literature which can be categorised as follows: problem-focused, emotion-focused, direct-action techniques, social and community support, and physical coping strategies. Perhaps some explanations of these categories will suffice.

Problem-focused Coping

Coetzee et al. (2009) refer to problem-focused strategy as cognitive resource that concerns the extent to which the individuals maintain a positive sense of self-worth, a positive outlook towards others and optimism about life in general. In the problem-focused strategy the person obtains information about what to do and acts accordingly to change the reality. This is a coping behaviour that may be directed at managing or altering the problem that is causing the distress (Steyn and Kamper 2009). This approach is confrontational and problem-solving strategy that enables the individual to define the problem, with a view to generate alternative solutions. It is also about making plans and coming up with different solutions to the same problem and concentrating on what to do next.

Emotion-focused Coping

Steyn and Kamper (2009) note that the emotion focused strategy is aimed at controlling the emotions linked with the stress situation. Montgomery and Rupp (undated) note that individuals will use emotion-focused coping when they believe that nothing can be done to modify environmental conditions. These consist of posi-

tive reappraisal and positive comparison as well as defensive strategies such as avoidance, minimisation, and distancing. These help ameliorate long-term negative consequences of stress (Steyn and Kamper 2009). Zedan and Bitar (2013) identify the emotional support given by colleagues as one of the top strategies teachers use to manage stress.

Direct Action Techniques

These are things that teachers can do that eliminate the source of stress. Restorative coping experiences refer to teachers being able to release stress in places away from the school environment. Places chosen by teachers reflect qualities that are helpful in offsetting the effects of the source of stress. The places teachers choose most often that make them feel better when stressed include home, nature related outdoor places, city places, churches, and cafes. These environments are helpful in relieving stress because they provide teachers with sensory conditions, social contact, props, and nature related environmental features, which can help teachers alleviate stress (Sprenger 2011).

Social and Community Support

Sprenger (2011) notes that social support can reduce the impact of stressors on teachers' well-being, job satisfaction, and physical illness risk. Teachers seek support from family, friends, and colleagues in order to receive advice, discuss feelings, get emotional support, get sympathy and understanding, and to talk about their feelings. Teachers who have more support within their personal lives tend to experience less stress in the workplace. Richards (2012), notes that teachers who successfully cope with the stresses of teaching rely on strong relationships with supportive family and friends. Mapfumo and Chireshe (2012:157) also note forming of support networks and developing of interpersonal skills to be effective in reducing stress. Naya (2008) study on factors affecting teacher stress and strategies to cope found that social support and networking is ranked the highest strategy in coping with stress. Similarly Richard's (2012) study identified family and friends support as top strategy for coping with stress.

Physical Coping Strategies

Steyn and Kamper (2009) note that these concern the degree to which individuals enact

the health-promoting behaviours believed to contribute to increased physical well-being, which is thought to decrease the level of negative response to stress. Mapfumo and Chireshe (2012) also note that physical strategies that help cope with stress include: exercising, eating, relaxing and drinking. However, drinking has been identified as a non-effective strategy as one does not really engage with the stressor (Richards 2012). And it may lead to such professionally maladaptive behaviours such as absenteeism, and lack of productivity (Mapfumo and Chireshe 2012). Common positive strategies teachers use to alleviate stress include exercise, social resources, avoidance, reading, hobbies, movement, and meditation (Mapfumo and Chireshe 2012; Richards 2012; Steyn and Kamper 2009). Also healthy life styles such as eating healthy, avoiding tobacco consumption and alcohol drinking, and listening to soft music was also associated with managing or reducing stress. These coping strategies used by teachers affect their outlook on the situation, thereby altering the perception of stress.

To alter the perception of stress, teachers may invoke inward or outward coping strategies. Inward strategies, such as concentrating on something narrow in the field of stimuli around oneself, include seeking stillness and focus (Sprenger 2011). Although there are coping strategies at the educators'/teachers' disposal, studies have also revealed that there are demographic variables that interplay with work related stress. Among such variables are gender, age, marital status, and qualifications. These are discussed below.

CORRELATES OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND WORK-RELATED STRESS

Occupational stress is the experience of negative emotional states such as frustration, worry, anxiety and depression attributed to work related factors (Aftab and Khatoon 2012). Work related stress occurs when there is a discrepancy between the demands of the workplace and that of individuals (Aftab and Khatoon 2012). Stress is caused by the existence of pressurizing factors, the personality type and demographic variables of the individual and the availability and quality to utilize the coping mechanism. Jackson and Rothman (2006) established that there

was a significant relationship between the prevalence of teaching stress and the demographic variables of gender, age, marital status, and qualifications of teachers.

Research has found a link between gender and teacher work related stress. A study by Mondal et al. (2011) found that there is significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of their psychological and physical stress. Male teachers were revealed to be more insecure and emphasized financial worries whilst females expressed worries about intrinsic facets of their jobs. Observations were that males had higher stress and anxiety than females. Females tended to complain more about burn-out than male teachers. An earlier study by Samad et al. (2010) revealed that female teachers had poorer mental health than male teachers and hence were more susceptible to stress than their counterparts. Austin et al. (2005) present another dimension to the puzzle that males are more restricted in expressing emotions and females had greater tendency to seek advice and social support and thus stressed women become more conspicuous than men. The literature above on the relationship between gender and teacher work related stress, though not specific to ECD teachers may present the study with a wider perspective through which to view teacher stress.

Age of a teacher has a relationship with teacher work related stress. Darmordy and Smyth (2010) in their study on job satisfaction and occupational stress found that teachers in their forties had higher stress levels than younger age groups. However, a study by Holeyannavar and Itagi (2012) found out that older teachers showed less stress than the younger ones. The reason proffered for this assertion in Aftab and Khatoon (2012) is that the older teachers are more experienced and adaptable to the environment and more ready to cope with stress. It would be interesting to establish the situation of ECD teachers regarding the relationship between age and work stress against the backdrop of these contrasting scenarios.

Qualifications and teacher occupational stress are related. For example, postgraduate teachers revealed "significantly less job satisfaction on job role item than undergraduate and graduate teachers" (Aftab and Khatoon 2012: 161). In support, a study by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) in Aftab and Khatoon (2012) showed

that teachers with high academic qualification, for example, bachelor or higher were less stressed than their colleagues with lower qualifications such as diploma. In addition to qualifications, studies showed that experience in teaching was correlated to teacher occupational stress (Aftab and Khatoon 2012). The studies above thus revealed that the early years of teachers' career are regarded as being stressful. However, the study by Aftab and Khatoon (2012:169) revealed that teacher "occupational stress is most prevalent among teachers with an experience of 6-10 years and least among 0-5 years of teaching experience in teaching." The high prevalence of stress among the 6-10 years was attributed to the fact that as teachers grew older their role burden of teaching gets diluted because potentially they possess a heightened capability to analyse these roles with much ease and due to experience they become adaptable to the work environment and can cope better with job stress. For the 0-5 years who showed the least stress the reason proffered was that the teachers might have been enjoying their newly found vocations. It would be interesting to investigate whether this scenario pertains to the South African ECD sector.

In the South African context policies are in place to enable all ECD practitioners to reach their full potential through in-service programmes and other paths of life-long learning (DoE, 2005). However, as Seleti (2009) intoned at a conference, although the policies for ECD qualification systems were in place, there was need for appropriately trained staff in ECD centres; provision of on-going in-service training and supportive and continuous supervision. The present researchers wonder what the qualification requirements mean for South African ECD educators who do not possess the appropriate qualifications.

Studies have shown that there is a relationship between marital status and teacher stress. Stress was high for those who were widowed, divorced and separated. In collaboration, Gold and Roth (1993) in Aftab and Khatoon (2012) found that unmarried teachers too had a higher stress level than married teachers. Parveen (2009) contrasts the assertion, and presents that work related stress was higher among married working women than in unmarried working women. This was due to traditional role designation trends, demands of society, more roles and re-

sponsibilities assigned to them as mothers, wives and homemakers. However, in Aftab and Khatoon's (2012) study there was no significant association between the occupational stress of teachers and marital status. The current study would seek to find out what the situation is in the case of ECD teachers in South Africa and more specifically in the East London District.

Bashir et al. (2013) conclude that the teaching environment is the stress provoking factor that causes stress; hence location may also be a source for stress. Location of school determines the type of facilities in the classrooms, multimedia, class sizes, classroom space, economic status of the children, interruptions (for example, noise from outside). The environment has a physical dimension (Wu et al. 2006) as highlighted by classroom size and location, and it can also have a theoretical dimension. For example, the mention of the apartheid era denotes an environment that was fraught with inequalities on racial grounds. Jackson et al. (2010: 460) posit that resource inequality in South Africa persists to this day as "many Africans continue to live on the outskirts of urban areas-the least developed sections of the city."

These areas are marked with informal settlements where there is lack of electricity and running water. The shortages may serve as sources of stress as the ripple effect may be felt by all operating in the environment. The socio-economic status (SES) of people in the aforementioned environment is generally low translating into poorly resourced ECD centres and facilities. Examples have been given portraying shacks housing the ECD centres in some areas (Shumba et al. 2014). This implies that the legacy of Apartheid discrimination is still being perpetuated even after it was officially declared defunct in 1994. Moreover, the Eastern Cape has a history pregnant with disparities as it housed the former Bantustans such as Transkei and Ciskei, which were relegated zones mainly for blacks (DoE 1996; DoE 2001). During this era ECD provisioning was poor for blacks and highly in favour of Whites. The present study would endeavour to find out whether remnants of these environmental disparities could be a source of ECD teacher stress.

Teacher stress could be a culmination of other factors. Al-Mohannadi and Capel (2007) aver that stress does not occur from the person or environment independent of each other but from

the interaction of the two. Stress thus arises when there is a misfit or lack of congruence between the person and the environment. When there is good fit no stress arises and conversely when there is incongruence or misfit stress occurs. Samad et al. (2010), however, contend that teacher stress levels in general could be minimized if teachers work in environments with support such as good collegial relationships, adequate resources and facilities. This argument led the present researchers to consider using the theoretical lens of the Person- Environment Fit theory discussed below.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT THEORY

It is important to note that stress is conceptualised as a by-product of an imbalance between job or environmental demands, and the ability of the individual to meet these demands as mitigated by a person's job control and decision latitude (Vazi et al. 2013). According to Al-Mohannadi and Capel (2007: 56), the central premise of the Person-Environment Fit theory "is that stress does not arise from a person or their environment separately, but rather from the interaction, or fit, between a person and their environment". There is therefore a very strong relationship between the individuals and their environment. We would then hypothesise that the event of stress will be most significantly reduced when there is a fit between the individuals and a particular environment. Conversely, we would equally hypothesise that individuals would most certainly experience stress when there is an occurrence of person-environment unfit or misfit. This line of thought appears to be congruent with Okeke and Dlamini (2013) and Dlamini et al. (2014) who suggest that the congruence between individual characteristics such as needs, abilities or values and environmental characteristics like job supplies, job demands or organisational values predict attitudes and behaviour.

Person-Environment Fit theory has been receiving patronage from many researchers within the last four decades and it has mainly been applied to investigate stress matters within occupation. Considering the context of the present, it is thought the theory is appropriate in the investigation of the effects of demographic variables, on work stimulated stressors and coping

strategies among early childhood educators in schools in one of the districts in the Eastern Cape. Okeke and Dlamini (2013: 34-35) have argued that:

Teachers appear to be caught in a complex web of personality, as well as professional responsibilities. At the extreme, it is possible that teachers in performing their professional duties may be faced with the dilemma of conflicting values between personal and professional needs. A fit between the personal and professional needs of the teacher may result in positive reactions, even in the face of difficulties. However, incongruence between those needs may result in personality disequilibrium that may impact the teacher's ability to handle situations.

Given what we already know about the complexities of working with young children, the researchers thought that it would be most appropriate to apply this theory to the present study. Early childhood education will be most effective and efficiently promoted within an environment where the children are most secured. The researchers argue in the present study that what impacts the psychosocial wellbeing of preschool educators whether inherently from the point of view of the person or the environment would most certainly impact the wellbeing of children in their care. They are therefore of the view that the Person-Environment Fit theoretical framework would afford the present study the epistemological strength to interpret the effects of demographic variables, on work stimulated stressors and coping strategies among early childhood educators in schools in South Africa.

DISCUSSION

ECD services can be provided through centre-based or home base approaches. Early childhood centres are manned by ECD educators. These, according to Cody (2014) refer to teachers, teacher assistants, specialists in early childhood education or administrators who come into contact with the young children in an educational or developmental setting. Of special significance are their qualifications. DoE (2005:34) indicates that ECD educators in South Africa should have a minimum qualification of NQF Level 4 and be registered with a professional body. Biersterker (2012) also attests that the licensing and registration of ECD facilities has a

bearing on staff qualification requirements by the government. After research indicated low level of qualification of ECD practitioners, the EPWP ECD plan was put into effect as a means to redress the backlog in training for educators with NQF 1, 4 and 5 (Pan Children 2012:5). These numerous demands could have an impact on the ECD teachers.

The complexities of teaching within the preschool suggest that teachers within this category of teaching and learning may be experiencing stress that requires being investigated (Okeke et al. 2014). Earlier, Dozva and Dyanda (2012) postulate that adequately prepared ECD educators are in a greater position to deal with the complexity associated with teaching at such levels. Inadequate or no preparation could be a source of stress for ECD educators. According to Cody (2014), the responsibilities of early childhood educators depend on the scope of their job and the age of the children for whom these educators are responsible for. For example, teachers of young children create lesson plans, administer discipline and evaluate progress of such learners, emphasizing the aspects considered crucial to successful physical, cognitive and emotional development. The activities planned for would be level specific. The researchers wonder if the educators in the current study are qualified to teach the children in their care and the challenges they encounter in their job. It can further be asked whether the teachers' demographics are related to these challenges.

CONCLUSION

ECD teachers, like other people in the workforce are subjected to work stimulated and non-work stimulated stress. Stressors may affect them physiologically and psychologically depending on one's resilience. Hence, the teachers need coping mechanisms to help them combat stress to be inculcated in them. Literature attests that there is a relationship between work-related stress and demographic variables. As such, the Person-Environment Fit theory is adopted in the study as the environment surrounding the teacher cannot be ignored. The environment has a bearing on the inter-relationships and intra-relationships the teacher has which may trigger stress. Thus, teachers' demographic variables also interplay with work related stress. The question that remains is how this occurs. This gap

needs to be filled by the data to be gathered in the ensuing research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature review discussed above, it can be recommended that an empirical study be carried out on ECD educators to find out the nature of stressors they encounter and how they cope with them. Teachers need to be made aware of stresses that abound in their profession as well as the coping strategies at their disposal. This awareness should be cultivated through pre-service and in-service training.

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