



Short Paper

Occupational Stressors and Stress Management of School Heads

Ryan R. Desabayla

Sorsogon State University Graduate School, Philippines
rydesab1216@gmail.com
(corresponding author)

Gerry S. Digo

Sorsogon State University Graduate School, Philippines
gsdigo557@gmail.com

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Abstract

Stress is part of the school heads' daily situation at their respective working stations. Hence, this study determined the stressors and stress management of secondary school heads in the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon, Philippines, during the school year 2020–2021. The respondents to this study were the 32 secondary school heads in the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon. This study used a descriptive survey design and an adapted research instrument. Findings revealed that the secondary school heads were slightly stressed on administrative responsibility, interpersonal relationship, employer's expectations, and instructional supervision. Additionally, they had different levels of stress management along with social activities, physical activities, reflective practices, and time management. The researchers concluded that the secondary school heads were slightly stressed on administrative responsibility, interpersonal relationship, employer's expectations, and instructional supervision. As an implication, secondary school heads need to manage their stressors at work through stress management, along with social activities, physical activities, reflective practices, and time management.

Keywords – School Heads, Occupational Stressors, Stress Management



INTRODUCTION

Stressors are everywhere. Stressors are explained as the situations or events that trigger different kinds of stress. These can be found in our physical environment or even in our working environment. Meanwhile, according to Shahsavarani et al. (2015), increasing amounts of stress and its effects on organizations are quite appealing. They added that the performance and actions of individuals inside any organization are greatly impacted by stress. Furthermore, under stress, workers' performances in any organization are affected, and the desired results are also compromised. According to Bhui et al. (2016), stress at work is frequently caused by poor management practices and unfavorable working circumstances.

Like other employees, school heads are prone to different stressors. According to Mahfouz (2020), in the United States of America, various stressors experienced by school heads do affect their job performance as well as their well-being. Meanwhile, in Australia, school heads reported higher levels of burnout compared to the general population, twice as much difficulty sleeping as a result of stressors at work, and were at higher risk of depression (Robinson, 2018). According to Maclean & Ibara (2020), in Nigeria, the demand for high standards without adequate resources to achieve them, the urgent need to meet different deadlines, having too many decisions to make, and poor conditions of service constitute administrative stressors on school heads. The cited research papers in a global context demonstrate that being a school principal is fraught with stressors.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, school personnel experience stress in the workplace (Orlanda-Ventayen & Ventayen, 2021). According to Josep et al. (2020), the highest stress levels of school heads are frequently experienced owing to administrative constraints such as time constraints, meetings, workload, and compliance with provincial and district policies. They continued by saying that the school heads' administrative duties were likewise thought to be difficult and that they had low stress tolerance levels. Even Wong, Tome, & Wong (2019) said that school heads experience a great deal of occupational stress while managing schools in difficult circumstances. During the school year 2020–2021, the Department of Education launched several programs for mental health and psychosocial support. These programs focused on mental health not only for students and parents, but also for school personnel. Hence, having mental health programs has something to do with stress management.

Based on the presented data and information, there is a need to determine the occupational stressors and stress management of school heads in the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon. Like other school heads worldwide and within the Philippines, Sorsogon school heads also experienced different stressors. The main objective of this research was to determine the occupational stressors and stress management of secondary school heads in the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon during the school year 2020–2021. The Department of Education, stakeholders, school administrators, teachers, students, and future researchers would all benefit from this study. For the

Department of Education, it may serve as a basis for implementing policies related to stress management and promoting the mental health of its personnel. The findings of this study serve as a guide for stakeholders to continue assisting the Department of Education with stress management for school administrators, teachers, and students. For school administrators, this study serves as a guide to practical skills to help cope with different stressors at work. Through this study, teachers can take time to manage their stressors as an essential solution to teaching effectively and efficiently and to helping students with their stressors instead of learning. For the students, the findings of the study serve as a guide or framework for school management on how to help the students manage different stressors to avoid anxiety and possible depression. For the researchers, the findings of the study serve as a reference for related studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress is a reality in our daily lives. Sahari et al. (2013) spelled out that the working environment or workplace condition has a significant impact on workers' stressors. Thus, the geographical location can affect the stress level of the workers. Meanwhile, secondary school heads have different sources of stress at work. According to Nekzada and Tekeste (2013), the causes of stress in the workplace are the physical working environment, work situations, and conflicts among colleagues and managers.

Furthermore, Alson (2019) stated that stressors at school are caused by working conditions and a lack of materials and resources to do the job effectively. The monitoring and demand from higher authorities also contributed to the stressors, and Igharo (2013) explained that school heads perceive that approximately most of their total life stress is job-related and that some of them seriously considered leaving school administration. In this connection, there is a need to examine problems of school heads' stress, strategic management, or stress management and plan to implement it (Ogalo et al., 2020).

Even though there are different stressors at work, there are ways to cope with the different stressors. In the study conducted by Ramsey-Tolliver (2019), findings revealed that increasing support, creating positive work environments within the school, and incorporating a mindset of effective communication can reduce the effects of stress. Meanwhile, in the study of Perry (2016), there are many ways stress management may apply to school heads. The mentioned strategies are exercise, family, time away from work, professional relationships, and other stress management techniques.

The mentioned pieces of literature explain that stress is part of a job like being a school head. There are different reasons why stressors exist. However, there are many ways to manage the different stressors at work. Managing workplace stressors effectively can lead to the achievement of the organization's vision and mission, as well as your own well-being.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study was to determine the occupational stressors and stress management of secondary school heads in the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon during the school year 2020-2021. Specifically, it aimed to:

1. Determine the level of stress along administrative responsibility, interpersonal relationships, employer's expectations, and instructional supervision; and
2. Describe the level of stress management of the school heads along social activities, physical activities, reflective practices, and time management.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study focused on the stressors and stress management of the secondary school heads in the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon, Philippines, during the school year 2021–2022. This study used the descriptive survey design. Using this research design, the researchers administered a survey questionnaire to a sample of respondents to determine and describe the occupational stressors and stress management of school heads.

Respondents

The 32 secondary school heads of the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon, Philippines, were the respondents to this study. Moreover, the respondents also provided profile data on sex, age, marital status, and school geographic location. In terms of sex, 21 or 66 percent are males, while 11 or 34% are females. Meanwhile, in terms of age, 5 or 16% of the secondary school heads are 40 years old or younger, 14 or 44% are ages 41 to 50, and 13 or 40% are ages 51 and above. Furthermore, in terms of marital status, 5 or 16% of the secondary school heads are single, 25 or 78% are married, and 2 or 6% are widowed. Lastly, in terms of school geographical location, 7 or 22% of the secondary school heads are assigned in coastal areas; 7 or 22% are assigned in conflict areas; 8 or 25% are assigned in town proper areas; and 10 or 31% are assigned in village areas.

Research Instrument

The researchers used an adapted questionnaire from Josep et al. (2020). The researchers sent a letter to the authors asking them to use the research questionnaires and properly cite their research paper. The adapted research questionnaires are divided into three parts. Part 1 dealt with the profile, specifically sex, age, marital status, and school geographical location. Part 2 dealt with the level of stress along with administrative responsibility, interpersonal relationships, employer expectations, and

instructional supervision. Part 3 dealt with stress management along with social activities, physical activities, reflective practices, and time management.

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers submitted the letter to the School Divisions Office, Province Division, to seek approval to conduct the study. After the approval, the researchers informed the respondents about the study. Moreover, the researchers also ensured the privacy of the secondary school heads, and then they started the data collection. The researchers used Google Forms and printed questionnaires for the school heads who could not access the research questionnaires online. Furthermore, focal persons in some schools assisted the researchers in distributing and retrieving the research questionnaires. The data collection process took two and a half months. The researchers informed the secondary school heads ahead of time, through texting, chatting, and a phone call, if they were willing to become the respondents. Furthermore, the researchers ensured that the Data Privacy Act was followed in the information given by the respondents.

Data Analysis

The researchers used frequency and percentage to describe the stressors and stress management of the school heads. For data analysis of the level of stress among the school heads and the level of stress management of the school, heads used a weighted mean. The following scale was used to analyze data for the level of stress along the mentioned variables: 5 - Extremely Stressed, 4 - Very Stressed, 3 - Moderately Stressed, 2 - Slightly Stressed, and 1 - Not Stressed. Moreover, for the level of stress management along the mentioned variables, data analysis was conducted using this scale: 5 - A great deal, 4 - A moderate amount, 3 - Occasionally, 2 - Rarely, and 1 - Never. Meanwhile, to interpret the responses in line with the level of stress, the researchers used this scale: 1.00 - 1.50 - Not stressed, 1.51 - 2.50 - Slightly stressed, 2.51 - 3.50 - Moderately stressed, 3.51 - 4.50 - Very stressed, and 4.51 - 5.00 -Extremely stressed. Furthermore, to interpret the responses in line with the level of stress management, the researchers used this scale: 1.00 - 1.50 - Never, 1.51 - 2.50 - Rarely, 2.51 - 3.50 - Occasionally, 3.51 - 4.50 - A moderate amount, and 4.51 - 5.00 - A great deal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the results and discussion relative to the level of stress among school heads along with administrative responsibility, interpersonal relationships, employer's expectations, and instructional supervision. Moreover, the discussion of the results on the level of stress management of the school heads, along with social activities, physical activities, reflective practices, and time management, is presented here.

RESULTS

The Level of Stress Among School Heads

Table 1 shows that the level of stress among secondary school heads with administrative responsibility was slightly high. It was noticeable that the secondary school heads had the highest weighted mean in an indicator focusing on increasing open endorsement and funding for school programs as part of their administrative responsibility (M = 2.34).

Table 1. Level of Stress along Administrative Responsibility

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
Frequently interrupted by phone calls.	2.00	Slightly stressed
Administer negotiated contracts.	1.88	Slightly stressed
Speak to groups.	1.72	Slightly stressed
Plans and directs the tasks to numerous individuals.	2.09	Slightly stressed
Prepare a budget and allocate resources.	2.13	Slightly stressed
Staff evaluation.	2.13	Slightly stressed
Endeavor to increase open endorsement and funding for school programs.	2.34	Slightly stressed
Average	2.04	Slightly Stressed

Table 2 provides an overview of the stress levels in the secondary school heads' interpersonal relationship. The secondary school heads were, on average, slightly stressed out in terms of their interpersonal relationship and stress levels, with a weighted mean of 2.14. Notably, when talking about how to settle disputes with their superiors, the school heads had the highest weighted mean on the indicator (M = 2.34).

Table 2. Level of Stress along Interpersonal Relationship

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
Endeavor to resolve staff differences.	2.25	Slightly stressed
The staff does not seem to understand my goals and expectations.	2.28	Slightly stressed
Endeavor to resolve differences with superiors.	2.34	Slightly stressed
Handle student discipline.	1.84	Slightly stressed
Endeavor to resolve student differences.	1.94	Slightly stressed
Attempt to influence immediate supervisor's actions and decisions affecting me.	2.25	Slightly stressed
Endeavor to resolve parent-school conflicts.	2.06	Slightly stressed
Average	2.14	Slightly Stressed

Table 3 summarizes the level of stress along with the employer's expectations. In terms of the level of stress along with the employer's expectations, the secondary school heads were generally slightly stressed, with a weighted mean of 2.27. Moreover, it is notable that they had the highest weighted mean in the indicator saying that their superiors assign many obligations to them (M = 2.44).

Table 3. Level of Stress along Employer’s Expectations

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
My superior(s) assigns many obligations to me.	2.44	Slightly stressed
Inclined to take an interest in extramural school activities to the detriment of personal time.	2.38	Slightly stressed
Unclear about the extent and responsibilities of my role.	2.13	Slightly stressed
Unaware of how superior(s) regard me or assess my competency.	2.16	Slightly stressed
Feel expectations of me impossible to achieve.	2.28	Slightly stressed
Feeling insufficient is anticipated from me by my prevalent.	2.31	Slightly stressed
Suspect that unable to fulfill the competing requests from those with more expertise.	2.19	Slightly stressed
Average	2.27	Slightly Stressed

Table 4 summarizes the level of stress of secondary school heads along with instructional supervision. Generally, in terms of the level of stress associated with instructional supervision, the secondary school heads were slightly stressed, with a weighted mean of 2.17. Furthermore, it is notable that they had the highest weighted mean on school-based review, applying contextualization, implementing learning standards, and leading concerning learners' achievement and performance indicators (M = 2.38).

Table 4. Level of Stress along Instructional Supervision

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
School-based review, contextualization, and implementation of learning standards.	2.38	Slightly stressed
Teaching standards and pedagogy.	2.13	Slightly stressed
Making teacher performance feedback.	2.16	Slightly stressed
Leading in learners' achievement and other performance indicators.	2.38	Slightly stressed
Supervising learning assessment and attaining a learning environment.	2.28	Slightly stressed
Career awareness and opportunities.	1.97	Slightly stressed
Guiding teachers on students' discipline.	1.94	Slightly stressed
Average	2.17	Slightly Stressed

The Level of Stress Management of the School Heads

Meanwhile, it is said that providing stress management tools like seminars and training for the school's employees addresses their individual needs and creates a culture of caring and relatedness that has a positive impact on the education process (Kipps-Vaughan, 2013). Table 5 summarizes the level of stress management along with social activities. In the case of secondary school heads, they only dealt with social activities in moderate amounts, with a weighted mean of 3.81. Moreover, the secondary school heads had the highest weighted mean on talking with family and friends as stress management ($M = 4.13$).

Table 5. Level of the Stress Management along Social Activities

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
Talk with family and friends.	4.13	A moderate amount
Community involvement.	3.75	A moderate amount
Socialize, such as having lunch with others	3.56	A moderate amount
Take opportunities to engage in networking to increase management and communication skills.	3.81	A moderate amount
Average	3.81	A moderate amount

Table 6 summarizes the level of stress management along with physical activities. Secondary school principals only dealt with a moderate amount of physical activities as stress management, with a weighted mean of 3.61. Notably, they had the highest weighted mean for engaging in leisure or recreational activities ($M = 3.63$).

Table 6. Level of the Stress Management along Physical Activities

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
Engage in leisure or recreational activities.	3.63	A moderate amount
Engage in regular physical exercise.	3.59	A moderate amount
Average	3.61	A moderate amount

Table 7 summarizes the level of stress management along with reflective practices. The secondary school heads engaged in reflective practices for stress management in moderate amounts, with a weighted mean of 3.73. Notably, the secondary school heads had the highest weighted mean on seeking solitude, slowing down, and taking time to reflect ($M = 3.81$).

Table 7. Level of the Stress Management along Reflective Practices

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
Engage in spiritual growth activities, such as meditation.	3.66	A moderate amount
Talk to district administrators or other school principals.	3.66	A moderate amount
Use relaxation and stress management techniques.	3.78	A moderate amount
Compartmentalize work and non-work life.	3.75	A moderate amount
Seek solitude, slow down, and take time to reflect.	3.81	A moderate amount
Average	3.73	A moderate amount

Table 8 summarizes the level of stress management along with time management. Generally, the level of stress management and time management of the secondary school heads was moderate, with a weighted mean of 4.33. Notably, they had the highest weighted mean for setting realistic goals (M = 4.38).

Table 8. Level of the Stress Management along with Time Management

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
Set realistic goals.	4.38	A moderate amount
Use time management techniques.	4.28	A moderate amount
Average	4.33	A moderate amount

DISCUSSION

The Level of Stress Among School Heads

The results in Table 1 are connected to the findings of Juma and Simatwa (2016) that school funds for school activities are one of the stressors for school heads. As implied, the secondary school heads experienced stress along with administrative responsibility. According to Yeboah-Assiamah, Asamoah, and Osei-Kojo (2014), scholars observed that administrative responsibility is necessary for the efficiency and productivity of administrations, and these also contribute to the stressors of the school heads.

The data in Table 2 are connected to the findings of Nekzada and Tekeste (2013) that one of the stressors at work is because of the managers, or in this case, the superiors. This implies that when secondary school heads are dealing with the mentioned group of people, there is a chance that they may get stressed. Velmurugan (2016) explained that they can enhance the understanding of the concerns of the workers and other people, which means attracting, developing, retaining, motivating, and communicating for them to contribute their best to the institution.

According to Al-Hawary and Haddad (2016), employers expected their employees to have cognitive skills, quality of work, planning and organizing the work, employment relationships, time, skills, appreciation, and respect. The data in Table 3 shows that the secondary school heads also stressed employer's expectations. This implies that, despite the pressure they feel to live up to their employer's expectations, secondary school heads are supposed to be servant leaders in their respective schools. According to Jaafar, Hassan, and Zambi (2021), the organization puts pressure on the employee to complete different tasks, which causes stress. For the organization, too much stress makes things more challenging.

According to the data in Table 4, secondary school heads were stressed about instructional supervision as part of the need to supervise classroom teachers for the students' learning. Stress may have been caused among the secondary school heads along with their accountability for instructional supervision. However, the instructional leadership beliefs and practices of school heads allow them to function well as instructional leaders (Buban & Digo, 2021).

Wanzare (2012) claims that instructional supervision is seen as a process of reviewing other people's work to make sure that bureaucratic rules and procedures are followed and that loyalty to the higher authority is maintained. Furthermore, appropriate instructional supervision may also reduce the high turnover rate of faculty members, as reported by Digo (2021) in a laboratory high school of a state university. Examples of instructional supervision include assisting students' academic success, enhancing the

quality of teachers, and enabling instructional supervisors to keep monitoring teachers' work. However, these also cause stress for the school heads.

The Level of Stress Management of the School Heads

The data in Table 5 are connected to the study by Calbert (2020), which found that talking with family and friends is one way to mitigate stress. Meanwhile, data show that secondary school heads engaged in a moderate amount of social activities to relieve stress. This implies that social activities such as stress management are not a big deal for secondary school heads. According to Kelly et al. (2017), engagement in social activities has shown a positive impact on health outcomes.

The data in Table 6 indicate that secondary school heads engage in physical activities, but only in moderation, to combat stress. According to Churchill et al. (2021), physical activities fight stress. As concluded by Joko and Wanasida (2019), a wellness program for employees is necessary to have a positive behavioral change, be healthier, and be more productive at work.

According to Wright and Adam (2015), reflective practices entail evaluating, reconsidering, and reframing current professional methods. Additionally, school staff members often engage in reflective activities employing a critical friendship approach in a setting that fosters collaboration and openness. The data in Table 7 imply that the reflective practices of secondary school heads are essential to their duties and responsibilities. According to Hooper (2010), leaders who engage in reflective processes are critical to building their capacity to lead an organization and continuing their growth and development as leaders.

According to Naparan and Tulod (2021), time management strategies could make the school's operation smooth and easy and help them accomplish the administrators' tasks efficiently. Time management techniques include establishing priorities, controlling distractions, creating written plans, and establishing timetables. Moreover, according to Grissom et al. (2015), school heads' time management capacities are a great strategy for increasing time on priority tasks and reducing stress. The data in Table 8 suggest that practicing time management is extremely beneficial in dealing with stressors. There are people who maintain busy schedules because of their academic needs, office work, employment responsibilities, and other duties and responsibilities. People of all ages and occupations are expected to possess the skill of time management. Effective time management is necessary to prevent experiencing pressure or stress at work (Kapur, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that the secondary school heads in the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon were slightly stressed on

administrative responsibility, interpersonal relationship, employer's expectations, and instructional supervision. Additionally, overall, they had different levels of stress management along with social activities, physical activities, reflective practices, and time management. The levels of stress management along the variables range from infrequent to moderate.

The researchers suggested that regardless of profile, the secondary school heads in the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon must handle the stressors at work through stress management. They must handle the stressors related to administrative responsibility, interpersonal relationship, employer's expectations, and instructional supervision to fulfill their duties and responsibilities in connection with the Department of Education's vision and mission. Additionally, they must have a great deal of experience in the mentioned activities relative to stress management. The researchers also suggest that the Department of Education implement programs related to the diagnosis and management of stress among its personnel in the field, and that in-depth research studies be done on the mental health of secondary school heads.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research paper have direct implications for the secondary school heads in the 2nd Congressional District of Sorsogon, Philippines. Regardless of profile, the secondary school heads experienced different stressors at work along with administrative responsibility, interpersonal relationship, employer's expectations, and instructional supervision. Furthermore, secondary school heads need to manage their stressors at work through stress management, along with social activities, physical activities, reflective practices, and time management.

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DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest

The researchers are hereby declaring that they do not have any personal conflict of interest relative to the application and submission of the research paper.

Informed Consent

The researchers are hereby declaring that all the persons involved in conducting this research paper are fully informed.

Ethics Approval

The researchers are hereby declaring that the Data Privacy Act is strictly followed in gathering the data needed. Moreover, other researchers' works are properly acknowledged.

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Authors' Biography

Ryan R. Desabayla, MA GenSciEd is a professional teacher and currently a Senior High School Teacher III at Juban National High School, Juban, Sorsogon. He has been in the Department of Education since 2014 and was named one of the 10 inspiring teachers in the Sorsogon Province Division in the year 2021. He is now a candidate for graduation with the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Management at Sorsogon State University. Furthermore, his research interest is in the field of education.

Gerry S. Digo, EdD is an experienced professional teacher with demonstrated work experience as a faculty member and administrator in the higher education industry. To date, he is a Professor 6 at Sorsogon State University. He is also a Career Executive Service Eligible (CESE) and was recognized as the Top 6 in the March 2018 Career Executive Service Written Examination (CESWE). He is passionate about developing quality systems for educational institutions and empowering educational leaders and managers. His research interests are in educational management, leadership, and policy.