

## Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies among Colleges of Education Tutors' in the Volta Region, Ghana

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### Abstract

This study investigates the causes and strategies used by tutors to cope with stress. To achieve this, a qualitative approach was chosen with the use of case study design. Stratified sampling procedure was used to select 14 tutors from seven (7) Colleges of Education in the Volta Region. Semi-structure interview guide was used to collect data and it was analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that generally, excessive workload, discrimination at work place, working condition, large class size and inadequate resources causes stress for tutors. The study revealed that respondents cope with stress through counselling and sharing jokes and experience with friends and colleagues. It was therefore, recommended that the colleges should employ more tutors to lessen the workload of the existing tutors.

**Keywords:** Stress, Tutors, Counselling, Excessive Workload, Working Condition

### Introduction

Modern-day living has brought with it, not only innumerable means of comfort, but also a plethora of demands that tax human body and mind. People often have too many of these demands placed on their time; they are worried about uncertain future, and have little time for family and fun. But would one be better off without stress? A stress-free life would offer no challenge, no difficulties to surmount, no new fields to conquer, and no reasons to sharpen one's wits or improve one's abilities. Thus, every organism must solve their problems to strive and thrive (Adeoye, Durosaro, & Olugbemileke, 2009). Stress is any physical, chemical or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental unrest. It is a negative emotional state occurring in response to events that are perceived as taxing or exceeding a person's resources or ability to cope (Hockenbury, & Hockenbury, 2012). The experience of stress depends largely on our cognitive appraisal of an event and the resources we have to deal with the event (Smith & Kirby, 2012).

Stress is the pattern of responses, an organism makes to stimulus events that disturb its equilibrium or exceed its ability to cope. The stimulus events include a large variety of external and internal conditions that collectively are called stressors (Adeoye, Durosaro, & Olugbemileke, 2009). A stressor is a stimulus event that places a demand on an organism for some kind of adaptive response. It is when the adaptive capacity of the organism collapses that stress occurs. Thus stress is the condition that occurs when demands exceed the adaptive capacity of individuals. However, stress is healthful and necessary to keep us alert and occupied. Stress researcher, Selye (1980), referred to such healthful stress as "eustress". But intense can overtax individual adjustive capacity, dampen the mood, impair ability to experience pleasure, and harm the body (Adeoye, 2008).

Since the effects of occupational stress are quite extensive, Rue and Byards (2000) as well as Noe and Wright (1996) assert that many large organizations and a growing number of smaller ones are attempting to help employees with stress, burnout and other personal problems including depression, anxiety, domestic trauma, financial problems and other psychiatric /medical problems. They explain that this help is generally offered in the form of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), counselling services and wellness programmes, all geared toward enhancing employee well-being. The programmes include periodic medical exams, education on improved dietary practices, weight control, exercise and fitness, hypertension detection and control as well as immunizations and cardiopulmonary resuscitation training. Harris (2000) believes that such programmes can help cut employer health costs, lower absenteeism and job turnover in organizations. Additionally, he claims that such programmes have been found to be cost-effective alternative to other treatment sources that employees might use.

Indeed, much of today's stress-related illness worldwide is the result of excessive demands placed on employees due to a number of challenges confronting both public and private sector organizations. In many respects, higher education is no different from other large organizations. They are society's premier knowledge-generating organizations. According to Sawyerr (2002), there is evidence to suggest that the sector is undergoing unprecedented changes and is confronted with multiple challenges both old and new. The challenges are

disheartening – access, funding, expansion, quality assurance, curriculum relevance, political intervention and poor working conditions. .

Academic life is more difficult than most anticipate because the responsibilities are time-consuming, diverse and sometimes conflicting. Don, Luana and Shelley (2006) are of the view that college staffs do complex work in an increasingly demanding environment. To Akinboye, Akinboye and Adeyemo (2002), the tasks which are labour-intensive and the institutional goals of high quality research and teaching may lead to job pressure. No wonder, Kinman (2000) claims that little is known about the impact that the challenges might have had on the workforce.

It is clear that the stress phenomenon is now recognized as an issue that has grown in prominence and there is growing evidence that African universities and indeed universities everywhere no longer provide the low stress working environments they once did. It is not surprising that in 1992, the United Nations described job stress as the “twentieth century disease” (Akinboye, Akinboye, & Adeyemo, 2002). It was reported that, over 70% of employees world-wide described their jobs as stressful. In corroboration of this circumstance, Winfield (2000) indicated that the prevalence of occupational stress among academic and general staff of universities from across the globe is alarmingly widespread and increasing.

A major source of stress among College of Education Tutors is the dramatic increase in student enrolment. Rapid increase in enrolment over the last few years has been a striking feature of higher education in Africa. As pointed out by Awopegba (2001), there has been an enormous increase in student enrolment without a corresponding increase in teaching staff. Amewudah (2005) claims that the democratization at the lower levels of the educational structure in the developing countries have resulted in huge expansion in enrolments which has now caught up with higher education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Tutors are increasingly feeling contradictory pressures arising from external drives to adopt commercial values and managerial practices while at the same time maintaining traditional educational principles and scholarly aim (Hall, 2011). As a consequence, administrative duties have increased significantly for tutors alongside escalating demands associated with research and teaching. Tutors are under increasing pressure to publish high quality research in preferred journals; to apply for grants to demonstrate research impacts and to build external links with industry and community (Sue, 2012). Vardi (2009) states that growing students’ numbers, wider students diversity, changes in students’ expectations as ‘paying customers’, the employability agenda and pressure to adopt new and innovative teaching methodologies have all impacted on the nature and burden of the academic workload of the tutor leading to stress.

Stresses are problems that cannot be overlooked. They have negative effects on the individual, his or her family, community and the nation at large. Every job has its own stress fingerprint. Literature abounds on the stressful nature of teaching as an occupation (Akeradolu & Adeogun, 2001). The stressful nature of teaching invariably affects teaching/learning process causing linear relationship between stress and tutors’ performance. Each individual has a particular range of comfort zone within which he or she feel steady and secure. Two individuals may be working under the same conditions and may differ in their level of stress. Stress actions are indiscriminate and it affects people of all ages and all categories of workers depending on circumstance and their coping abilities (Ijaiya, 2002).

Research evidence has also shown that there is high level of stress among tutors in higher educational institutions in Ghana (Atindanbila, 2011). But unlike advanced countries such as United States of America, Britain and France where teachers’/tutors’ stress has received reasonable attention because of the relationship between occupational stress and work effectiveness, the issue of stress associated with the teaching profession has not received required attention in Ghana and therefore very little literature exist on this topic. The argument is that most of the findings of the studies on stress among tutors conducted in the Western educational context cannot be applied in Ghana due to contextual and environmental differences.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is in twofold: 1) to investigate the causes of stress among tutors in Colleges of Education in the Volta Region and 2) to identify strategies that is employ by tutors to cope with the stress they experience.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the causes of stress among tutors in Colleges of Education in the Volta Region?
2. What strategies do tutors employ to cope with stress they experience in carrying out their duties?

### **Significance of the Study**

Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 33) argue that “The researcher must show that practitioners needed information that the research will provide”. First, the study stress among college tutors has implications for improving understanding of job-stress as well as for enhancing their working life. Understanding environmental and personal influences on stress and burnout may hold benefits for schools, colleges and particularly administrators to empower tutors to overcome and persevere through the stress and stay in teaching. Lastly, the results of the study will be useful in informing and educating others interested in examining the issue further. The findings and the approach to the study can be useful for future studies in a different context.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is based on Person-Environment Fit Theory of stress. The most widely accepted frameworks for conducting research on job-stress (Brewer & McMahan, 2004; Hinnah, Danso Mensah & Gyaki, 2014; Kokkinos, 2007). Person-environment fit is the degree to which individual characteristics harmonise with those of his or her environment (Meyer & Dale, 2010). With the Person-environment fit theory there is interaction between an individual and his or her environment determines whether or not the situation is stressful for that person. It assumes that human behaviour is a function of the person and the environment, and that a person’s vocational satisfaction, stability and achievement depend on the congruence or fit between the person’s personality and the environment in which the person works (Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004; Kokkinos, 2007; Salami, 2006).

In the work situations, higher degrees of fit predict positive work outcomes (Vogel & Feldman, 2009). According to Clark-Murphy (2010), the person environment approach suggests that for optimal productivity, individuals should be compatible with their environments. Streufert and Swezey (1986) concluded that, decision-making performance reaches an optimal level when an individual’s cognitive capability matches the complexity of their environment. Jacques (1989) also argued that for optimal productivity, organisations should be designed on the person-environment fit based on individual’s cognitive capacity at every level of the organisation.

In the context of the workplace, the individual’s attributes are interests, transferable skills, career motives and values, personality preferences, career orientations, self-concepts and sense of self-efficacy. The work environment include individual’s expectations and perceptions regarding workload, control over one’s work, tangible and intrinsic rewards of work, the relationship and sense of community among co-workers, perceptions of fairness in the workplace and the role of personal and organizational values (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004). If the fit between an individual and his environment is incompatible, that results to stress. Similarly, lack of fit between the demands placed on individuals and their abilities to meet those demands can result in stress.

### **Causes of Stress among Tutors**

Over the last decade there has been a substantial increase in stress-related illness in institutions (Cooper, 2004). The sources of stress are many, varied, complex and different for every individual, vary over time and therefore are almost impossible to analyze. Many studies of stress at work have shown that there are a variety of organizational factors that are instrumental in causing stress, and these factors intrinsic to the job, organizational structure and climate, relationships within the organization, the role of the individual in the organization and career development (Sutherland & Cooper, 2001).

Tutor stress is a real phenomenon and that high levels are reliably associated with a combination of causal factors like those intrinsic to teaching, individual vulnerability and organizational influences (Matt, 2002) cited in (Atindabila, 2002). Research has suggested that a number of stressors are intrinsic to the teaching profession (Okebukole, & Jegede, 1989).

George and Jones (1996) point out that the sources of stress may range from too much or little work, time pressures and deadlines, working conditions, excessive travels, long hours to frequent organizational changes. Erasmus (2006) admits that stress in the workplace comes from different sources. They come from irritating fellow employees, noise pollution, irritating habits (eg. obsessive throat clearing, loud telephone conversation, gossiping, chewing gum or sniffing), impossible workloads and an impossible boss.

To Cole (2004), the main sources of occupational stress are located in a number of groupings. These are organizational factors such as management style (where individuals find it difficult to adapt to a superior’s management style because it is too autocratic or too participatory); communication and organization structure; external environment such as development of new technology, economic situation and political changes; job characteristics such as job demands, physical conditions and role conflict; work relationships such as superiors, colleagues, customers and suppliers; domestic situation such as home life and outside social life as well as personal factors such as personality type and ability to adapt to change.

Robbins and De Cenzo (1998) are of the view that factors that create stress can be grouped into two major categories namely organizational and personal factors. To them, an employee's job and the organization's structure are widespread causes of stress. Excessive workloads and role conflict are key factors they consider as potential stressors in the organization. Financial difficulties, death of a family member, divorce, serious illness as well as employee personality are some of the personal factors that can also create stress.

### **Organisational Factors**

Organizational structure, climate and leadership of a school contribute to tutor stress and burnout. According to Cartwright and Cooper (1997), psychological strain is often due to the culture and management style adopted within an organization. They highlight that factors relating to organizational structure and climate that are stressors include hierarchical, bureaucratic structures that allow employees little participation in decisions affecting their work; lack of adequate communication between managerial and non-managerial levels; cynicism regarding leadership and attempts by employees to further their own interest at the expense of others. Kahn and Cooper (1993) also indicate that limited opportunities for advancement, insufficient performance feedback, performance assessment measures being inadequate and biased control systems and culture within the organization, may be perceived as potential stressors.

Warshaw (1982, cited in Steenkamp, 2003) maintains that work stressors can only be fully comprehended if the importance of work to the employee is understood; be it for meeting the basic needs for employees, including maintenance, activity, social needs, self-esteem and self-actualization. The perceived threat or failure to satisfy these basic needs represents a source of stress in the work place.

Research has highlighted that there are six major sources of work place stress which include: factors intrinsic to the job, the role of the employee, relationships at the workplace, organizational climate and structure, the lack of potential for career advancement, as well as factors external to the work environment (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997).

Stressful situations occur within schools because of the organization's culture, function, structure, the nature of the management procedures, insufficient training of tutors, time pressure, poor work conditions and poor consultation and communication (Brown & Ralph, 1998; Kyriacou, 2001). It is further highlighted by Olivier & Venter (2003) that the lack of discipline in schools, the abolishment of corporal punishment, unmotivated learners, redeployment, retrenchment, and retirement packages for tutors/tutors, large tutor-student ratios and a new curriculum approach all contribute to the increase in stress levels of tutors. In addition, the management style of principals, new governing bodies for schools, the high crime rate, coping with current political change and corruption in state departments are also cited as factors contributing to the stress experienced by tutors (Olivier & Venter, 2003). Several international studies have highlighted that tutors perceive the implementation of the inclusive model as having insufficient support resources, the policies were confused and that inclusion had been imposed from the top, without adequate consultation (Bender, Vail & Scott, 1995). Griffin (2005), Greenberg (2005) that a poorly designed office and cramped workspace and lack of resources can make it difficult for people to have privacy, work effectively or even having social interaction.

Leadership is another form of organizational factor that contributes to tutor stress. Research indicates that principals play a vital role in the care for the personal welfare and emotional support of tutors. Isherwood (1993) found that principals that demonstrated excellent human relations skills heightened tutors' loyalty and improved tutor satisfaction, whilst the lack in participatory management, lack of sensitivity to school and tutor-related problems and lack of support was reliably associated with tutor stress.

Lack of influence also leads to tutor stress. Cheek and Miller (1983, cited in Steenkamp, 2003) deduce that not being involved in decision making has been established across all occupational groups to be the most salient source of stress that correlates with low self-esteem. Several studies have also highlighted that tutors feel that they have a lack of control and decision-making powers due to the hierarchical nature of bureaucratic structures at school which concentrates power in the hands of a few (Kyriacou, 2001).

There are numerous problems that face tutors/tutors as a consequence of recent government policies involving rightsizing or downsizing of tutors, the banning of corporal punishment, redeployment of tutors, voluntary severance packages, early retirement and retrenchment. Radical changes in the education system are apt to take their toll on the well-being of the tutor corps as changes in social life and school practice brings about serious psychological adjustment problems (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002).

The major problems facing tutors are due to the fact that the increases in responsibility have not been accompanied by appropriate changes in facilities and training in order to equip tutors with these new demands.

Consequently tutors may feel threatened by these new demands, thus becoming stressed. Changes in education have been identified as a major factor among sources of stress in Britain (Travers & Cooper, 1996).

Again, colleagues in an organization are also a source of stress among tutors. According to Sutherland and Cooper (1990, p. 46), poor work relations are defined as “having low trust, low levels of supportiveness and low interest in problem solving within the organization.” Supervisors, peers and subordinates can dramatically influence employees just by their interactions. Problems of instability may occur in situations where the relationship between a supervisor and subordinate is psychologically unhealthy. Competition amongst colleagues and differences in personality clashes amongst fellow workers can give rise to stress (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997). Jarvis (2002) found that factors such as social support amongst colleagues and leadership style have an impact on levels of stress amongst tutors.

Negative interpersonal relations and the absence of support from colleagues or superiors can be significant stressors for employees (Driscoll & Beehr, 2000). Conversely, having access to social support from other people in the organization can reduce psychological strain (Beehr & McGrath, 1992) and alleviate emotional exhaustion (Greenglass, Burke & Konarski, 1998). According to Sutherland and Cooper (1990), the quality of interpersonal relationships at work is important in that supportive relationships are less likely to create pressures associated with rivalry, bickering and gossip mongering. In addition, the superior-subordinate relationship can be potentially stressful when the leadership style is authoritarian, lacks understanding that feedback about performance and recognition and praise for effort are beneficial for boss-subordinate relationship. In conjunction with this, Cartwright and Cooper (1997) indicate that in situations where the relationship between supervisor and subordinate is psychologically unhealthy, problems of emotional instability may occur.

A study by Rollinson (2005), shows that a number of behaviours can be particularly stress-provoking. These include inconsistent instructions, lack of adequate direction, too strong an emphasis on productivity, focusing only on isolated incidents of sub-standard performance, ignoring good performance and lack of concern for employees' well-being.

### **Stress Sources Relating to Role in Organization**

According to Sutherland and Cooper (2000), organizations are continually reinventing themselves and as a consequence, changes to job roles are common. The impact of changes in the workplace can alter the nature of job roles, causing role ambiguity or role conflict, or additional demands, resulting in role overload. Role ambiguity, role conflict and level of responsibility for others are often regarded as the major sources of stress relating to a person's role in the organization (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997).

Role Overload and Responsibility is a source stress among tutors. Role overload, referring to the number of different roles an individual has to fulfil, can lead to excessive demands on the individual's time and may create uncertainty about the ability to perform these roles adequately (Driscoll & Cooper, 2002). Sutherland and Cooper (2000) posit the view that being responsible for the work and performance of others, demands more interaction with others, and is thus more stressful than being responsible for equipment, budgets and other issues. Role-overload is the final impact. Related to work overload is role-overload which takes place when a Tutor has to cope with a number of competing roles within their jobs. A study by Pithers (1995) brought out this factor clearly. He measured levels of strain, organizational roles and stress in 322 Australian and Scottish tutors and role overload emerged as the major cause. In addition to coping with increased demands, academic staff has to perform publicly, so that poor performances in any of the main areas of academic work (undergraduate teaching, thesis supervision and research) are readily identified. Tutors are also subjected to student evaluation of their teaching which is taken into account during promotions. Tutors who also fail to publish are not doing well. To Winefield (2000), there can be no occupation that their performance is opened to public scrutiny like teaching.

Another source of stress relating to role in organization is role ambiguity. Role ambiguity refers to the extent to which employees lack clarity about their role or the task demands at work (Spector, 2000). It occurs when an employee does not understand or realize the expectations and demands of the job, or the scope of the role (Kahn & Cooper, 1993). Role ambiguity has been associated with tension and fatigue, intention to quit or actually leaving the job, and high levels of anxiety, physical and psychological strain, and absenteeism. The stress arising from unclear objectives or goals can lead to job dissatisfaction, a lack of self confidence, a lowered sense of self esteem, depression and low work motivation, increased blood pressure and pulse rate, and intentions to leave a job (French & Caplan, 1990) According to Driscoll and Beehr (2000) research has

demonstrated a consistent link between role ambiguity in a job and high levels of psychological strain and burnout. Role ambiguity involves a lack of clear and consistent information about duties, tasks, responsibilities and rights (Smylie, 1999).

Role Conflict is also a source of stress among tutors. According to King and King (1990), role conflict arises when an employee experiences incompatible demands or incompatible goals surrounding tasks connected with their job which can induce negative emotional reaction due to perceived inability to be effective on the job. Furthermore, having to do tasks that are not perceived to be part of one's job role can potentially lead to stress associated with role conflict (Cooper & Sutherland, 2000). Cartwright and Cooper (1997) maintain that people, who have a more flexible orientation to life, suffer less from role conflict than people with high anxiety levels.

### **Classroom Management**

Classroom management is another aspect of a tutor's daily activities that can cause undue stress and lead to burnout if not combated early on in one's career. Student misbehaviour is one of the most common factors reported as a major contributor to tutor stress (Geving, 2007). This falls under the umbrella of all that goes on in a tutor's classroom during a teaching day: student engagement, student apathy, lack of respect towards the adult and other children in the room, students showing up to class unprepared, and negative student behaviour. These misbehaviours are the everyday incidentals, not the severe behaviours such as violence towards tutors and students (Dunham, 1992). If tutor burnout is caused by the above behaviours occurring continuously in the classroom, the bigger impact of the burnout can lead to not only tutors leaving, but can lead to higher student dropout rates (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008).

More training in behaviour management can lessen burnout because tutors start having more success with students and classroom management due to increased skills and knowledge (Egyed & Short, 2006). Furthermore, tutors are confronted with students labelled as problematic or as "at risk" at an increasing rate (Abebe & Shaughnessy, 1997). Tutors need to be offered more support in order to be better prepared to handle the issues that can arise with students in need. Ultimately, the individuals most negatively affected by stress and burnout of tutors in the schools, are the students (Yong & Yue, 2007).

### **Environmental Factors**

The environment in which teaching and learning takes place has been theorized and empirically demonstrated to influence the attitude of the tutors, their productivity and their students' learning (Borg, & Riding, 1991). The awareness of the effect of the environment of the tutor on the students' performance was heightened during international meetings like National Assessment of Education Progress in U.S. and the British Assessment Performance in 1988 (Helgeson, 1988). During these meetings, the achievement levels of students were reported to be declining. It was clear that the tutors were going through a lot of stress and this was translating into the students' declining achievement (Anderson, 1989).

A number of the sources of stress with regards to the environment for the tutors have been identified and discussed below. First and foremost, leadership style emerged as a significant organizational factor for stress. Harris et al. (1999) assessed the departmental leadership styles and realized that those who had close personal relationship with staff helped to reduce stress levels in them. Travers and Cooper (1994) interpreted this in terms of heads of departments failing to cope with workload and resorting to bullying as a maladaptive coping strategy. Findings related to this include lack of friendly and supportive atmosphere among staff members can be stressors (Payne et al., 1987).

Several studies point to the fact that if there are changes in the school, it affects the tutors. Travers and Cooper (1994) reported that the following changes are sources of stress for tutors: Lack of support from the government, constant changes within the profession, lack of information as to how the changes are to be implemented and diminishing social respect for tutors. Another source of stress for Tutors in recent years is the expectation that they should attract external funding through research grants or research consultations. Traditionally, Tutors were not expected to generate external income and hence may not have the entrepreneurial skills that are required to do so (Atindanbila, 2011). A study by Winefield and Jarett (2001) showed that in the humanities where this skill is lacking as compared to the other areas, the psychological stress level is higher than in the other discipline

## **Supportive Measures to Help Tutors Cope with Stress and Burnout**

### **Social Support**

There is consistent evidence that employees with more support from others experience lower strain and burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), and where an employee is faced with potentially stressful demands, conflicts and problems in the work place, having support from others may reduce the impact of the pressures on the individual's well-being (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2002).

Although research (Ganster, Fusilier & Mayes, 1986) found no evidence of buffering or found reverse buffering; where the presence of social support make worse the amount of stress experienced, Green glass, Fiksenbaum and Burke (1996) indicate that support from colleagues and supervisors had a significant buffering influence on tutor burnout, and feelings of isolation exacerbated the stress experienced. Support from colleagues and administration can help to build positive self-efficacy in tutors. Ware and Kitsantas (2007) defined a groups' willingness to work and stay together in a group as "cohesiveness". The more a tutor believes in the group's capabilities and sees it aligned to one's own ideas of educating students, the more it correlates to a higher feeling of self-efficacy. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) further emphasized, "Observing colleagues managing different aspects of teaching and seeking guidance may increase individual tutors' self-efficacy, particularly when tutors work in teams and have ample opportunities to observe each other" (p. 621). The opposite would be true if a tutor did not believe in the abilities of others. The more positive experiences of collaboration a tutor has, the more likely it will boost intrinsic motivation (Rhodes et al. 2004). Working together and believing in the abilities of the group as a whole can give an individual a higher feeling of self-efficacy and the ability to do the job. Other support systems include, reduced perfectionism, where individuals are taught to have more realistic expectations and social support, providing the necessary emotional, informational, appraisal and instrumental support that the individual needs (Quick & Quick, 2004). By understanding the stressors that prevail in the work place, the appropriate steps can be undertaken to assist in the reduction of stress levels. An organization could consider the provision of skilled support, by employing a full-time counsellor that could provide the needed counselling services or use employee assistance programmes (EAPs). Counselling involves a set of techniques, skills and attitudes to help people manage their own problems using their own resources (Cooper & Bramwell, 1992). Other methods of stress prevention include: training individuals in stress management techniques, managing morale and utilizing teamwork (Sutherland & Cooper, 2002).

### **Administrative Support**

Principals, in particular, can nurture or exasperate tutor/tutor stress by whether or not the proper assistance is given to meet the needs of each individual. Working conditions at schools and how tutors are feeling about their jobs are strongly linked to the role of the principal (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Ultimately, it is the goal of the principal to create a school environment that supports a learning community that is satisfying to both students and tutors (Brock & Grady, 2000). If an administrator focuses only on students, s/he is missing an important key to student success: tutors who are not stressed or experiencing symptoms of burnout are better meeting the needs of the students. Bindhu and Sudheeshkumar, (2006) emphasized, "...the welfare of the tutor should be of supreme concern to the school authorities" (p. 7).

Administrators have the power to influence the climate of the school and in doing so, can motivate and positively impact tutors' working situations (Rhodes et al., 2004). Leithwood and Beatty (2008) stated, "Leaders are emotionally significant 'others' in tutors' lives and affect a large part of tutors' disposition to be open to new ideas and new practices" (p. 99). Administrators have a powerful role in tutor satisfaction. At the same time, principals can have the opposite effect on tutors and staff, so it is important to distinguish between positive and negative support. Leaders can be driven to develop a school environment that focuses on raising student achievement, however, if they set Unrealistic goals and are too demanding on their employees, the opposite may occur (Sorenson, 2007). The wrong kind of pressure can lead to more stress, which then can lead to burnout.

Principals need to encourage and guide tutors, new and experienced, to the development of a shared vision and goals by making collaborative decisions. Ingersoll (2001) stated, "Data suggests that improving teaching conditions such as administrative support and input on decision making will increase tutor retention" (as cited in Ware & Kitsantas, 2007, p. 309). Furthermore, from multiple studies, Leithwood and Beatty (2008) identified that giving tutors/tutors a role in the school's decision-making process, reduces stress in tutors' jobs.

An administration's support of tutors can lead to less stress and higher retention rates of tutors. The need for acknowledgment from administration should occur in personal relationships, loyalty and in building staff development to further build on tutors' needs (Margolis & Nagel, 2006). Principals must recognize that the

leadership role held is a powerful one, and it goes beyond just educating the students. How an administrator decides to lead his/her tutors can have a major impact on the success of educating each student at a school site. Bateman (2008) believed leadership should be focused on what a leader is able to accomplish, not whether the individual has a charismatic personality. Leaders need to be aware of the problem, but they need to take action to solve the problem. Bateman (2008) further explained "Managers seeking to be competent and respected leaders can benefit from working on their personal style and interpersonal relationships, but a focus on problem-solving for performance will close the deal" (p. 310). In order to be successful leaders, individuals must be successful problem solvers.

### **Professional Development**

Support also comes in the form of professional development. It offers more opportunity for tutors/tutors to strengthen their teaching skills and can result in stronger job satisfaction, thereby increasing retention in the profession (Rhodes et al., 2004). Tutors need to be given the chance to work on their craft and the training they attend must be relevant to the individual based on necessity. For example, if a tutor is struggling with classroom management, there should be opportunity for additional training to assist in the individual tutor's needs.

Support of the new tutor is an important element not to be overlooked. New tutors need help in realizing the importance of their work and how to get the resources needed to be effective in their jobs (Inman & Marlow, 2004). Well-designed mentoring programs have been studied and are proven to raise retention rates of new tutors by improving their overall job performance (Darling-Hammond, 2003). In order for the mentoring programs to be successful, the concerns of the beginning tutors need to guide the activities done to help them succeed (McCann & Johannessen, 2004). Furthermore, in order for new tutors to learn new ways of teaching and become more familiar with the curriculum, there needs to be regular, structured opportunities for staff development at the school site (Inman & Marlow, 2004).

### **Methodology**

Methodological choice of this research is underpinned by philosophical positions regarding how knowledge is gained, choice of method and frames for data analysis, among others guide the study at all stages. The researcher used qualitative research approach, which was underpinned by interpretive paradigm. The approach was chosen because it allows researchers to access the experiences and viewpoints of the research participants (Verma & Mallick, 1999). Secondly, it recognises the role of the study and the research participants in knowledge construction, acknowledging interpretations as 'socially constructed realities.' The researcher and the research participants acquire active roles in knowledge construction. Lastly, it is useful in an attempt to understand a phenomenon in all its complexity in a particular socio-cultural context (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative study is a bigger term that comprises many research designs including Historical study, Phenomenological Study, Ethnographic Study and Case Study. The designs may have some related feature and difference but out of these, the case study design was chosen for the purpose to investigate the causes, and coping strategies used by tutors in Colleges of Education in the Volta Region, Ghana. A case study design allows an investigation to real-life event or in-depth analysis conducted, usually over a limited period of time, and focuses upon a limited number of subjects (Yin, 2003).

According to Best and Kahn (1993) population refers to as "a group of individuals or people that have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher" (p.13). The population constitutes all academic staff of E. P. College of Education, St. Theresa's College of Education, St. Francis College of Education, Peki College of Education, Jasikan College of Education, Akatsi College of Education and Dambai College of Education in the Volta Region, Ghana. Whereas, the targeted population are senior tutors because at the Colleges these groups occupy large positions, duties and supervise more students, curriculum assessment, community project, transforming teacher education and learning.

The sample was fourteen (14), which consisted of two (2) senior tutors each from the seven (7) colleges of education with master of philosophy degree. Stratified sampling procedure was used to select respondents for the study. A small sample size was selected because it would enable the phenomenon under study to be explored for a better understanding. Creswell, (2005) argues that selecting a large number of interviewees will 'result in superficial perspectives ... the overall ability of a study to provide an in-depth picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual or site' (p.207).

Before data collection, the researcher observed ethical consideration because my positionality as a senior tutor at E. P. College of Education makes it less difficult to ask certain sensitive questions from my colleague tutors. But my positionality as a pseudo-insider was successful with series of formal and informal interactions and relationship with tutors help me to get acquainted to them. For this reasons, they perceived me as a harmless researcher and therefore, discussed issues openly and dispassionately with me was not difficult. Lastly, the researcher took advantage of their 'unfamiliarity' with the issues and questions were asked for extra clarification.



After the researcher has achieved the positionality, he then used semi-structured interview instrument to collect data from respective tutors for the study.

By way of ensuring validity of the instruments, three (3) retire tutors who have key knowledge about the topic, administration and data analysis of data were given the instruments for thorough check for flaws. Comments made were favourable which does not require massive change. To grant the content validity of the instrument, the questions that was been asked were given to a college principal to scrutinize the instruments. To check internal consistency of the instrument, the researcher asks for clarification from respondents about their comments.

The data were analysed using content thematic analysis. Content thematic analysis is an analytical process which requires study to work with data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them and searching for pattern (Merriam & Associates, 2002). For instance, the statement below represents interviewee doctor's comment on coping strategies.

*When I go to the town, some trusted colleagues there help me cope with stress; they can have a bit of joke with me and I think that helps- laugh it off a bit. This can help make me feel better (EPCoE-1).*

Furthermore, to attribute comments to the interviewee senior tutors from colleges were assigned some serial codes. For example, Interviewees from E. P. College of Education were assigned with (EPCoE-1); (EPCoE-2); Interviewees from St. Theresa's College of Education (STTCoE-3), (STTCoE-4); Interviewees from St. Francis College of Education (STFCoE-5) (STFCoE-6); Interviewees from Peki College of Education (PCoE-7) (PCoE-8); Interviewees from Jasikan College of Education (JCoE-9) (JCoE-10); Interviewees from Akatsi College of Education (ACoE-11) (ACoE-12) and Interviewees from Dambai College of Education (DCoE-13) (DCoE-14).

## Results and Discussions

This section presents the results/discussions from the data collected from respondents. The data were thematically analysed and related literature were used to confirm or disconfirm the assertions given by the respondents.

### Causes of Stress among Senior Tutors

One of the items on the interview schedule was to found out whether the tutors feel stressed at work or they find their work stressful. Their responses suggested that they all found their work as stressful. They emphasised that looking at the workload on them, they were always stressed up. With regards to how the tutors feel when stressed, JCoE-10 for example highlighted this problem by citing his personal experience "I feel restless, tense up, back pains, low concentration and frustrations all over when stressed". In effect the interviewees said they felt some symptoms in one way or the other.

When asked about their major causes of stress, most of the interviewees noted that excessive workload, work conditions that were not very appealing were a potential stressor to majority of the tutors. They also commented on stressors relating to pace of change of general college atmosphere, inadequate resources, insufficient preparation time, lack of in-service training and bureaucracy. The majority believed that workload or demands made on them were high. ACoE-12 for example remarked:

*I experience my stress when there is excessive workload on me; teaching, marking, supervising students' research work. When it happens like this and you don't meet deadline, it sometimes creates tension between me and head of department which worsen the case.*

PCoE-7 shared her view:

*Well, as my job role has become more involving... (Joggle shoulders) I guess that I have got better at it and can handle the stress but there is always something new to throw you on daily basis; teaching, marking, research work supervision couple with bad condition of service. All these cause me a lot of stress.*

It emerged from the data that tutors' causes of stress in the lecture theatre was when teaching intellectually weak students; students neither understood, nor contributed to lessons. It appeared that when the students are weak academically it makes the tutors teaching difficult. The tutors do all the talking as no contributions come from the students and finally do not perform in exams STFCoE-6; DCoE-13 and STFCoE-6. EPCoE-2 was emphatic that:

*It is very stressful to me when I teach and realized that I have not communicated to the students; they didn't understand the lesson, probably their understanding is very low. When I conduct exams and students' performances do not reflect the way they understood me, I feel bad.*

Responses from interviewee *STFCoE-5* revealed that dealing with students outside the lecture theatre was not all that stressful except some few who were troublesome and deliberately refused to take quizzes or submit assignments as expected. Other students also disturbed tutors in their homes when attending to their private work:

*I am not stressed when dealing with students outside the lecture theatre just that there are few instances when some students refused to take instructions; some do not take part in quizzes or submit assignment when expected to, and so they come home to worry me or start calling me on phone at my private time for me to reschedule dates for them to write those papers when am doing other things of private interest (DCoE-14).*

Another dimension of tutors stress at the lecture theatre was insufficient time for tutors to prepare before going to teach. Tutors had no time to revise, mark assignments, quizzes and collate marks to know students level of understanding and as a result could not deliver as expected:

*My stress starts when I am about to go to the lecture theatre and I feel that I haven't been able to revise, mark assignments, quizzes and collate marks to know students level of understanding. I struggle with wanting to reach every student. How do I manage my instruction to meet all academic level in the lecture theatre? With that, how do I manage the time I spent lecturing to make sure everything involving curriculum gets done when it needs to be done (STTCoE-3).*

Some of the participants especially the low-ranked ones rather complained about colleagues at the department advancing ahead of them both in academics and research. They felt that some of their colleagues looked down on them perhaps they were not professors, especially when they had not presented any paper or research. *STTCoE-4*, one of those tutors remarked:

*With my colleagues at the department, I become more stressed when I get to know that may be somebody has been able to publish this number of papers, and when some are going for further studies when I have not made any attempt, I hardly do things.*

*PCoE-8* who shared different opinion contended that self-adequacy was what he considered not good at the department. Though, he was not much concerned about some things that went on at the department, he felt that certain decisions that directly affected people were taken without their knowledge.

*If you go ahead and make your own decisions and do your own things to torment some people, then what you have decided may well affect the people that work right next to you. Certain decisions that directly affected me were taken without my knowledge. I wish to be consulted well about some things that affect me directly, (ACoE-11).*

When a further probe was made about interviewees' causes of stress when dealing with the college authorities, the data revealed that bureaucracy and favouritism in terms of appointments of tutors to lead various departments or units and promotion of staff were the tutors' source of worry. One *JCoE-9* commented:

*There is favoritism when it comes to appointing people/leaders to head department/units. The bad side of it is when it comes to promotion. People submit their document and it come faster than expected but others too delays. For the flexible way promotion in the college but do to biases on the side of the leaders in control it becomes difficult (JCoE-9).*

### **Strategies Employ by Tutors to Cope with Stress**

Three themes emerged to answer the above research question. The first one was the strategies tutors used to cope with stress in their work environment. The second one looked at tutors' benefits on counselling services to cope with stress and the third one also talked about how tutors cope with stress at home.

With the first item which demanded the tutors coping strategies in their work environment, the data suggested that all of them had their own way of dealing with stress. Most of the interviewees talked about talking with

friends/family and students (social interactions) during their leisure time, browsing for fun or visiting social networks, engaging in exercise/sports, maintaining positive thinking and prayer for assistance as their coping strategies. *PCoE-7*, for instance, explained: I walk up and down stairs to interact with colleagues, I crack jokes and we laugh over it. I interact with students who I consider to be matured and respectful.

*I also sit behind my computer to browse for fun or visit face book to chat with friends on campus Sometimes I move outside the office to exercise or stretch my legs. I also try to always think positively and pray constantly for assistance because the Lord knows better than human beings (ACoE-11).*

*JCoE-10* added that: I move a lot when I feel cramped in my office, I walk out and with my cell phone I call a friend or somebody to reduce stress.

*I have pasted a lot of posters in my office to make the place friendlier and whoever comes to my office gets something to read to entertain him/herself to reduce stress. Sometimes, I sit behind my computer to browse (ACoE-12).*

Another commented:

*I talk with my friends when I am stressed. I also like sports a lot so I always engage in sports. I think positively and try not to internalize or harbour issues and also not forgetting my prayers because in Psalm 131:1-2 the Bible says “Destructive fear (worry, panic, suspicion) is generated from anticipation of the unknown. We all like to be in control of our circumstances. But when I compared my minimal human capabilities to that of an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present God, I surrender my control. Suddenly my fears (and anger) diminished (STTCoE-3).*

Another dimension of coping strategy suggested by the interview data was effective time management. The interviewees were of the view that the little time when managed appropriately relieves one from stress and burnout.

*EPCoE-1* shared this view commented that:

*Coping with stress, deals with effective time management, so I plan my time table very well and adjust to it. When there is a clash I look for convenient time to attend to that schedule and make sure that the time is effectively managed as the saying goes “time is money”.*

In a follow up question to examine interviewees typical approaches they use to deal/cope with stress they experience during teaching, marking, supervision of research work and in their administrative work. With respect to interviewees coping strategies when teaching, *PCoE-8* stated that making lessons lively, the use of appropriate teaching aids to aid easy understanding of lessons in class was the best coping strategy as every member of the class took part in the lesson thereby lessening the amount of talking done.

*When I am teaching and I realize that I am stressed out because students are not getting the concept, I break for a while, tell a story or create a scenario to make the lesson lively. Sometimes, projector is used to make the lesson self explanatory especially when it is audio visual. Those who are far and near enjoy the lesson and I move on (PCoE-8).*

It also emerged from the data that due to the large number of students, tutors tried not to pile up scripts. Others admitted that most of their questions were objective types so that they could be helped out. *STTCoE-4*, for example commented, my students are many so after assignment or quiz, I start marking as early as possible in order not to pile up the scripts to be a burden on me. Sometimes, objective questions are set so that I could be helped out.

As to how interviewees cope with stress when supervising students' research work, all the fourteen interviewees maintained that supervising research work was the most stressful of all the tutors work. They viewed such activity as tedious as it took much of their time especially when students came out with a lot of conceptions and tend to argue out. As a result, most of the interviewees said they attended to students' research work either in the evening or weekends to avoid getting stress.

*Supervising students' research work is very stressful my friend, especially where students come out with a lot of conceptions and misconceptions and tend to argue out because of their status. So, I attend to my students at the latter part of the day or weekends to avoid stress (JCoE-9).*

*PCoE-7* also added: Supervising students' research work is difficult task so I attend to students after I have finished with the day's work to enable me have enough time for the student and to avoid interference. With regard to how the interviewees coped with stress in their administrative work, majority of them contended they avoided taking plenty lessons and made sure some of their responsibilities were delegated to their colleagues.

*I am the head of the department, so I account for whatever goes on in the department. Therefore, when it comes to course allocation, I always make sure that I take few lessons because of my administrative work. I also delegate some of my responsibilities to my colleagues to reduce the pressure on me (STFCoE-6).*

The data suggested that interviewee tutors did not go for formal counselling as a way of dealing with stress experienced, they rather enjoyed informal counselling from friends. The friends advised them to take rest when stressed. *EPCoE-2* and *DCoE-13* for example, commented: they received some sort of guidance pertaining to life. Though, one may not know its importance, but it helping them to cope with stress of life. *STFCoE-5* also said that:

*I have never benefited from any formal counselling service before. Though, I have a counsellor friend, we interact, share ideas and sometimes when he sees me stressed, what he says is "take rest". I am not even aware that such things exist for tutors. I only know the centre is meant for students.*

It emerged from the data that tutors did not patronize the counselling centre meant to assist every individual in and outside the college to come out of their problems. Probably, they thought the centre belonged to only students. The interview data also highlighted how the tutors coped with stress at home. It emerged that they avoided taking official work home and watched television with their family. *PCoE-7*, for instance commented "Oh, at home I do relax and just watch 'silly' programmes with my wife and children. *DCoE-14* I avoid taking school work home"

The data suggested that tutors used a lot of strategies to cope with stress they experience but they still think that they need a lot of support to cope with such situation. How the tutors think they can be helped to cope with stress and burnout are presented in the next section.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The following conclusions were drawn from the study:

1. The tutors' major stressors come from the classroom environment, the nature of their work, organizational factors, and policy-related issues.
2. Stress experienced by tutors affect their general health, their teaching responsibilities, their administration work and their home lives.
3. Most of the tutors at Volta Region talk with friends/family or students, browse the internet for fun or visit social network sites, control personal contacts, manage their time effectively, pray for divine assistance, maintained positive mind-set and engage physical exercise, and avoid piling-up exercises/exams scripts in their attempt to deal with the stress they experience.
4. The tutors could be helped to reduce stress through regular in-service training, mentorship programmes, networking with others, flexible promotion policies.

Based on the findings the following recommendations could be made:

1. The study discovered that excessive workload and project work supervision were a major source of stress to the tutors. Therefore, it is recommended that the college should employ more tutors to lessen the workload of the existing tutors.
2. It emerged from the study that the college had flexible promotion policies but the college authorities did not go by it. Therefore, the college authorities should go by the college's promotion policies to help tutors reduce their needless stress level when struggling to go on promotion.
3. The study also discovered low patronage of tutors in the counselling services set up to address problems in the colleges. Therefore, the counselling centre should be proactive.

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