Occupational stress of primary school teachers in the Republic of Republic of Ireland

Final Year Project

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Abstract

Stress defined as an unwanted experience accompanied by physical, intellectual, or behavioural changes can trigger negative reactions (Taylor, 2012, Kundaragi, 2015). Teaching is an extremely stressful occupation. Studies suggests teaching is a stressful occupation due to many different causes (Kyriacou, 2001, Simón & Alonso-Tapia, 2016). The research on teachers' occupational stress in Republic of Ireland has been limited (Darmody,2011., Kerr et al, 2011). This study examines the causes of occupational stress among Irish primary school teachers, with a particular focus on class level, school size and location of school (Tokar & Feitler, 1986). The Teacher's Stress Inventory (TSI) (Fimian, 1984) was used to collect data from one hundred and twenty eight participants who were teaching in primary school across Republic of Ireland. Class level being taught was a statistically significant factor in occupational stress levels (8.4% of variance). There was a non-significant positive relationship, between stress levels and years of experience, $r(124) = .16$, $p = .07$. Similarly, there was a non-significant and negative relationship between stress levels and school size($r(124) = -.16$, $p = .07$). There was a statistically significant difference in occupational stress levels derived from the Discipline and Motivation subscale of the TSI ($F(6.90, 120.41) = 3.68$, $p < 0.05$), this was significantly lower for the junior level teachers. These results support international research on the sources of teachers' occupational stress levels (Kyriacou, 2001). The results acquired from this study impact our understanding of occupational stress among primary school teachers in Republic of Ireland.

Keywords: occupational stress, Irish primary schools, Irish primary school teachers, Teacher's Stress Inventory, causes of stress, class level, school size, location of school, years of experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature review

What is stress?

Stress is defined as an undesirable emotive experience accompanied by physical, intellectual, or behavioural changes to a person (Taylor, 2012). Low levels of stress can be extremely beneficial and healthy and can help with many things including improved motivation and eagerness to achieve, however, negative stress can potentially result in serious biological, emotional, and social problems for individuals (Tucker, 2008).

Causes, consequences of and coping with stress

There are many causes of stress. Stress may be triggered by a variety of sources, both internally and externally. External stressors include environmental stressors (weather or pandemics), social stressors (financial or relationship burdens) and physiological stressors (pregnancy or lack of fitness) (Brouwers,2000). Equally the sources of stress can be internal, coming from undesirable thoughts, negative beliefs and feelings of lack of self-worth (Kundaragi, 2015).

There are vast and wide-reaching consequences to stress. Stress can cause responses that include headaches and nail biting. It can cause more serious responses like anxiousness, inability to relax, lack of sleep and quick-temperedness. Moreover, extreme excessive stress may cause difficulties such as depression or suicidal ideation (Arria, 2009). These consequences of stress have been linked with absenteeism at work and ongoing illnesses (Kyriacou, 2001). Workplace stress leads to bigger healthcare costs, absenteeism and lower levels of staff performance, ultimately leading to a revenue and productivity loss for companies (Jex, 1998).

Teaching and stress globally

All jobs have some element of occupational stress, however studies such as Billehoj (2007) indicate that teaching is one of the most stressful occupations a person can have. There are many international studies which have examined the origins of teachers' occupational stress and report that the main cause of teachers' occupational stress stem from a combination working conditions, relationships with colleagues, time burdens, level of experience held by teacher and a heavy workload placed on teachers as the main influences on stress levels (Bishay, 1996, Kyriacou, 2001).

Classroom disturbances are also a key challenge encountered by teachers (Simón & Alonso-Tapia, 2016). Teachers spend a substantial amount of time dealing with classroom disturbances while still trying to teach the class (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). These disturbances increase the levels of occupational stress and pressure on teachers.

Some international research has suggested that occupational stress levels can change depending on whether the school has a large or small population of children attending and whether or not the school is situated in an urban or rural location. Tokar & Feitler's (1986) study indicated that were greater occupational stress levels visible among teachers in large, urban schools than smaller populated rural schools. Millicent (1999) found similar results; a significant difference in occupational stress levels between teachers in small and large schools, with teachers in larger schools experiencing the highest levels of stress. Other research however contradicts this. Older studies such as Rottier et al, (1983) observed that teachers in smaller, rural schools were more stressed than their larger, urban school counterparts and likewise more recent studies such as Perry (2013) indicate that rural schoolteachers are significantly more likely to be more stressed than their rural counterparts.

International research into the cause of teachers' occupational stress levels indicate a trend between the class level at which a teacher is teaching and occupational stress levels. An

Australian study, compiled by Geng et al (2015) looked at two hundred and ninety-one teachers across the three levels of schooling: preschool, primary school and secondary school settings. Findings showed that the occupational stress levels were highest among the secondary school teachers. Preschool teachers were the least stressed and significantly happier in their jobs compared to teachers in higher grades (Geng, 2015). A similar study in America showed how year level seems to contribute towards the levels of occupational stress experienced by teachers also. Theriot's (2010) American study on 5th and 6th grade children showed there were 18% increase with disciplinary issues made by the teachers of students in 6th grade compared to students in 5th grade. This data shows a remarkable surge in discipline challenges faced by teachers as the class level being taught increased. This would suggest that the older the age group being taught, the higher the levels of occupational stress experienced by teachers. Opposingly, Wolters & Daugherty (2007) noted no significant difference of occupational stress levels for teachers across different class or school levels. There has been no Irish research on this specific relationship however.

Consequences of occupational stress for teachers

The consequences of occupational stress for teachers can be seen physically, mentally and socially. Studies show how stress can impact teachers' sense of achievement, ultimately impacting teachers' levels of self-confidence, self-worth and can eventually result in negative self-thoughts and high levels of dislike for oneself (Pillay et al., 2005). Teachers' level of occupational stress has an undesirable impact on their class. Research has indicated that when teachers become stressed, their student's achievement outcomes are likely to suffer because the teachers are more concerned with their personal turmoil (Watt and Richardson, 2008). A British study showed that how a teacher's wellbeing and stress levels had a direct impact on their students SAT scores (Briner & Dewberry, 2007).

Teaching and occupational stress in Republic of Ireland

An Economic and Social Research Institute study found that occupational stress among teachers in Republic of Ireland has doubled from 2010 to 2015, increasing from 8% to 17% (Darmody, 2016). This has an impact on the individual teacher and their employers. Dermody's study also found that 45% of primary school teachers in Republic of Ireland have experienced occupational stress during their career (Darmody and Smyth, 2011). 11% of all retired secondary teachers in Republic of Ireland retired due to ill-health combined with undesirable levels stress and anxiety (Fitzgerald, 2008).

Within the Irish context, there has been limited attention given to occupational stress among primary school teachers who teach at different class levels in primary schools in Republic of Ireland. A report from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on Irish Education looked at data collected through the Growing Up in Republic of Ireland Study (Darmondy & Smyth, 2010). It found that while the vast majority of primary school teachers were content, they displayed high levels of occupational stress. This research however was limited to teachers who were solely teaching nine-year olds. Darmody (2011) notes this as a huge limitation in her own research, stating that experiences of other teachers, particularly those teaching very young children in primary school may be significantly different and furthermore suggests that it is imperative that future research is undertaken in this area (Darmody, 2011). While international studies previously discussed show a positive correlation between children's class levels and occupational stress experienced by teachers, there is no Irish research in this specific area.

CSO figures recorded three thousand, nine hundred primary schools in Republic of Ireland in 2014. In these schools, there were forty thousand teachers employed (CSO, 2014). With such a substantial number of teachers in Republic of Ireland, looking after their health and well-being is imperative. In the context of Republic of Irelands education system, there

are a total of eight classes in primary schools. Children begin school in junior infants at approximately five years old and finish eight years later in sixth class at approximately twelve years old. To date, there has been no study to look at whether there is a connection between occupational stress levels of Irish primary school teachers teaching children in the lower classes of primary school (junior infants) to those teachers teaching children in the upper classes of primary school (sixth class). This is a need to look at what are the causes of this high level of occupational stress for teachers and whether it draw a parallel to international studies in this area.

Rationale

As per the limitations and recommendations outlined in the "Growing Up in Republic of Ireland" study (Darmody, 2011), the focus of this research is to investigate whether Irish primary school teachers experience more or less stress depending on the class level in which they are teaching. Are occupational stress levels of Irish primary school teachers directly related to the class level at which they teach? While copious amounts of international research can be found discussing the causes of primary school teachers levels of occupational stress, within the context of Republic of Ireland, the research is lacking. This study attempts to reduce the extensive gap in literature in relation to occupational stress of Irish primary school teachers and to contribute further to literature in relational to teacher's occupational stress.

Research aims and hypotheses

Past research has produced tangible evidence that teaching causes high levels of occupational stress. The causes of this occupational stress has been analysed at an international level, reasons include relationships with colleagues, level of experience held by

teacher, class level among others. Yet despite this, there seems to be little research on the causes of occupational stress from an Irish perspective. While Darmody (2016) discusses the impact teaching at different class levels may have on occupational stress, more research is needed in this area.

In order to address this gap in the area, this study aims to look at the following questions, (1)Is there an association between higher stress levels among Irish primary school teachers across the levels in primary school? (2) As class level increases, does the occupational stress of teachers increase also increase? (3) What are the causes this stress? (4)Is there a difference between the stress levels of rural/small school teachers in comparison to their larger urban school counterparts? These research questions will be investigated using hierarchical multiple regression, Pearson product- moment correlation and ANOVA analysis.

Hypotheses

Therefore, the primary hypotheses of the study are:

H1: Teaching more senior classes will predict higher occupational stress levels in teachers.

H2a: There will be a relationship between teachers' experience and occupational stress levels.

H2b: There will be a relationship between size of school and teachers' occupational stress levels.

H3: There will be differences in sources of stress between groups of teachers of different class levels.

METHODS

Participants

Data was collected from one hundred and twenty eight participants (12 males, 116 females) who were teaching in primary school across the Republic of Republic of Ireland in the 2019/2020 academic year (pre Covid). Particpants varied in gender, age (21-65 years old), years of teaching experience (0-35years), location of school (urban, rural) and were recruited from several schools throughout the Republic of Ireland. Participants were self-selected through convenience sampling methods, primarily word-of-mouth was used. Four participants were removed due to not satisfying the inclusion criteria (Class level taught states as 'Other').

Measures

Teachers Stress inventory

Teachers occupational stress was measured with the use of a questionnaire adapted from Teacher's Stress Inventory (TSI); a tool used for the measurement of occupational stress in teachers. TSI is highly valued for its high reliability and validity and was developed by Fimian in 1984 (Revised in 1988). The original tool consists of 49 items divided in two groups of subscales: Sources of Stress, consisting of Work-Related Stressors, Professional Distress, Discipline and Motivation and Time Management subscales and Stress Manifestations, that include Emotional Manifestations, Behavioural Manifestations and Physiological-Fatigue Manifestations subscales. The scale used in this study was adapted because of the need for parsimony. Teachers completed this survey during the school day, therefore out of the original 49 Likert-type items, 22 where removed resulting in a tool consisting of 27 items. Additionally, questions relating to the frequency of item occurring were removed to further reduce the time teacher would have to spend on the survey.

Fimian (1984) proposed several ways of calculating the score of the TSI. Here, the score for each individual sub-scale was calculated by a simple average. Resulting sub-scale scores were then summed up to achieve the final score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of stress.

Demographic questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire included further items relating to teacher's work. Data on gender, years of experience (with possible answers: '0 - 5 years', '6 - 10 years', '11 - 15 years', '16 - 20 years', '21 - 25 years', '26 - 30 years', '31 - 35 years', '35+ years'), number of colleagues (with possible answers: '1-4 Teachers', '5-9 Teachers', '10-14 Teachers', '15 or more Teachers') and, finally, on level taught by a teacher (possible answers: 'Junior -2nd class', '3rd – 6th class', 'Special Education Needs' and 'Other' were gathered.

Procedure

Pilot study. Following ethical approval from the National College of Republic of Ireland ethics board, a draft questionnaire was first piloted to ensure the questionnaires subject matter and duration were suitable. At the end of the questionnaire, the pilot's participants were asked to give their opinion on the information sheet and consent page they received and the questionnaire. Feedback was also received in relation to how easy the questionnaire was to navigate. They were asked to contribute any suggestions or improvements they felt might make the survey more efficient. No additional changes were required following the pilot study.

Main study procedures. Participants were recruited using convenience sample methods through directly contacting teachers in the researcher's workplace and requesting the link of

an online survey to be shared. The questionnaire was also shared through teacher only groups. The one hundred and twenty eight participants completed a 12-minute unpaid online questionnaire. Prior to completing the main section of the survey, an information sheet was completed (see Appendix A), along with a consent form (see Appendix B1) and electronic consent (see Appendix B2). The main body of the survey included demographic questions (gender, years of teaching experience, class level currently teaching and location of school (See Appendix C1) and the Teacher Stress inventory (Fimian 1984) which was adapted for online use (see Appendix C2). The final section consisted of a debriefing sheet reminding participants of the aims of the study, their rights as a participant and relevant helpline contact numbers was provided (See Appendix D).

Data analyses

A priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1.9.4. (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009).) software in order to determine a sufficient sample size for the multiple regression model. Using the input of assumed effect size =.15 and the alpha level of 0.05 it was determined that sufficient sample size would be 119 participants. Lower sample size estimates were obtained using guidelines prepared by Stevens (1996) who recommends 15 participants per one predictor variable as well as the guidelines by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) who recommend the number of participants to be greater than 50 + 8 participants per predictor variable. Considering that the planned model would contain three predictor variables, these formulae suggest that sample should not be smaller than 60 or 82 participants, respectfully.

RESULTS

In order to ensure there were no abnormalities in the data and to check that assumptions for multiple regression and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were not violated, the data was screened using the Explore function of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 26, IBM, 2018). Furthermore, reliability of the adapted scale was tested for with use of internal consistency metric. Four of the subscales displayed low reliability (see Table 1 for full results).

Table 1

Teacher Stress Inventory scores by level taught, subscale scores and reliability statistics.

Baseline characteristic	Junior class -2nd		3rd – 6th class		Special Education Needs		Full sample		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	α/N
TSI total score	21.32	3.01	22.41	3.28	23.07	3.78	22.23	3.39	
Work-Related Stressors	3.93	.69	4.15	.63	4.29	.69	4.11	.68	.70/4
Professional Distress	2.91	.72	2.84	.76	2.91	.71	2.89	.73	.53/4
Discipline and Motivation	2.93	.94	3.43	1.02	3.42	.93	3.26	.99	.75/3
Emotional Manifestations	3.71	.52	3.80	.57	3.98	.65	3.82	.58	.83/4
Behavioural Manifestations	2.99	1.03	3.28	.97	3.32	1.04	3.20	1.01	.58/3

Physiological-Fatigue Manifestations	1.78	.58	1.86	.62	1.93	.70	1.85	.63	.44/5
Time Management	3.06	.69	3.04	.70	3.22	.90	3.10	.76	.44/4

Note. N = 124; α = Cronbach's alpha

Descriptive Statistics

124 participants included in the final sample scored an average of 22.16 (SD = 3.37, range 12.08-30.77). The highest percentage of teachers worked in bigger schools which had 15+ teachers (46.8%), followed by those who worked with 4-8 colleagues (28.2%), those who worked in a 2-3 teacher school contributed 12.9% of the data, while lastly those teachers who worked in a 9-14 teacher school contributed 12.1% of the data.

In the sample, 92.7% of teachers had between 0-20 years of experience, with teachers belonging to '6-10 years', '11-15 years' and '16-20 years' groups accounting for 30.6%, 22.6% and 25%, respectively. The remaining 7.3% of participants belonged to teachers teaching either less than five years or more than twenty years. Groups of teachers of different class levels were approximately equal: 33.9% of participants taught Junior infants to 2nd class, 37.9% taught 3rd to 6th class and 28.2% of participants taught Special Educational Needs (SEN). Summary of teacher characteristics can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher characteristics.

	N	%
Level taught		
Junior -2nd class	42	33.9
3rd – 6th class	47	37.9
SEN	35	28.2
School size		
1-4 Teachers	16	12.9
5-9 Teachers	35	28.2
10-14 Teachers	15	12.1
15 or more Teachers	58	46.8
Experience		
0 - 5 years	18	14.5
6 - 10 years	38	30.6
11 - 15 years	28	22.6
16 - 20 years	31	25.0

21 - 25 years	6	4.8
26 - 30 years	1	.8
31 - 35 years	2	1.6

Note. N = 124.

Inferential statistics

Hierarchical multiple regression

A two-step hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to investigate class level taught as a predictor of occupational stress levels, after controlling for years of experience in teaching and school size.

Preliminary analyses were conducted in order to ensure no assumptions of the multiple regression were violated. The data showed no abnormalities in normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Additionally, correlations between the predictor variables were investigated. All correlations were small or negligible (ranging from .00 to .21) and are discussed further in the next section (for details see table 3).

Table 3.

Intercorrelations between predictor variables and their correlations with teachers' occupational stress.

	Occupational stress	Experience	Teaching level
Experience	.16		
Teaching level	.21*	.23*	
School size	-.16	.00	.04

Note. Correlation significant on: * $p < .05$ level; N = 124.

In the first step of the multiple regression, predictors of teacher's experience and school size measured by the number of teachers in a school were entered. In the first step, both years of experience and school size had similar, small predictive power on occupational stress levels in teachers and was non-significant ($\beta = .16$, $p = .07$ and $\beta = -.16$, $p = .07$,

respectively). The model was statistically significant F (2, 121) = 3.32, $p < 0.05$ and explained 5.2% of variance in occupational stress levels.

In the second step, current level taught was added to the model, explaining an additional 4.5% of variance. Level taught was the strongest and a statistically significant predictor of occupational stress levels in teachers ($\beta = .19$, $p > .05$). The final model was statistically significant and explained a total of 8.4% of variance in teacher's occupational stress (F (3, 120) = 3.69, $p < 0.05$). Summary of the model can be found in Table 4.

Table 4.

Hierarchical regression model of teachers' occupational stress.

	R	R^2	*Adj.* R^2	ΔR^2	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*CI 95% (B)*
Step 1	.23*	.05	.04	.05**					
Experience					.42	.23	.16	1.82	-0.04/0.89
School size					-.48	.27	-.16	-1.82	-1.02/0.05
Step 2	.30*	.08	.07	.03**					
Experience					.31	.24	.12	1.31	-0.16/0.79
School size					-.51	.26	-.17	-1.93	-1.03/0.02
Teaching level					.80*	.39	.19	2.06	0.04/1.57

Note. R^2 = R-squared; Adj R^2 = Adjusted R-squared; ΔR^2 = R^2 change; B = unstandardized beta value; SE = Standard Error of B; β = standardized beta value; CI 95% (B) = 95% confidence interval for B. Statistical significance: *p < .05, **p < .001.

Pearson product-moment correlation

In order to test the second hypotheses; to look occupational stress levels of teachers in the context of number of years of experience and school size a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used.

There was a non-significant positive relationship, between stress levels and years of experience, $r(124) = .16$, $p = .07$. Similarly, the relationship between stress levels and school size measured in number of colleagues was a non-significant and negative, $r(124) = -.16$, $p = .07$. Summary of the data can be found in Table 3.

ANOVA

A series of four one-way between groups ANOVAs were conducted to determine if there were differences in sources of stress between groups of teachers. Teachers were divided into three groups accordingly (Junior -2nd class, 3rd – 6th class and SEN teachers). Sources of stress were derived from TSI subscales and included (1)Work-Related Distress, (2) Professional Distress, (3)Discipline and Motivation and (4)Time Management.

There was a statistically significant difference in occupational stress levels derived from Discipline and Motivation ($F(6.90, 120.41) = 3.68$, $p < 0.05$). The effect size indicated a very small difference in stress level (eta squared = .06).

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for teachers of Junior infants to 2nd class ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.94$) was significantly lower ($p = .04$) than those teaching 3rd to 6th class ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.02$) The test also indicated that the mean score for teachers of Junior infants to 2nd class was lower (but not significantly lower) than that of Special Educational Needs teachers ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.93$; $p = 0.7$). There was no statistically significant difference in mean scores between Special Education teachers and 3rd to 6th class teachers ($p = 1$).

There were no statistically significant differences in stress levels derived from the three other sources for teacher groups based on the level they taught (for details see Table 5).

Table 5.

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Sources of Stress.

Source of stress	Junior -2nd class		3rd – 6th class		Special Education Needs		*F*	p
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Work-Related Distress	3.93	0.69	4.15	0.63	4.29	0.69	(2.44, 56.05) 2.76	.068
Professional Distress	2.91	0.72	2.84	0.76	2.91	0.71	(.15, 64.92) .14	.868
Discipline and Motivation	2.93	0.94	3.43	1.02	3.42	0.93	(6.90, 120.41) 3.68	.028
Time Management	3.71	0.52	3.80	0.57	3.98	0.65	(1.37, 41.57) 2.07	.131

Note. N = 124.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to build on previous research in the area of occupational stress among primary school teachers across the Republic of Republic of Ireland. The main focus of the study was to examine what factors influence occupational stress. These factors included stressors such as work-related stress, professional distress, discipline and motivation issues and time management problems. The study also looked at the relationship of school size, teachers' experience and class level on occupational stress levels of primary school teachers.

Findings from the study

Connection between class level being taught and occupational stress levels

The relationship between teachers' occupational stress levels and class level being taught were studied. Class level was a statistically significant predictor of occupational stress when years of experience and school size were accounted for. This result indicates that the higher the class a teacher is teaching, the greater the level of occupational stress that is experienced by the teacher.

While this result conflicts with Wolters & Daugherty (2007) study who failed to find a significant disparity of occupational stress levels, it supports Geng's (2015) study who found that stress levels of secondary teachers were the highest among the three teaching levels, with the early childhood teachers having the lowest stress levels (Geng, 2015). This current study found comparable complementary results to Geng (2015), the higher the level a teacher is teaching at, the higher the level of occupational stress for the teacher.

Relationship between teachers' experience and occupational stress levels.

The relationship between teachers' level of experience (how many years they were teaching) and their occupational stress levels were examined and the results from the study found a non-significant relationship between years of teaching experience and occupational stress levels. Investigations by Darmody and Smyth (2011) found that duration of teaching service had an impression on occupational stress levels, with those who had been teaching the longest reporting the lowest levels of occupational stress. These findings are not found in the present study. The relatively small and unequal sample size may account for the non-significant result in this research as the vast majority of participants had between 0 – 20 years 'of teaching experience (N=115), leaving only nine participants with twenty or more years of experience. A larger study with equal numbers participants spread across levels of experience may ensue similar results to Darmody's (2011) study.

Relationship between size of school and teachers' occupational stress levels.

The findings in this study do not support the existence of a relationship between the size or location of the school in which a teacher is teaching and levels of perceived occupational stress experienced. Similar results were supported by Darmody (2011) who reported no significant difference in teacher stress levels in schools serving urban, rural or mixed catchment areas (Darmody 2011). The current study does not support the opposing international research completed by Rottier et al (1983) or Millicent (1999).

Discipline and Motivation, a factor in occupational stress

Sources of occupational stress for teachers was looked at using the Teacher Stress Inventory Subscales (Fimian, 1984). From the four subscales ((1)Work-Related Distress, (2) Professional Distress, (3)Discipline and Motivation and (4)Time Management), only the

"Discipline and Motivation" sub-scale stress source yielded a significant result. In particular, the Junior- 2nd class teachers displayed lower stress levels associated with discipline and motivation sub-scale than those of 3rd – 6th class and SEN teachers. The remaining three sources of stress were not significantly different between teachers; however, "Personal-Professional" subscale stressors came close.

This result supports international research which reports that difficult behaviours displayed by students in class is the main cause of teachers' occupational stress (Kyriacou,2001). Teachers who have classes in the lower end of the school do have as much disciplinary and motivational difficulties as higher class level teachers. Results from the current study suggest that teachers are frustrated with pupil behaviours and their lack of motivation. Similar results were found by Theriot et al. (2010) with 4196 elementary and middle school children in America. More locally, while previous research was only based on third class teachers, Darmody (2011) results also support this study, showing that teachers occupational stress levels are lower when pupils are well-behaved.

Strengths and limitations

It must to be noted that there are some limitations of this study, and these should be considered by future researchers who may conduct a similar study. One such limitation is attributed to the years of experience held by the participants. The years of teaching experience of participants in this study ranged from 0 – 35 years, however only nine participants who completed this study had between 21 and 35 years' experience. This may be due to the research being completed online, future research may consider doing paperer and online formats.

Furthermore, there was an underrepresentation of males in the sample. While females represent a higher proportion of the teaching profession which is reflected in this

study, a larger study specifically asking for the same number of males and females in each school to complete this study would reduce the gender imbalance.

A final limitation of this research were the methods used to obtain measures of stress. The self-report questionnaire does not account for the fact that stress can be seen as subjective, one persons level of stress is different to the net and likewise, a person may be more stressed today than yesterday. All the little factors may affect the answers given in the questionnaire. Using qualitative measures in the form of interviews may give further insight into the feelings of individuals.

Future studies

Notwithstanding the limitations of this research examined above, the results acquired from this study impacts our understanding of occupational stress among primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland. Considerations for further research are outlined below. The findings draw attention to how certain factors within the teaching profession can facilitate higher levels occupational stress (Jepson and Forrett, 2006). These factors could be explored in more depth in relation to individual personality traits. Identifying whether there is a relationship between personality traits and occupational stress levels would help identify potential teachers that are most susceptible to occupational stress. School leaders and management could then place these teachers in specific job roles to suit them. This would enhance wellbeing in the workplace (Jepson and Forrett, 2006). As Jex (1998) has previously mentioned these new lower levels of occupational stress would then lead to lower rates of absenteeism and higher levels of performance, ultimately leading better productivity for schools and a more contented management and staff as a whole (Jex, 1998).

The information gathered in this study would inform educational policy and practice. It could help the Department of Education and specific teacher unions such as the INTO to

introduce programmes and facilities to help teachers maintain appropriate and safer stress levels. By looking at the stress levels across class levels, principals in primary schools can be more selective as to which teacher they chose to teach at a specific class level. Teachers themselves can become more self-aware of the possible increase in their stress levels depending on the class being taught and be more conscious and prepared for this.

CONCLUSION

The overall purpose of this study was to determine whether there was an association between levels of occupational stress and class level being taught among Irish primary school teachers. The study looked at whether as the class level being taught increased, did levels of occupational stress increase alongside. This study also examined whether there were different causes of occupational stress among primary school teachers in the Republic of Republic of Ireland.

Despite the limitations discussed, the current study achieved some insight into the areas of occupational stress. A combination of factors were discovered that may shed some light on teacher's vulnerability to occupational stress and sources of occupational stress among teachers

Results identified class level as a significant predictor of perceived stress. The research found that the discipline and motivation of children has a huge impact on teacher's occupational stress levels. It is hoped that this current research and future research in this areas will inform practise. School management can use this information to place teachers in appropriate classes to suit their needs.

This study has attempted to reduce the extensive gap in literature in relation to occupational stress of Irish primary school teachers and to contribute further to literature in relational to teacher's occupational stress.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Information sheet

SURVEY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Occupation stress levels among Irish primary school teachers

Thank you for your interest in my research study. As part of my Bachelor of Psychology Final Year Project at the National College of Republic of Ireland, I am carrying out a study on Irish primary school teachers views on their occupational stress levels.

What is the purpose of this study: The purpose of this study is to investigate occupational stress levels among primary school teachers in Republic of Ireland. Studies suggests teaching is a stressful occupation due to many different causes, but this is under researched in Republic of Ireland. This study can be important because the results could potentially be used to influence future management and department ideas about school location, class sizes and how teachers' level of experience can impact on their occupational stress levels.

If you decide to take this survey, what will you have to do?

You will be asked a series of questions that explore the occupational stress levels among Irish primary school teachers in Republic of Ireland.

Who can take part in the study? If you are a qualified primary school teacher, currently teaching in an Irish primary school you are invited to participate in this survey.

Information gathering: The information provided during the survey will remain strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and General Data Protection Regulation (2018). All data is collected anonymously and is unidentifiable.

Can I change my mind about being involved during the survey? You can withdraw from the study by closing the page. This will stop your answers from being included in the data.

If you would like general information on mental health and stress services currently available, see below:

The Samaritans www.samaritans.ie

Aware: supportmail@aware.ie

National Suicide Helpline (Pieta House) 1800 247 247

Who do I contact for additional information about the study?

I am available to answer any questions you may have in relation to this study. Both my contact details and my supervisors are available on the next page.

Thank you

Aileen Leavy

YOU ARE INVITED TO PRINT THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR OWN RECORDS

Appendix B1

Informed Consent form

SURVEY PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Occupation stress levels among Irish primary school teachers

You are invited to a web-based online survey on occupational stress of Irish primary school teachers run by Aileen Leavy, a student in the National College of Republic of Ireland. In order to consent to participation in this study, please read the below before giving your full consent:

i. I agree to participate in this research study of my own free will and on a voluntary basis.
ii. I understand that although I agree to participate now, I have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without fear of reprisals.
iii. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
iv. I understand that participation involves the complete of a short 10-minute survey to investigate my views about the causes, consequences and coping strategies of occupational stress among primary school teachers teaching in Republic of Ireland.
v. I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
vi. I understand that any information I provide for this study will be treated anonymously and with the highest confidentially.
vii. I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may be required to report this to the suitable authorities.
viii. I understand that signed consent forms and online data collection will be retained until deemed appropriate to destroy.
ix. I understand that I am free to contact the researcher and/or university to seek further understanding and information on the study. I confirm that I have been provided with a list of contact numbers and emails to do so.

Appendix B2

Electronic Consent form

PARTICIPANT ELECTRONIC CONSENT FORM

Occupation stress levels among Irish primary school teachers

Electronic consent:

1) I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher: Aileen Leavy

Contact number(s): 087 1228488

Email address: x15045170@gmail.com

Research supervisor: Michele Kehoe

Psychology Department

National College of Republic of Ireland

Michele.Kehoe@ncirl.ie

2) Do you confirm that you have read and understood the information sheet provided to you?

☐ Yes

☐ No

3) Do you confirm that you are over 18 years of age and are voluntarily completing this questionnaire? If so, please confirm below:

☐ Yes

☐ No

You may print a copy of this consent form for your records.

Appendix C1

Survey demographics

PARTICIPANT SURVEY DEMOGRPAHICS

Occupation stress levels among Irish primary school teachers

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary
- Prefer not to specify

How many years have you been teaching?

_____

Age?

_____

What size school are you teaching in?

- Less than ten teacher school
- More than ten teacher school

What class level do you currently teach at?

- Juniors to 2nd class
- 3rd to 6th class
- Special Educational Needs teacher
- Other

Appendix C2

Teacher Stress Inventory (Fimian, 1984) Online version

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE (TEACHER STRESS INVENTORY)

Occupation stress levels among Irish primary school teachers

The purpose of the following questions is to gain an understanding of occupational stress causes and consequences among primary school teachers currently teaching in the Republic of Republic of Ireland. When responding we are interested in how you feel about a statement and whether it reflects your opinions and your occupational stress levels.

When choosing your response to a statement , consider that:

- Disagree Strongly = I am certain that I do not agree with this statement ever
- Disagree: Usually, I do not agree with this statement
- Neither agree nor disagree, I have no opinion on this subject
- Agree: Usually, I agree with this statement
- Agree Strongly: I am certain I always agree with this statement.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

1) I easily over-commit myself.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

2) I become impatient if others do things to slowly.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

3) I have little time to relax/enjoy the time of day.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

4) There isn't enough time to get things done.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

5) There is little time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

6) The pace of the school day is too fast.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

7) My personal priorities are being short-changed due to time demands.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

8) There is too much administrative paperwork in my job.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

9) I lack promotion and/or advancement opportunities.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

10) I need more status and respect on my job.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

11) I receive an inadequate salary for the work I do.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

12) I lack recognition for the extra work and/or good teaching I do.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

13) Teaching provides for a secure future.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

14) Teaching provides me with financial security.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

15) Insufficient income keeps me from living the way I want to live.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

16) I feel frustrated having to monitor pupil behaviour.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

17) I feel frustrated attempting to teach students who are poorly motivated.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

18) I feel frustrated when my authority is rejected by pupils/administration.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

19) Working conditions in my school are good.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

20) The administration in my school communicates its policies well.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

21) My immediate supervisor gives me assistance when I need help.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

22) My immediate supervisor praises good teaching.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

23) My immediate supervisor explains what is expected of me.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

24) I am friendly with the people with whom I work.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

25) My colleagues stimulate me to do better work.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

26) My interests are similar to those of my colleagues

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

27) I respond to stress by feeling insecure or vulnerable

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

28) I respond to stress by feeling unable to cope.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

29) I respond to stress by feeling depressed or anxious

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

30) I respond to stress by sleeping more or becoming fatigued

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

31) I respond to stress by procrastinating

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

32) I respond to stress with physical exhaustion

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

33) I respond to stress with feelings of increased blood pressure

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

34) I respond to stress with feeling of heart pounding or racing

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

35) I respond to stress with stomach pain or cramps.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

36) I respond to stress by using over-the-counter or prescription drugs.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

37) I respond to stress by using alcohol.

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

38) I respond to stress by calling in sick

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

39) I use relaxation techniques to deal with stress

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

40) I use exercise to deal with stress

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

41) I pursue other hobbies to deal with stress

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

42) I seek support from colleagues to deal with stress

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

43) I seek support from family/friends to deal with stress

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

44) I get professional help to deal with stress

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

45) I seek support from my union to help deal with stress

Disagree Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Agree Strongly ☐

Appendix D

Debriefing form

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEFING FORM

Occupation stress levels among Irish primary school teachers

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in the present study . This is a comparative study looking at whether there are any differences between the levels of occupational stress and job satisfaction among primary school teachers in rural and urban schools in Republic of Ireland who teach at varying class levels. The data you provided will help me complete my final year project.

The information you have given me is anonymous and will only be used for this research. It will not be possible to withdraw your data as it is non identifiable. Please note that all data will be stored securely on a password-protected computer.

I greatly appreciate your cooperation and the time you spent completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to email me at x15045170@gmail.ie. You can also contact my supervisor Michele Kehoe on Michele.Kehoe@ncirl.ie

In the event that you feel distressed by participation in this study, I encourage you to please contact Samaritans Republic of Ireland on 116123.

Thank you again for your participation.

Aileen Leavy