TEACHER STRESS IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON STRESS AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHER-PERCEIVED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an empirical phenomenological model that uses teachers' experiences to obtain comprehensive descriptions to create themes. These themes provide the basis for a reflective analysis to depict a portrait of elementary teachers' experiences dealing with stressors and their perceived effect on mental and physical health. A majority of the research on teacher stress focuses on urban schools; few studies have reported the causes of stress among those instructing in rural areas. This phenomenological study investigates the definition of rural, the history of rural schools, importance of teachers, teacher satisfaction, stress in teachers, burnout, the causes of burnout, etiology of teacher stress, and the implications of teacher burnout. Themes from semi structured interviews, observations, and focus groups revealed that teachers' perception of multiple roles and lack of self-efficacy were major causes of stress in teaching at rural schools. Dialogue with elementary teachers revealed that stress could lead to cynicism, detachment, and depression, triggering burnout that has a detrimental effect on physical and emotional health. The detrimental effects of stress not only affect the teachers' mental and physical health but have interpersonal implications relating to student relations and achievement, caregiver relationships, and peer interactions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter I

Introduction

Schools are considered the nurseries of our nation, and those that teach are the architects for the future of the United States (Gupta & Rani, 2014). Teachers carry the essential role in the educational process for students; they are the definitive agents of knowledge, curriculum, schedules, rules, and assessments (Gupta & Rani, 2014). In addition to the primary role of student educator, teachers are often providers of students' mental health services (Ouellette et al., 2018) The teacher is the primary role model for pupils and must demonstrate resilience in the face of adverse situations and be able to recover with a strong sense of self-efficacy (Gu & Day, 2007).

Teachers are faced with one of the most demanding professions—one that requires tremendous psychological resources to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of ever increasingly diverse students—and they are hampered by increasing ambiguity and decreasing self-efficacy (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenburg, Harris, & Katz, 2013). The increased demands have had a negative effect on the teaching profession (Kauffman, 2018). Teaching is a stressful position, and both physical and emotional exhaustion is commonplace (Buchanan, 2017). It is stressful due to the high social-emotional demands and interpersonal relationships between teachers and students and because it is an attention-intensive job in which teachers must be flexible and creative concerning the vast decisions that must be made (Roeser et al., 2013). Stress related to interpersonal relationships decreases a teacher's sense of achievement and increases emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Cui et al., 2018).

Although teaching can bring a sense of personal satisfaction, it also carries with it stress due to demands from students, demands from parents, demands from administration, work overload,

lack of professional identity, and a deficiency of being recognized for hard work (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

An individual's stress level depends on that individual's perception concerning events and circumstances and the ability to handle environmental forces threatening his or her well-being (Abel & Sewell, 2001). Teacher stress can be theorized as an imbalance concerning factors of risk and factors of protection (Prilleltensky, Neff, & Bessell, 2016). Teacher well-being is currently very tenuous because of high demands of accountability set forth by political influence that places the brunt of the burden upon teachers (Moore, 2012). The amount of stress put upon teachers is increasing as more states adopt new tenure policies, termination processes, and evaluation strategies based on students' progress (Lavigne, 2014). This stronger accountability for teaching performance has increased teachers' feelings of stress and burnout (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty & Harrington, 2014).

Burnout is defined as a prolonged reaction to chronic emotional stress that stems from emotional exhaustion leading to cynicism and inefficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Job burnout is described as physical and mental exhaustion caused by job stress (Cui et al., 2018). The concept of job burnout emerged as an important academic research topic in the 1970s and gained the attention of researchers and policy makers during subsequent decades (Rosenow, 2013; Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach, 2009). It is a well-researched and accepted academic subject; there are currently over 6,000 scholarly writings published concerning burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Numerous studies have reported high levels of stress and high levels of burnout in schoolteachers (Abel & Sewel, 2001).

The high levels of occupational stress can have detrimental effects upon teacher performance, student performance, physical and mental health, and job satisfaction (Klassen,

2010). High levels of stress can lead to depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and, often, untimely burnout, and stress levels are inversely related to teacher self-efficacy (Klassen, 2010). A downhill spiral can occur: stress creates depression and can lead to burnout, which represents an increasing global health epidemic, in turn producing a financial burden on workers, families, and the healthcare system (McTernan, Dollard, & LaMontagne, 2013). However, research concerning the impact of depressive symptoms on teachers are seldom touched on in qualitative studies (Van Aalderen, Breukers, Reuzel, & Speckens, 2014). The effects of work related stress in teachers and teacher satisfaction is not well understood (Ouellette et al., 2018).

Over the past 30 plus years, some researchers have become more intent on uncovering stress, untimely burnout, and levels of self-esteem within the educational community (Rosenow, 2013). Burke, Greenglass, and Schwarzer (1996) conducted a longitudinal study concerning prediction of teacher burnout over time and the effects of work stress; the results indicated that the effects of burnout differ significantly between genders concerning feelings of depersonalization. Men reported a higher measure of depersonalization, in part due to the inability to effectively cope with stress and continue work while remaining untouched by feelings (Burke et al., 1996).

Recent research is now revealing that teacher well-being has an important impact upon academic performance of students (Paterson & Grantham, 2016). Teacher burnout is a serious issue in the school setting and can reduce the quality of life for teachers as well as student motivation (Shen et al., 2015). This is an extremely serious concern for those charged with educating and shaping adolescent development, and it is a prevalent issue in existing research (Beshai, McAlpine, Weare, & Kuyken, 2016). Teacher stress and burnout coupled with demands to improve students' standardized test scores place teachers at risk for being dissatisfied with

their jobs (Moore, 2012). Job satisfaction is essential in every profession; unless one is satisfied with his or her job, it is nearly impossible to perform duties honestly and efficiently (Qamar & Ahmad, 2015).

Because of job dissatisfaction, an alarming number of teachers leave the profession after one year (Moore, 2012). In the last few decades, a significant number of teachers have departed the teaching profession due to overwhelming responsibilities and expectations that are unobtainable (Stewart, 2015). They also often leave the profession because of lack of professionalism, self-efficacy, recognition, and autonomy (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Research entitled *The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future* (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007) estimates that teacher attrition has increased 50% in the last 15 years, costing educational resources an estimated $7 billion a year (Stewart, 2015).

Although a tremendous amount of research has been conducted on the phenomenon of burnout, much of the research lacks organization and compatibility (Stewart, 2015). The link between stress and mental health does not have strong empirical support because current stress measures are inadequate (Amirkan, 2012). The difficulty of measuring stress is that it is not a single variable but is a system of interdependent processes that include individual appraisals of the adverse conditions (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988).

There are few studies relating stress, social support, and emotional health in teachers (Burke et al., 1996). Although literature and research examines sources and costs associated with stress in education, there is a lack of theory to explain and understand the psychological effects on teachers (Paterson et al., 2016). "Because many teachers experience stress and burnout, identifying factors that promote health and well-being among teachers and school staff is critical" (Abenavoli el at., 2013, p. 57).

Research about stress and the effects on teacher well-being is especially lacking for rural schools. There are few scholars studying rural education issues, and there is a lack of high-quality research concerning rural schools (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005). Although the debate about education policy and reform is at the forefront of current media and research, much of the attention is given to the critical challenges concerning urban schools, while seldom is there much concern for problems facing rural schools (Truscott & Truscott, 2005). Rural educational research is relatively small within the immense amount of research directed at educational improvements, and this is anomalous given that one in five students attends a rural school (Coladarci, 2007). Rural America contributes in many ways to the American community, yet the rural population has been disregarded and often ignored in educational research and literature (Fraley, 2013). Advocates for rural education have argued for many years that rural teachers and students represent a forgotten minority (Azano & Stewart, 2015). Along with this sense of ambiguity, rural teachers face dwindling resources and lack of professional development, and these are further reasons that advocates of rural education emphasize the vast need to redirect and promote research to help support those educating in rural areas (Vaughn & Saul, 2013).

To facilitate a better understanding of rural education, more qualitative research needs to be conducted to overcome the historical deficiency of regard for rural people and places (Roberts & Cuervo, 2015). There has been some emergence of rural research in recent years in publications such as *Journal of Research in Rural Education* and *Rural Educator*, but most research such as dissertations rarely receive much notice; there needs to be an effort to cultivate more relevant research in the realm of rural (Howley, Howley, & Yahn, 2014). Although the

2004 creation of the National Research Center on Rural Research is encouraging, the quality and quantity of rural research can be improved (Coladarci, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Teaching is an extremely stressful occupation, and high levels of occupational stress have a wide effect on teachers' performance, physical and mental health, and overall job satisfaction (Klassen, 2010). Research and literature provides evidence that teacher stress is related to fatigue, withdrawal, disenchantment, diminished enthusiasm, and deleterious effects on teachers' mental and physical condition. (Shen et al., 2015) The adverse effects on mental and physical health include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and an increase in bad health choices, such as smoking, inactivity, and excessive alcohol use (Burns, Butterworth, & Anstey, 2016). Exacerbating all this is the fact that teachers overextend themselves with so many obligations concerning students, pressures from evaluations, pressures to achieve adequately yearly progress, and pressures from caregivers, that little time is left to stay healthy (Clement, 2017). Further studies are required to improve understanding of the relationship between stress and conditions of health (Paterson et al., 2016).

Besides causing health and well-being issues, job stress can lead to burnout and diminish relationships and effectiveness with students (Hinds, Jones, Gau, Forrester, & Biglan, 2015). "Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy" (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 403). When teachers endure stress for a long time, they can experience depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, which can impact physical and mental health, affect relationships, and negatively affect student achievement (Richards, 2012). Teachers'

psychological well-being is critical if they are to help students reach academic goals (Hinds et al., 2015).

Several researchers have studied stress in teachers and found that many suffer from burnout (Abenavoli et al., 2013, Arnold et al., 2005, Burke et al., 1996). One study conducted in Great Britain by the House of Commons (2004) indicated that education staff experienced high levels of anxiety and stress-related health issues comparable to those found in other human service fields such as occupational therapy; however, the study was small and may not represent the general teaching population. Sims (2013) revealed that stress from mental exhaustion caused many caring teachers to become detached from students and display negative attitudes that affected student achievement and teacher psyche. Moore's (2012) research on dissatisfaction among U.S. school teachers found that educators who experience extended periods of stress suffer physiologically and become detached from their job. Prilleltensky et al., (2016) found that teacher stress not only had a multitude of impacts on teacher health and well-being, but it was also a major factor in high teacher attrition rates.

The majority of the research on teaching and stress has focused on urban schools; few studies have reported on causes of stress in rural schools (Abel & Sewell, 2001). There are very few scholars researching rural environments, and little to no funding is available for research specifically considering the rural context (Arnold et al., 2005). There is a historical lack of educational research on rural areas and the result is a significant deficiency in the amount of research on rural schools (Sherwood, 2001).

Background

In both rural and urban areas, the teacher occupies an important place in the field of education; the teacher is the ultimate agent of knowledge when it comes to student learning

(Gupta et al., 2014). Since the mid-1700s, the rural classroom teacher has been the pillar of the American educational system (Canales, Tejada-Delgado, & Slate, 2008). The quality of a teacher is the most important school factor when it comes to raising student achievement (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015).

In the educational system, sweeping changes occur often and create stress for teachers and administrators (Gupta et al., 2014). Performance issues placed upon teachers and lack of support and resources have escalated the stress level of teachers considerably (Richards, 2012). The stress teachers feel from job pressures often leads to job dissatisfaction and burnout within the occupation (Pearson et al., 2005).

Personal, societal, and financial costs associated with burnout are too high to ignore (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013). Teacher stress and burnout (TSB) is related to many factors that are detrimental to not only the instructors but to administration, district personnel, students, and communities. Research has shown that teachers' sense of stress, teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction are not only related to teacher motivation and longevity, but are also related to student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012).

Much of the research dealing with TSB over the past few decades has exclusively focused on schools and districts in urban areas (Player, 2015). To date, few studies have explored the connection between TSB and the unique factors present in rural settings that, from teachers' perceptions, affect their behavior and emotional well-being (Shen et al., 2015). Urban schools, to which much of current research and reform is dedicated, are different than rural schools (Bauch, 2001).

Although rural schools are very different from urban or suburban schools (Howley, 1997) they are an important part of the educational system, as more than half of all districts (57%) are located in rural areas, and approximately 12 million students (24%) are enrolled in schools in rural areas (Hunt-Barron, Tracy, Howell, & Kaminski, 2015). Yet despite these numbers, relatively little research has focused on rural schools. The fact is evident that few studies dealing exclusively with rural schools, districts, and communities are sufficient to take into consideration "place" and the idea of "the rural" (Wilcox, Angelis, Baker, & Lawson, 2014, p.1). Rurality and place are concepts that are difficult to delineate when considering research and teacher education programs (Moffa & McHenry-Sober, 2018).

Advocates for rural education have argued for years that rural educators represent a forgotten minority (Azano & Stewart, 2015), but researchers have seldom taken notice of the inequality of rural research compared to its urban counterpart (Burton, Brown, & Johnson, 2013). Rural studies in education have, in fact, been vastly ignored by scholarly research and media (Chandler, 2014). There are few scholars studying educational issues in rural areas and little to no funding is available (Arnold et al., 2005). The study of rurality and rural research is extremely limited in higher education programs, and this limits the potential of success for teachers and students (Moffa & McHenry-Sober, 2018).

The level of attention given to research on rural schools has been increasing over the last 40 years, but it remains a marginal aspect of scholarly literature (Burton et al., 2013). The field of rural research is considered limited and continues to be weak considering its suburban and urban counterparts (McHenry-Sorber & Hall, 2018). Administrators and leaders of rural education are eagerly awaiting research to identify better intervention programs and strategies to enhance student success in their rural areas (Arnold et al., 2005). However, limited research has

occurred and few scholars have analyzed data on the intervention programs and strategies to promote student success—which surely must include factors affecting teachers—in rural schools (Arnold et al., 2005).

Discovering effective interventions to promote student success is difficult because of a lack of high-quality data dealing exclusively with rural education (Arnold et al., 2005). The majority of the research on rural education is driven by the idea of inherent inequalities unique to rural communities (Arnold et al., 2005). Researchers need to be cognizant of the particularity of rural life and not ignore it (Roberts & Green, 2013). Rural educational research must be held accountable to consider the uniqueness of rural environments when conducting research (Hellwege, O'Conner, Nugent, Kunz, & Sheridan, 2013). Rural schools in the United States pose a set of unique circumstances that are rarely addressed by current studies. In just the past decade, rural areas have gone through significant changes that include economic transformations, an increase in demographic diversity, and ever increasing demands being placed on teachers and school systems (McHenry-Sorber & Hall, 2018). Research in rural education has been detached from the framework that influences it, creating a gap in scholarly knowledge (Moffa & McHenry-Sorber, 2018).

Some studies view rural schools as a problem within public education; they are viewed as "backward" and reluctant to change (Burton et al., 2013, p.1). Surface and Theobald's (2014) research concerning rural areas reports the deep-rooted historical misconception that rural schools and communities are substandard and second-class. The belief exists that rural students are behind urban and suburban students when considering education and being prepared for college (Manley, 2018). Corbett's (2013) metasearch on thesis studies indicates the tendency of many studies to reinforce well-established stereotypes for those living in rural areas of being

narrow, prejudiced, and reluctant to change. The fact is that many rural areas are manufacturing dependent, and the future of rural America appears desolate without the creation of new ideas and a commitment to revitalizing the cornerstone of many rural areas, which is the school (Miller, 1993).

Teachers in rural schools face many role ambiguity issues; they fulfill many roles, and this presents a unique set of problems to address (Canales et al., 2008). There are many teachers in rural schools that assume multiple roles such as janitor, lunchroom monitor, technical assistance provider, special education and general classroom teacher, and coach, among others (Eppley, 2015) Those working in rural schools must be generalists to survive, because limited funds typically do not allow for centrally focused staff (Versland, 2013).

Historically, rural schools have been a one-person operation with teachers serving in "role ambiguity," unsure of their purpose as teachers. In the educational climate of today's rural schools, this premise still holds true. Teachers might be professional instructional specialists, lunchroom monitors, hall monitors, nurses, coaches, crisis counselors, intervention specialists, bus duty monitors, maintenance staff, or technology specialists—or a combination of several of these (Canales et al., 2008). Rural school teachers and administrators find themselves spending a considerable portion of time with conflicting work demands and role complexity, which can cause stress due to feelings of being stretched to the limits (Starr & White, 2008).

The purpose of this investigation was to determine the unique stressors of rural elementary teachers and how these stressors may lead to TSB. The research examined self-reported attitudes and beliefs about the ways unique stressors in rural settings affect teachers' mental and physical well-being. The goal of this phenomenological research design was to

explore the perceptions, beliefs, and opinions of rural educators and the relationship of stress to adverse health effects.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study include:

1. What are the perceived stressors of elementary teachers in rural schools?

2. What are the effects on mental and physical health of perceived stressors in rural elementary schools?

3. How do teachers in rural elementary schools rank stressors?

Description of Terms

The researcher regularly used several terms within this study. Although definitions are provided within the study; the following abbreviated glossary may prove useful to understanding frequently used terms. The terms have been defined by an examination of the related literature as guidance.

Ambiguity. Situations in which the information available to the decision maker is not sufficient to form a probabilistic view of the world (Amarante, 2014).

Attrition. Refers to when teachers leave the teaching profession (Broughman & Rollefson, 2000).

Autonomy. The perception that one has control over one's self within the work environment (Pearson et al., 2005).

Burnout. A level of stress that leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, loss of personal accomplishment, and frustration, which results from continually working towards given goals or principles that fail to produce corresponding rewards (Maslach, 1997).

Depersonalization. The uncaring and negative attitudes developed by individuals toward responsibilities, work colleagues, and those they serve (Maslach, 1997).

Emotional exhaustion. The feeling of lack of energy and being depleted, which is the central focus of burnout (Grant, Berg, & Cable, 2014).

Hindrance stress.   Detrimental stress that does not enhance mastery, personal growth or future gains (LePine, LePine, and Jackson, 2004).

Imaginative variation. The process of seeking possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives and different positions, roles, or functions (Moustakas 1994).

Job satisfaction. Satisfaction with specific activities of a job and with working conditions (House & Wigdor, 1967).

Lived experience. The comprehensive description of the realities of the teachers who experience stress in phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994).

Neurocirculatory asthenia. A disorder with symptoms that include breathlessness, heart palpitations, nervousness, irritability, chest pains, exhaustion, dizziness, fainting spells, and anxiety attacks in the absence of other medical or neuropsychiatric disease (Cohen & White, 1951).

Phenomenological study. A description of participants' lived experiences of the world and reasons for having such experiences. A phenomenological study examines the experiences of an activity or concept from the participants' perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

Resilience. The capacity to continue to "bounce back" and recover strengths or spirit rapidly and efficiently in the midst of adverse conditions. (Gu et al., 2007.)

Rural. There is no single definition of what is considered rural. There are formal classification themes that define rural areas by place, economic activity, or a population fewer than 2,500. (Coladarci, 2007). The accepted definition of rural for this study comes from the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (2016): Rural areas consist of open countryside, and the population is less than 500 people per square mile.

Self-efficacy. An individual's belief in his or her own capacity to carry out a particular course of action and be successful in doing so (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

Stress. The occurrence of negative conditions, including frustration and anxiety, that affect various aspects of the job and are often perceived by teachers as threatening to their psychological or physical well-being (Kyriacou, 2001.)

Stressors. Factors intrinsic to teaching that affect the individual's vulnerability and systematic functioning at institutional and political levels (Jarvis, 2002).

Teacher stress. The experience by a teacher of unpleasant and negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, tension, and frustration, resulting from some aspect of work as a teacher (Kyriacou, 2001).

Teacher stress and burnout (TSB). The result of high levels of detrimental environmental conditions that threaten the psychological and physical well-being of teachers. TSB may include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and perceived diminished personal accomplishment (Abel & Sewell, 2001).

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine stress that may lead to TSB in rural elementary school teachers and their perceived effects of that stress upon their own mental and physical well-being. The intent of the study was to focus specifically on hindrance stress in the teaching

profession. The study also examined the factors that teachers perceive lower the detrimental effects of stress upon physical and psychosomatic health. There are multifaceted elements to ponder when considering the vast effects that stress has not only upon teachers' well-being, but also upon the two most detrimental issues within education: teacher attrition and decrease in student motivation and achievement.

The previous studies examining teacher well-being have been informative, although the research has not given a comprehensive understanding of teacher well-being (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2014). This study broadens the understanding of the many roles that teachers in rural elementary schools must take on given their unique situation, such as teacher, counselor, moral advisor, and many other significant roles. This study will assist educators, administrators, and researchers in understanding the extreme dynamics between various aspects of rural elementary education. The study examines interpersonal dynamics between teacher and student, teacher and administration, teacher and caregiver, and teacher and community. The intended benefit is that teachers and administrators will have a clearer understanding of the major stressors that may cause burnout and use that understanding to create professional development to help alleviate many of the problems.

This research concludes that one of the major issues in education is stress upon teachers. Stress and its often-resulting burnout have a negative effect on not only the teacher, but on the students as well, and they have an immense impact on teacher attrition (Rosenow, 2013). Teachers that are satisfied and content in their position have higher levels of motivational behavior and performance; satisfied teachers experience lower levels of stress, anxiety, and other issues associated with job burnout (Klassen, Usher, & Bong, 2010).

Overview of Research Methods

To help satisfy the purpose of this study, the researcher employed one-on-one interviews to collect data concerning teachers' stress and its perceived effect on their mental and physical well-being. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insight concerning causes of teacher stress in rural elementary schools and effects on psychological and physical health. District superintendents in the rural Upper Cumberland area of Northeast Tennessee were contacted by email in order to gain site permission to conduct research within their districts. Permission was granted to contact individual school administrators. The researcher contacted several school administrators in the selected districts in order to obtain permission to speak at a staff meeting. To obtain a purposeful sampling of teachers, the researcher attended staff meetings in the selected school districts to explain the study and ask for volunteers to contact the researcher by email if interested.

This study involved an empirical phenomenological research design using a modified Van Kaam method of analysis by Moustakas that involved individuals who provided distinct descriptions involving their lived experiences. The primary objective of a phenomenological study is to analyze the meaning from the lived experiences of a person or group of people considering a specific phenomenon (Simon & Goes, 2011). This qualitative method is based upon ontology, a branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of "being" (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005, p. 3). The first step in this process was to list and group experiences from participants. The second step was to review the transcripts and remove nondescript, unclear comments and irrelevant responses. The third step was to cluster the core themes and experiences and begin the coding process. The fourth step was to identify invariant constituents and reoccurring themes. In step five, the researcher used the invariant constituents to construct an

individual summary of experiences. The sixth step involved constructing individual structural descriptions based on the previous step, which resulted in a summary of experiences concerning stress and effects upon mental and physical well-being. Step seven involved constructing a textural-structured description, which combined steps five and six. This process allowed the researcher to develop a composite description, which represented the essence of the experiences for the research participants as a whole.

A concern sometimes expressed of a phenomenological research design is whether the researcher can separate personal bias or perceived conclusions based on prior knowledge and experience (Moustakas, 1994). Epoché, the act of suspending judgment about the natural world to instead focus on analysis of experience, was integrated into the research process to address this concern. This qualitative research design involved explaining the premise of stress in rural elementary schools and generating an understanding of its effects. In using a qualitative method, the researcher derived a better understanding of opinions, ideas, perceptions, and feelings to create common themes for understanding the phenomenon. The main purpose of a phenomenological design is to seek perspectives from interviews, observations, and focus group narratives and depict participant experiences and feelings to produce in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon being examined (Yüksel, P., & Yıldırım, 2015). This approach and methodology allowed the researcher to focus on teacher interpretations concerning stress and burnout, and their influence on a teacher's mental and physical condition.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

The literature reviewed for this study focused on the phenomenon of teacher stress and burnout (TSB). The purpose was to develop a deeper understanding of the causes of stress in teachers from rural areas and how those unique stressors affect their physical health and mental well-being, which in turn is related to aspects of their educational practice.

This review begins with a conceptual understanding of the current climate of education in today's society and the importance of teachers. It examines research related to teacher self-efficacy and its relationship to TSB. The importance of teacher satisfaction and how it relates to stress is explored, and stress in teaching is examined for its effect on teachers' health and well-being. Research regarding unique features of teaching in rural schools is described, and then the review examines burnout in regard to Maslach and Jackson's (1984) three-component structure of burnout. The section concludes with implications of TSB and a summary of major themes and insights.

Teaching in Today's Educational Climate

Employees of public elementary and secondary schools account for 36% of the public workforce in the United States. Given the vital importance of the teaching profession on society, it is worthy of scholars' attention (Fowles, Butler, Cowen, Streams, & Toma, 2014). The working conditions and their effects are a starting point for this attention.

Teaching is one of the hardest occupations and often leads to extreme levels of stress and strain stemming from student behaviors, worker conflicts, caregiver/teacher relationships, and new policies and procedures (Shin, Noh, Jang, Park, & Lee, 2013). A number of other factors

contribute to teacher stress include personal coping mechanisms, support systems, self-efficacy, and school climate (Ouellette et al., 2018). Teaching in today's society is filled with anxiety, and the angst felt by teachers has a detrimental influence on their physical and mental health and work efficacy (Cui et al., 2018). The role of a teacher has become more complex with increasing workloads, limited interaction with adults, government initiatives, organizational and contextual factors, and high-stakes testing and accountability (Richards, Levesque-Bristol, Templin, & Graber, 2016).

The current emphasis of the educational system is more about mandates, testing, and administrative directives and has become less about teachers and students (Mulder, 2016). Recent educational policy initiatives in the United States have increased the notion that the current education system is not meeting the social, economic, and civic requirements needed for students and teachers in rural areas to succeed (Zuckerman, Wilcox, Schiller, & Durand, 2018). Research has noted that although teachers historically have been judged as successful only if students choose to learn, a teacher's success or failure is now judged heavily by student achievement on standardized tests (Stukes, 2015). The level of stress has increased on a daily basis as more states adopt new hiring and firing procedures based on teacher evaluations (Lavigne, 2014). Much of the increased evaluation pressure is because in 2001, the U.S. Congress enacted legislation labeled the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that required each state to set performance standards for every school in America and track student learning across a wide range of levels (Matthews, 2004). NCLB enacted steep consequences for schools, districts, and states that failed to meet performance goals (Matthews, 2004).

Despite high levels of teacher reported stress, many teachers have found personal satisfaction from working with children and seeing students reach academic success (Klassen et

al., 2010). But many others have lost this satisfaction. According to a nationwide study conducted in 2009-2010 by Public Agenda and Learning Associates, there are over four million K-12 teachers in America, and two out of five are disappointed and disheartened when it comes to their occupation as a classroom teacher (Yarrow, 2009). Because of this disappointment, many decide to leave the profession.

Over the past three decades, the issue of teacher retention has increased steadily in U.S. public schools (Simon & Johnson, 2015). The role of a teacher is very complex, and a wide variety of reasons exist for why teachers leave their jobs (Mulder, 2016). Teachers that leave their positions have reported the lack of professionalism, lack of recognition, and lack of autonomy as the foremost reasons they choose to leave (Pearson et al., 2005). In the wake of NCLB, teachers felt increased pressure and stress from accountability measures, causing a large number of teachers to leave the profession (Grissom et al., 2014).

In the first years of teaching, it is not uncommon for many newcomers to question why they became teachers due to the complex demands of students, other teachers, and schools (Fry & Anderson, 2011). Nearly 17% do not complete their first year of teaching, and almost 50% of teachers leave the profession within five years (Muller, Gorrow, & Fiala. 2011). The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that one-third of all teachers will leave the teaching profession in the first two years of teaching, costing billions nationally to hire new teachers and train them for those open positions (Haynes, 2014). According to research conducted by Burkhauser (2015), attrition has disproportionately affected low-income and low-achieving schools often found in rural areas.

Importance of Teachers

Teachers do not only transfer their knowledge of a specified curriculum, they also help shape children socially and culturally (Mulder, 2016). Teachers have played a pivotal role in contemporary society, and teaching continues to be one of the most important and demanding professions (Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). There is strong evidence that the quality of a teacher is the single most important factor to raising student achievement (Gagnon et al., 2015).

Research has noted a teacher's psychological and physical well-being is an important factor for student success (Hinds et al., 2015). Teacher-student relationships that are positive are associated with higher student self-esteem and grade point average with fewer signs of depression, and students are more likely to be engaged in learning and exhibit better behavior (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Conversely, teachers that have experienced burnout exhibit little to no patience with students, and the lack of personal connectedness has had devastating consequences on quality of education and student achievement (Jacobson, 2016). Research has shown that there is a significant correlation concerning TSB on students' academic performance and quality of student-teacher relationships (Gastaldi, Pasta, Longobardi, Prino, & Quaglia, 2014).

Teacher Self-Efficacy (TSE)

Self-efficacy is a social leaning theory made known by social cognitive psychologists Bandura and Walters (1977) and is defined as an individual's belief in his or her ability to achieve a goal. TSE is conceptualized as an individual's belief in his or her own abilities to carry out activities required to reach educational goals (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). The personal efficacy beliefs that teachers hold play an important role in their functioning (Bandura, 1997). Research has revealed that TSE is directly related to improved student achievement, greater

student motivation, higher job commitment, and increased job satisfaction (Klassen, 2010).

Teachers' confidence in their ability is a powerful source of motivation, influencing them to act a

certain way that overcomes obstacles and accomplishes educational tasks (O'Neill &

Stephenson, 2012). Research has shown that teachers with high self-efficacy have reduced stress

and longer careers in education (Klassen et al., 2010).

Research has indicated a relationship exists between TSE and TSB (Skaalvik & Skaalvik,

2007). A low perception of self-efficacy can contribute to TSB, which can cause negative and

apathetic feelings toward students and fellow teachers (Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013).

Research has suggested the following school factors negatively influence a teacher's self-

efficacy: inadequate time to prepare lessons, standardized testing, large class sizes, little control

over decisions, belief that opinions don't matter, pressure of accountability, professional

isolation, discipline problems, and lack of administrative support (Richards, 2012). Gonzalez,

Peters, Orange, and Grigsby's investigation (2016) concerning the effects of NCLB on teacher

self-efficacy indicates that the accountability measures and standardized testing have further

increased stress for teachers and have lowered individual self-efficacy.

Teacher Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as a positive emotional state that comes from an individual's

appraisal of job experiences (Reilly, Dhingra, & Boduszek, 2014). Job satisfaction has been

deemed essential in all professions; if one is not satisfied with his or her position, it is difficult

and even impossible to carry out the duties effectively (Qamar et al., 2015). Teacher job

satisfaction has a vast impact on student achievement; teacher satisfaction can either make or

break an organization's success (Knox & Anfare, 2013). Teachers have reported that stressors

such as extensive work overload, time constraints, and student misbehaviors and interruptions

are detrimental to their sense of job satisfaction (Mazzola, Schonfeld, & Spector, 2011). On the

other hand, a 2011 quantitative study by Durham-Barnes reported that teachers who feel a sense

of ownership in their schools and create positive differences in students' lives have a sense of

satisfaction in teaching. Teacher satisfaction plays a pivotal role in the climate of the school,

teacher attrition, and the quality of education for students (Berry & Gravelle, 2013).

Job dissatisfaction has led to stress and untimely burnout when not addressed (Pearson et

al., 2005). Every teacher has experienced stress to some extent; it is the level of stress and how it

affects individual perception of job satisfaction that determines whether a teacher can resist TSB

(Mulder, 2016). There is a large body of research on factors that affect morale and satisfaction.

These factors include the following: work environment, organizational structure, work relations,

professional development opportunities, autonomy, variety in work, self-actualization,

recognition, success, role definitions and parameters, work load, financial conditions, and

personal life situations (Sutherland, Fogarty, & Pithers, 1995). "Teachers who are satisfied with

their work typically display higher levels of motivated behavior and performance as well as

lower levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout" (Klassen et al., 2010, p. 464).

Stress in Teaching

Stress is described as a disparity concerning risk and proactive factors (Prilleltensky et

al., 2016). Teacher stress is defined as the experience of negative feelings resulting from a

teacher's work (Klassen, 2010). Teacher stress has been an ongoing and growing issue with a

myriad of detrimental effects on school districts, teacher well-being, and student behavior and

achievement (Gastaldi et al., 2014).

The study of occupational stress is not a new topic; researchers have been studying stress

for decades and such reviews typically focus on quantitative data (Mazzola et al., 2011). A

search for books related to stress on amazon.com alone provided over 450,000 results (Nagel, 2009). In recent years, the occupational stress experienced by teachers has become a matter of intense study and research (Antoniou, Ploumpi, & Ntalla, 2013). Even so, Flock et al. (2013) has noted that given the critical role teachers play in society by fostering the social and academic well-being of the nation's children, addressing teacher stress still remains a significant issue in education.

The many studies that have been conducted regarding stress have provided ample evidence that teachers experience a myriad of stressors. The following are examples of the evidence:

- Teaching professionals have experienced more stress than the average worker in human-related occupations due in part to inadequate salaries, negative administration views, and a limited amount of parental involvement with the students (Gupta el at., 2014).

- Research conducted in 2013 by Antoniou et al. postulates that the occupational stress teachers experience is related to business requirements, deficiency of recognition programs, student misbehaviors, administrative bureaucracy, lack of support and benefits, work overload, and time constraints.

- A related study conducted by Zurlo, Pes, and Capasso (2016) points toward a wide range of stressors including time constraints, role conflict, peer conflicts, role ambiguity, student misbehavior, enormous workloads, and criticism from parents and community.

- Kyriacou (2001) has indicated that lack of student motivation, student discipline, time pressure, coping with change, evaluation by others, dealing with peers, low self-esteem, unsupportive administration, role conflict, and poor working conditions are foundations that lead to TSB.

- A multivariate meta-analysis conducted by Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan (2014) indicated that teachers experience stress at alarming rates due to increased student diversity, decreased levels of parental involvement, increased workload, and added responsibilities.

- A pilot study conducted by Flock et al. (2013) indicated teaching is plagued with turnover due to stress caused by time demands, increase in work, student behavior, poor administration, and increased pressure from public and political scrutiny.

- In a doctoral dissertation from Walden University, Jacobson (2016) addressed several issues teachers encounter that are sources of stress. The stressors include failure to properly manage classroom and student behavior, adverse school work environments and lack of peer collaboration, lack of support and respect, and unrealistic demands put upon teachers from society, bureaucracy, and administration.

- A study conducted by Sims (2013) at the University of Missouri-St. Louis stated that many passionate and dedicated teachers are unable to teach children due to stress heightened by student apathy, student discipline issues, shortage of supplies, low attendance, overcrowding, mounds of paperwork, and excessive mandated testing.

- Research from Roeser, Skinner, Beers, and Jennings (2012) suggests that the predominant source of teacher stress is from the uncertainty and attention-intensive character of education in which teachers must be versatile and flexible concerning decisions that must be made both immediately and on a consistent basis.

Among the many stressors, two seem to be among the most prevalent: constant—and often overwhelming—demands, and taxing interpersonal relationships. Educators are given a difficult task to meet the individual academic, social, and emotional needs of all students (Abenavoli et al., 2013). School systems and their teachers are expected to create positive and

safe educational environments to reach prescribed progress according the federal, state, and local mandates (Oakes et al., 2013). But it can be difficult for educators to stay afloat in the storm of changes, standardized testing, administrative duties and responsibilities, curriculum mandates, and the milieu of working with students (Evans-Palmer, 2015).

Lazarus (1990) interpreted stress as an individual's awareness that environmental and personal demands have surpassed his or her support systems and coping resources. Related to this are findings by Abel and Sewell (2001) who reported in their research that teacher stress stems from the perception of high academic expectations and the inability to meet the expectations. Stress related to the inability to meet the demands set forth by administration and policy threatens a teachers' mental and physical health if no effective coping mechanism is used (Abel & Sewell, 2001). Coping is defined as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus, Folkman, & Stress, 1984, p. 141). O'Neil & Stephenson (2012) noted that stress is a catalyst for teacher burnout, and the high-performance standards placed upon teachers create stress due to unavailable resources to combat the demands.

Research conducted by Mazzola et al. (2011) indicated that interpersonal conflicts are the most prevalent source of stress when considering all occupations. Teachers are the frontline people to ensure quality education for the next generation, and stress stems from the many interpersonal relationships that exist within the nature of teaching (Gupta et al., 2014). Teachers are expected to have positive relations with students, parents, and administration; however, interpersonal relationships can be an area of risk for stress (Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Similarly, Zembylas (2009) theorized that stress in teaching was primarily due to the social-emotional demands and vast interpersonal connections inherent to working with children.

The relationship between stress and well-being is ambiguous inasmuch as the measurement of stress is ambiguous as well (Amirkhan, 2012). There is inconsistency in understanding the definition of stress, and the discrepancies often obscure how stressful events affect the body and mind (Nagel, 2009). Unfortunately, much of the research currently being conducted on stress is occurring with poorly developed methodology and a limited amount of questions that reach depth of understanding (Day, 2005).

One researcher who conducted important studies regarding the relationship between stress and well-being was Hans Selye. Figure 1 graphically represents his ideas. According to Selye, all living organisms respond to stress, and the basic reaction pattern is almost always the same; this response is called *general adaptation syndrome* (Selye, 1950). General adaptation syndrome consists of three phases or reactions to stress; the first phase is called the alarm reaction, the second phase is resistance, and the final phase is exhaustion (Tripken, 2011). Stress depends upon an individual's appraisal of circumstances and the resources to cope (Abel and Sewell, 2001).

The alarm phase is the initial reaction to stress. The body's physiological processes are altered and resources are mobilized (Seyle, 1950). An example of physiological change in the alarm phase would be an increase in heart rate and breathing (Tripken, 2011). The second phase—resistance—occurs when the resources to adapt to stress are employed (Seyle, 1950). In the exhaustion phase, the individual's adaptive resources are depleted and vulnerability to stress-related illness may occur (Seyle, 1950). Explanations for the general adaptive syndrome conclude that exposure to a sustained exhaustion phase will lead to poor work quality and contribute to adverse health conditions (Tripken, 2011).

Figure 1

General Adaptation Syndrome Documenting the Phases of Prolonged Stress
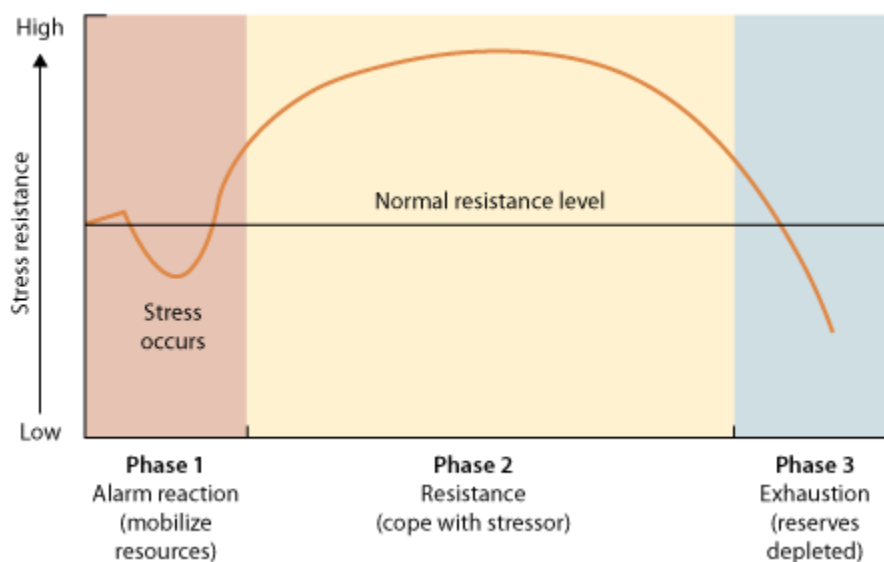
Note. Retrieved from http://oli.cmu.edu

Because of factors inherent to teaching, educators are vulnerable to the maladies in the third phase of coping with stress. Classroom teachers are consistently in a demanding profession given the complex interpersonal dynamics, long days, workload, and limited interaction with adults; it is more important than ever for teachers to understand stress and develop a resistance to burnout (Richards et al., 2016).

Teaching in Rural Schools

Defining and understanding a rural school has implications for every aspect of this study. This task is made difficult by the many ways in which rural can be defined theoretically, conceptually, and empirically (Koziol et al., 2015). The term *rural* is conceptually evasive, and the lack of a consensus about its definition is problematic for educational researchers (Stelmach, 2011). Rurality and place are difficult to define and evade consensual definition (Moffa &

McHenry-Sorber, 2018). Rural is often defined in relationship to its opposite, urban; so what is not urban must be rural (Corbett, 2013). Understanding what rural is has complex boundaries, and the definition morphs in attempts to pinpoint it (Corbett, 2013).

It is important to understand what is rural in demographic terms as well as geographic (Roberts et al., 2013). Rural schools are characterized by small populations, low population density, geographic isolation, and limited opportunities (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015). The theoretical perspective in finding an operational definition for a study involving rural can be based on two categories: 1) place-based theories that include demographics, population size, and spatial descriptors, and 2) socio-cultural or social construct theories that rely on culture, society, and communication (Koziol et al., 2015).

The accepted definition of what rural is for this study comes from the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (2016): Rural areas consist of open countryside, and the population is less than 500 people per square mile. A strong relationship exists between population density and human capital investments, and using a demographic-based definition is appropriate for this study given this link (Koziol et al., 2015).

Since the mid-1700s, the rural school and one-room school house have been the backbone of education in the United States (Canales et al., 2008). However, the late 19th century exhibited a change in education. As urbanization migration occurred due to industrial advancement, the lack of political clout left the rural areas neglected (Burton et al., 2013). For many centuries, power was held by the rural landed aristocracy, but as industrialization and urbanization occurred, power shifted, and those in rural areas were subsequently presumed as being "backward" and "living in the past" (Surface and Theobald, 2014, p.1). The advocates for rural education have argued for many years that students from rural areas represent a minority

that seems to be abandoned (Azano & Stewart, 2015). Rural research and scholarly literature on poverty, which is common in rural areas, are often overlooked, and popular media often disregard the rural class of people (Chandler, 2014).

Rural Americans could perhaps represent the most varied and heterogeneous citizens within our society (Burton et al., 2013). But one struggle many rural areas have in common is that of poverty. Rural schools compose 22% of the United States public schools, and a vast number of the students are faced with issues of poverty (Vaughn et al., 2013). One in four children in the United States lives in a state of poverty regardless of whether the school is labeled as rural or urban (Fishman, 2015). The issue of poverty has created daily obstacles that must be met with strength and perseverance for the individuals that must bear it (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Socioeconomic status has by and large been the single strongest indicator of student success based on analysis of test scores; students in high poverty areas perform much lower in reading and mathematics (Chandler, 2014).

A myth exists that those from rural areas remain impoverished because of predictable actions and behaviors and lack of values (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Researchers and literature must overcome what is considered "implied defiance of rural people and place," and must value rural for its own right—not as depraved but as different than urban (Roberts et al., 2015, p. 1).

The concept that rural schools and unincorporated communities are inferior to their urban counterparts is entrenched in historical references; history relegates those living in rural areas to being second-class citizens (Surface and Theobald, 2014). The idea persists that people in rural communities are lazy, lack sound judgment, and do not value education (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Many picture rural as consisting of self-sufficient farms overseen by people content with simple pleasures who are simple minded (Chandler, 2014). The myth exists that children in rural

schools are not particularly smart or ready for school; these children often seem broken when it comes to education (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). The White House Charter of Education enacted by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1944 pointed out the discrepancies between a rural school and what was considered a "modern" school (Azano & Steward, 2015). Now some 70 years later, researchers uncover the same situational difficulties that teachers in rural areas still contend with today: impoverished students, lack of financial resources, insufficient educational resources, limited professional development, and lack of teacher collaboration (Vaughn et al., 2013).

       The personification of people, schools, and communities from rural areas is rooted in American culture (Surface & Theobald, 2014). The United States and its citizens are a product of the 18th century during which they won the war over aristocratic power, designed a government to allow for liberty and justice for every citizen, and created the cultural belief that each person will succeed or fail based upon his or her own merits (Surface & Theobald, 2014). The United States has always presented the ideology that all people can be successful in this country, and by hard work and "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps," they can reach whatever economic status they desire. What is lacking in this theory is the social policies and organizational issues that reinforce poverty (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). It is presumptuous to assume that anyone can just will themselves out of an adverse situation or environment without regard for the complex issues that keep them in poverty (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Some theorists contend that issues related to impoverishment and the lack of resources in rural schools can be attributed to American capitalism, which they believe focuses on exploiting the under-educated, and they suggest a radical altercation to economic structure and political philosophy before poverty in rural areas can be altered (Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Besides the difficulties of poverty, rural districts also face difficulties attracting teachers. The process of recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers has been a challenge for rural schools because of a lack of amenities, lower pay, and professional isolation (Azano & Stewart, 2015). Because rural schools are challenged by their distance to human capital, teachers must often instruct outside their area of expertise (Gagon et al., 2015). Additionally, struggles exist in rural schools between national, state, and local control of instructional practices, prescribed curriculum, measures of data, and approved assessments for both student learning and teacher evaluations (Burton et al., 2013). Rural schools face challenges concerning federal policies that were designed for urban settings (Gilles, 2017). The unique aspects of rural areas require policies tailored to their special circumstances (Gagnon et al., 2015). Rural schools often share many of the problems and challenges of urban schools, but the challenges are more pronounced in rural areas given the isolation, and fewer qualified candidates apply given the association with fewer amenities (Player, 2015). In the present culture of public schools in the United States, it is difficult to find dynamic instructors and leaders; this is an urgent problem especially in rural areas (Wood, Finch, & Mirecki, 2013).

Despite its unique problems, rural school education has been noted in research to have advantages: Rural communities share a sense of closeness, and often the number of students in a class are small (Azono & Stewart, 2015). And children from rural communities can be especially resilient in the face of adverse conditions (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Research that has been conducted concerning rural schools makes a compelling argument for preserving the inherent qualities of rural communities (Arnold et al., 2005). Schools cannot control the often disheartening circumstances that children in rural areas face; nevertheless, these students can be resourceful, powerful leaders and can express maturity beyond their years derived from

situations they have seen and dealt with (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). In a study by Chandler (2014), more than half of the teachers interviewed supported the idea that rural schools can fix the poverty problem, and teachers felt they were responsible for meeting the needs of rural students both academically and on a personal level. Despite challenges, teachers in rural areas have noted there are some inherent qualities of rural, such as smaller class size and greater parental involvement, that have contributed to reaching students academically and personally (Berry & Gravelle, 2013).

Burnout

Burnout is defined as a prolonged reaction to chronic emotional stress that stems from emotional exhaustion and leads to cynicism and inefficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout can result from having persistently stressful associations with others (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). This type of stress is faced by educators who have a difficult task in trying to meet the many needs of the children they teach—their academic needs, their emotional needs, and their social needs (Abenavoli et al., 2013). Additionally, chronic stress has led to undesired personal and professional outcomes such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, absenteeism, and ineffectiveness in engaging with others (Roeser et al., 2013).

Burnout is, and has been, a serious issue in education; research has documented that burnout from unmitigated stress can lead to a reduced quality of life and has a negative effect on teaching effectiveness (Shen et al., 2015). TSB is a serious problem not only in the United States but globally as well; TSB has dramatically diminished the quality of life of teachers in many ways and has led to a deterioration in the quality of instruction (Shen et al., 2015).

There have been several models developed in order to provide a better understanding of TSB. Building upon Selye's general adaptation syndrome model (1950), Lazarus et al. (1984)

developed the transactional model to better understand reactions to stress that perhaps could lead to burnout (O'Neill et al., 2012). This transactional model of stress, depicted in Figure 2, emphasizes the person-environment relationship in which a cognitive appraisal of the environment (stressor) is followed by the implementation of coping strategies. The cognitive appraisal of the stressor is placed into two categories: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal (Tripken, 2011). The essential elements of the transactional model of stress are the interaction of the person in relation to the environment and the product of the relationship (Perrewé & Zellars, 1999).

During the primary appraisal phase, the individual assesses the environment and determines if the situation is a threat or stressor (Lazarus et al., 1984). Stress is not a property of the environment or person; rather, at the conjunction between a particular person and a particular environment, stress is determined individually and deemed a threat or not (Perrewé et al., 1999). The primary phase involves an individual's evaluation of the environmental encounter and whether it hinders or enables that individual (Perrewé et al., 1999).

The secondary appraisal phase is an individual's assessment of the stressor and the resources he or she possesses to manage the situation (Tripken, 2011). In the secondary appraisal phase, individuals evaluate the presumed outcome and gauge how to overcome or prevent the stressor or improve the situation for benefit (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). If coping resources are inadequate to eliminate or reduce the threat or harm from the environment, the result is an experience of stress (Tripken, 2011). The individual's choice for a coping strategy depends upon available resources, perception of the environment, and level of personal control considering the threat or challenge to homeostasis (Perrewé et al., 1999).

Figure 2

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping
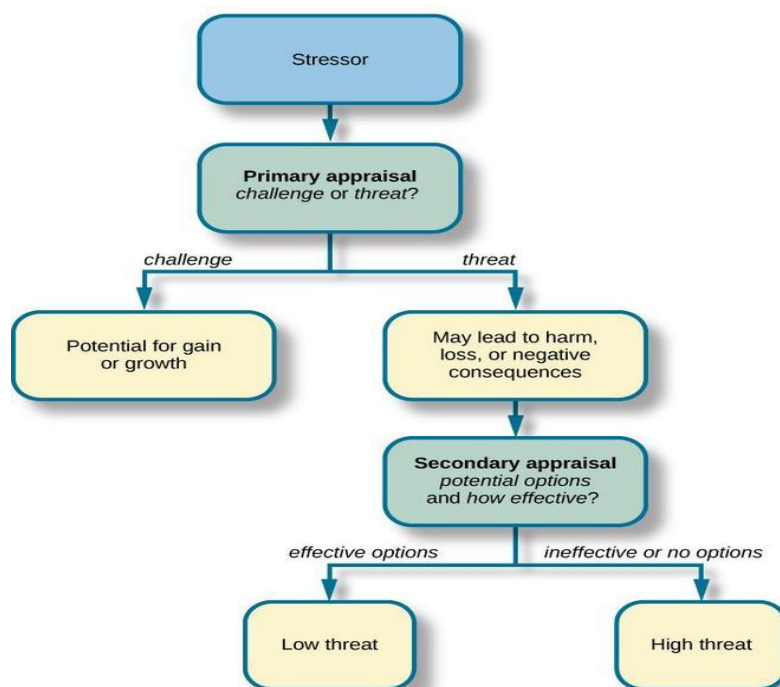
Note. Lazarus et al., 1984

Maslach and Jackson's Burnout. Freudenberger (1974) developed the term *burnout*

during his research with healthcare workers who were experiencing physical and emotional

exhaustion. Although there is no universal definition of burnout, most researches accept the

three-component structure defined by Maslach et al., (1984). Burnout is defined using the

following factors: 1) factors of depersonalization; 2) factors of reduced personal

accomplishment; and 3) factors of emotional exhaustion.

Depersonalization is characterized by a negative attitude towards others and a cynical

attitude towards the work environment (Richards et al., 2016). Teaching is a stressful occupation

due to the intense social-emotional anxiety of meeting the needs of 30-plus children at once and

"having to make many decisions on the fly" each day (Roeser et al., 2013, p. 788).

Depersonalization is considered a coping mechanism that may divert blame toward students and

families for learning difficulties and misbehavior and generate attitudes of negativity or apathy

toward students and peers (Oakes et al., 2013). Removing one's emotions, which can increase

apathy, may be a key factor in the development of various psychological problems (Hinds et al.,

2015).

Factors of reduced personal accomplishment deal with negative feelings concerning one's

work and an inclination to diminish one's feelings of professional and personal achievement

(Richards et al., 2016). Teachers' feelings of personal accomplishment stem from the

consequences of their own actions (Oakes et al., 2013). However, many teachers have felt a

reduced sense of personal accomplishment due to low levels of collegial support, lack of

recognition, professional isolation, and difficult interpersonal interactions (Hinds et al., 2015).

The stress of teaching has reduced ambition and often causes teachers to withdraw from

involvement with students, other teachers, and school (Hinds et al., 2015). TSB due to reduced

personal accomplishment encompasses a wide range of detrimental factors that include a lack of

self-confidence in the profession of teaching (Ghanizadeh et al., 2015). The reduction of personal

accomplishment undermines intrinsic motivation, teacher passion, and happiness with career

(Shen et al., 2015).

Teachers dealing with the third burnout factor of emotional exhaustion consider

themselves psychologically drained, believe their emotional resources have been depleted, and

think they are overextended in their duties (Richards et al., 2016). When teachers struggle

through complex inter-dynamics, contradictory situations, and hostile environments, they exhibit

vulnerability to cynicism and exhaustion (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Maslach et al. (2001) reported

that the central cause of TSB is emotional exhaustion or the feeling of being emotionally overextended to the point of fatigue. TSB caused from emotional exhaustion decreases teacher ambition and increases the tendency to withdraw from work (Hinds et al., 2015). The limited amount of studies dealing with teachers' emotions indicate positive teacher emotions correlate with their own well-being and overall quality of instruction (Hagenauer et al., 2015).

TSB creates conflict in the relationships of students and teachers; teachers with high-stress levels have lower self-efficacy, lower teacher-student rapport, and lower levels of effectiveness (Lavigne, 2014). When TSB increases, so does the negative teacher/student relationship. This phenomenon will likely change students' perception of their teacher and may change their feelings toward them and influence their behavior in the classroom (Shen et al., 2015). Research has shown students themselves can recognize TSB, and teachers experiencing TSB receive a low rating from students on classroom management and pacing of the curriculum (Shen et al., 2015). Determining what causes TSB and negative emotions associated with TSB can help support teachers' well-being and quality of life (Hagenauer et al., 2015).

Implications of Burnout. Burnout, which has been described as overstrain, industrial fatigue, and neurocirculatory asthenia, is common in highly demanding human service positions (O'Neill et al., 2012). Human service professionals, such as nurses, police, firefighters, and teachers, are susceptible to feelings of stress that have led to burnout (Aloe et al., 2014). Gutpa et al. (2014) found that 86% of teachers have high levels of occupational burnout, which can lead to psychological distress, increased anxiety, cardiovascular disease, and exhaustion. Research conducted by Austin, Shah, and Muncer (2005) found that more than 40% of teachers' experience serious symptoms of TSB due to workload, abusive teacher/parent relationships, and abusive student relationships.

Schools play a major role in adolescent development, and teachers are the most important figures for the cultivation of emotion and academic success (Beshai et al., 2016). Positive interaction with students promotes engagement in academics and proper behavior (Thapa et al., 2013). A teacher's positive mood is directly related to high quality learning and caregiving (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013). Teachers that have socio-emotional competence experience better classroom behavior and teacher-student relations, and they respond better to students' social and academic needs (Abenavoli et al., 2013).

In contrast, teachers that experience burnout have an absence of positive emotions, which connects burnout to dysphoria and anhedonia, the central factors of depression (Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2016). There is a significant correlation between TSB and student academic performance; teachers under the effects of stress have less empathy and are detached from students, resulting in negative scholastic achievement (Gastaldi et al., 2014). TSB affects student motivation negatively and can impair motives for learning (Shen et al., 2015). The consequences of TSB have been diminished job satisfaction and reduced teacher-pupil rapport (Able et al., 2001).

TSB also adversely affects students' academic achievement because of teacher attrition, teacher absenteeism, and exhaustion (Roeser et al., 2013). Teacher turnover due to TSB has increased considerably over the past three decades, especially in underserved communities, and this attrition makes it difficult to attract high quality teachers (Simon, 2013). Burnout is a universal issue affecting every stage of a teacher's career and lowering levels of self-efficacy, which can cause teachers to leave the profession (Aloe et al., 2014). Stress that teachers experience causes almost half of them to leave the profession in the first five years, and another 50% that remain will not make it to retirement age (Katz, 2015).

TSB not only is related to undesirable personal and professional outcomes such as anxiety and depression, it can also lead to high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease (Roeser et al. 2013). A fundamentally accepted idea in the science of psychology is that stress affects physical as well as emotional health (Amirkhan, 2012). An individual's response to stress can be physical (e.g., cardiovascular disease), psychological (e.g., anger), and behavioral (e.g., excessive alcohol consumption); the effects of stress depend upon individual perceptions (Mazzola et al., 2011).

Stress begins in the hippocampus of the brain, and chronic stress can lead to unfavorable changes in lifestyle, such as increased smoking, poor diet, excessive alcohol use, poor sleep quality, and decrease in physical activity, all of which can escalate the risk of cardiovascular disease (Nyberg et al., 2013). Stress can degenerate the hippocampus which controls memory, thus leaving teachers under strain with less access to knowledge to assist in combating TSB (Paterson et al., 2016). In addition, studies involving humans under chronic stress have shown a reduction in dendrite and neural growth, which can damage the brain's adaptive response and weaken the immune system, thus impairing the body's ability to heal wounds (Nagel, 2009).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed for this study focused on the many causes and implications of stress and the type of environment needed for teachers to stay healthy and assist students in reaching their full potential. The purpose was to give depth and insight into the root of the problem of TSB and the branches of the issue concerning the damaging effects upon teachers, students, and peers. Often teachers enter the profession with idealism, enthusiasm, and a purpose, but this often fades as the reality of challenges overshadows their passion to make a difference (Richards, 2012).

Teachers have a difficult task considering the demands put upon them. Self-efficacy is essential in creation of teacher satisfaction; people who do not feel they have control over their own destiny experience feelings of detachment, depersonalization, and diminished accomplishment. The implications of stress alone make it worthy of study, and the effects of stress reach beyond teachers and students. Stress may lead to TSB, which is a societal problem that cannot be addressed with inductive and continuous training; it must be considered, discussed collaboratively, and understood by all who have a stake in any educational system.

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Introduction

Many studies of job stress and strain on relationships have been conducted concerning teachers, but much of the research has been quantitative in nature with little on rural environments (Mazzola et al., 2011). Although studies using quantitative methods have been important in the body of literature concerning stress and its effects, such studies have limitations (Mazzola et al., 2011). Quantitative research makes assumptions concerning stressors in structured data-collection instruments, which may not recognize or ignore important stressors that might be discovered using a qualitative design (Mazzola et al., 2011).

The field of research concerning rural education continues to be limited (McHenry-Sorber & Hall, 2018). Due to the dearth of literature specific to stress in rural schools, the appropriate method of study is an exploratory design and specifically a phenomenological methodology. Groenewald (2004) states that phenomenological study is grounded on the perspective and experiences of people as they lived it. Phenomenological methods create a very effective form of qualitative research that brings individuals' experiences and perceptions into new perspectives that enable a deeper understanding to challenge policy, theory, and action (Lester, 1999). This type of research involves theory enhanced by inductive reasoning, which allows the voice of those being interviewed to contribute to a single cohesive statement regarding the essence of teacher stress in rural schools (Watkins, 2012).

This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of teacher stress and discover new or unique stressors when they teach in rural communities. One purpose

of using a qualitative design is to involve a reflexive process operating in every stage of the study from the initial questions throughout conclusions. (Maxwell, 2013). The purpose of a qualitative phenomenological design is to explore common themes that come from shared lived experiences (Panesar, 2010). The common themes then provide a basis for reflective analysis, which enables meaning to be derived from the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The primary objective is to clarify the meaning, structure, and essence of lived experiences around a specific phenomenon (Simon & Goes, 2011). Phenomenological research focuses on whole experiences and searches for meaning through first-person accounts that form a reflective, involved, and personal commitment of the researcher and research subjects (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenologist researcher gathers information of the lived experiences and attempts to understand the behavior through the eyes of the participants (Simon & Goes, 2011). The normality of the phenomenon is examined with a very thorough search and fine analysis so that different and new truths can materialize (Wilding & Whiteford., 2005). In order for phenomenological research to be judged valid, the study must use appropriate and rigorous procedures through a heuristic process into the specific phenomenon (Simon & Goes, 2011). This method of inquiry offers a systematic interpretivist method of studying and learning about a phenomenon that can be challenging to research with traditional positivistic methods (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005).

The following questions were used to guide the study:

1. What are the perceived stressors of teachers in rural elementary schools?

2. What are the effects on mental and physical health of perceived stressors for teachers in rural elementary schools?

3. How do teachers in rural elementary schools rank stressors?

Research Design

  The design of phenomenology stems from the works of the German philosopher Edmund

Husserl (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Husserl (1859-1938) sought to develop a new

philosophical methodology which would offer understanding of people and their own social

consciousness following the social unrest after World War I (Groenewald, 2004). Husserl used a

pair of terms to refer to connected elements of any intentional act: *Noesis* is the essence of the

character and *noema* is the ideal essence of the character (Rassi & Shahabi, 2015). Noesis

represents the way things are, while Noema represents the ideal way things ought to be.

Husserl's method of focusing on lived experiences allows individuals to provide distinct

descriptions of their conscious life in relation to situations or conditions that exist within their

environment. Phenomenological research organizes, presents, and analyzes data from the

wholeness of the experience rather than parts. It distinguishes itself from previous research and

suggests further investigations and discussions brought forth from outcomes regarding social

meanings and personal values (Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenological research, every

statement has equal value woven into nonrepetative, nonoverlapping components that are

clustered into themes for a universal textural description.

  According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology can be used to identify the essence of

the perceptions, feelings, and beliefs of individuals based upon lived experiences. The analysis of

the data extends from a central assumption that this essence of a particular experience or set of

experiences is shared by others. The central focus of this phenomenological study was on the

experience of life as it was lived in relation to stress and the effects of stress upon the teacher.

Creswell (2015) states that phenomenological research is not only a method of research but is considered a philosophy as well. This means of research was judged to be the most comprehensive method of inquiry to identify experiences that might provide insight concerning the phenomenon of teacher stress. To further satisfy the purpose of this particular study, the researcher also chose a modified Van Kaam method designed by Moustakas (1994) to explore the understanding of teacher stress in the rural school setting and how the teachers perceive it affects them psychologically and physically. Moustakas is considered to be the founding father of phenomenological research (Simon & Goes, 2011). This method relies on the execution of a seven-step process: (1) list and make preliminary groupings, (2) reduce and eliminate, (3) cluster and thematize the invariant constituents, (4) make the final identification of the invariant constituents and themes, (5) generate individual textural descriptions, (6) construct individual structural descriptions, and (7) create textural-structural descriptors and composite descriptors representing the whole group. These steps are detailed in the data analysis section.

The research in this study tells the stories of teachers through one-on-one interviews concerning experiences with a wide range of stressors. These provide tangible and practical data to create an understanding of the underlying issues related to stress, burnout, and effects on health. A phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to practice the use of epoché, which is the process of setting aside all preconceived ideas, beliefs, bias, and judgments. Epoché is a clearing of the mind, allowing the structures of the imaginative variation to appear through a clear lens. Through epoché the researcher then is able to bracket the experiences and beliefs concerning a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher is trying to see the world before it appears to his or her definition, whereas intuition precedes empirical knowledge. In order to enable the imaginative variation to emerge from the data, the researcher must integrate a

mindfulness mentality throughout the exploratory process. Mindfulness is the ability to focus on the present moment of the experience using an open and receptive manner and a suspending of judgment (Berkowicz & Myers, 2015). The researcher abandons the search for perceived truth, the perfect moment, or manufactured ideal outcomes and consciously allows the data to effectively tell the story of the phenomenon. Through the use of intentional mindfulness techniques, the researcher is able to bracket personal experiences and intentionally engage in the act of epoché when exploring the phenomenon under study.

Participants

The study focused on rural elementary school teachers from Capps County, Cascade County, Lee County, Oakland County, and Pathfork County in the Upper Cumberland area in Northeast Tennessee. There were six teachers who participated in the one-on-one interviews. The following demographics were collected but not used in the statistical analysis: Caucasian 100%, Male 33.33%, Female 66.67%, and educational status ranged from Bachelor of Science to Ph.D (A.B.D). The represented districts and schools have Title I status, and their percentages of free and reduced lunch vary as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch in Represented Districts

Pseudo District Name	Percentage of Free/Reduced
Capps	52.1%
Cascade	58.8%
Lee	76%
Oakland	50.8%
Pathfork	42.2%

Note. Information obtained from https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#TN/5/0/char/0

Table 2

Percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch in Represented Schools

School Name	Percentage of Free/Reduced
Riverhaven Elementary School	80%
Redcliff Elementary School	56%
Norrod Middle School	71%
Aelford Elementary School	68.5%
Havenbush Elementary School	61%
Byrock Elementary School	67%

Note. Information obtained from individual school administrators

The interviews were conducted in Capps, Cascade, Lee, Oakland, and Pathfork districts, and the details are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Details of Participating Schools and Districts

School	District	Grade level
Riverhaven	Capps	K-8
Redcliff	Cascade	K-8
Norrod	Lee	5-8
Aelford	Oakland	K-8
Havenbush	Oakland	K-8
Byrock	Pathfork	K-5

Table 4

Details of Participating Teachers

Pseudo Name	Years Experience	Education Level	Teaching Experience
David Ryan	33	Ph.D (A.B.D.)	Retired teacher and former school administrator. Reentered the teaching profession and acquired his current position as a special education teacher one year ago. Has always taught in rural areas.
Lizabeth Ham	38	B.S.	Has been teaching in rural areas her entire career, mostly middle school mathematics.
Jessica Smith	42	B.S.	Has held many teaching positions within rural elementary schools. Is currently the school librarian.
Jon Barro	3	B.S.	In his third year of teaching and has taught at three schools within the same rural district.
Jodi Linder	12	B.S.	Has worked in two different rural districts.
Dana Pane	7	M.A.	Seven years teaching experience in special education. She has taught three years in metropolitan schools and four years in rural schools.

Approval for research was obtained from the author's IRB (Appendix A). The researcher contacted Capps County, Cascade County, Lee County, Oakland County, and Pathfork County district superintendents via email (Appendix B-F) to provide an overview and requirements of the study and to request permission to conduct research in their respective districts and contact school-level administration. Once district permission was obtained (Appendix G-K), elementary school principals were contacted by email (Appendix L) informing them about the study and requirements for participation and requesting permission to attend a meeting in person to recruit

participants. Two principals contacted denied request to attend a meeting; however, they stated the information would be distributed to staff via email. The researcher prepared a short synopsis of the study for presentation at the meeting and asked for volunteers to contact the researcher if interested by email or phone.

Potential interview participants were emailed more in-depth information about the research (Appendix M). The researcher deliberately sought participants who could contribute to the central importance of the study, which is understanding the phenomenon of teacher stress (Eissenstat & Bohecker, 2018). Purposeful sampling was used to determine who would be interviewed. This involved recruiting participants who perceived that stress in their lives comes from the teaching profession and could express themselves openly about their perceived stressors. Participants were also selected for their ability to articulate experiences about a wide range of stressors that stem from being a teacher in a rural elementary school. The study purposefully sampled teachers with a wide range of teaching experience to disparage the concept that novice teachers endure more stress than experienced teachers.

Selected participants were emailed to set up an interview (Appendix N), and before the interview, they were instructed to sign a consent form (Appendix O). The protocol for the interviews is shown in Appendix P, and after each interview, each participant was given a participant debriefing form (Appendix Q) for future contact concerning data collection.

The research methodology considered most appropriate to explore the issue of teacher stress in rural elementary schools was a phenomenological study. The central questions concerning a phenomenological study are as follows (Simon et al., 2011):

- What are the lived experiences of the group concerning a specific phenomenon?

- What are the meanings, structures, and the essence of these experiences related to the

  phenomenon?

In order to seek the answers, the researcher used one-on-one interviews to collect data on the causes of teacher stress in rural elementary schools. The interview questions were reviewed by peer experts prior to interviewing participants. The interview protocol is Appendix O.

Analytical Methods

The researcher fully disclosed the intent and purpose of the research to all participants and in good faith obtained and secured signed consent forms before beginning any data collection. The researcher confirmed with the interview participants that the information would be confidential and pseudonyms would be used. Participants were made aware that at the conclusion of the study, the researcher would secure the notes, transcripts, recordings, survey data, and any related information for three years, and after that time it would be destroyed according to the protocol (45 CFR 46.115, 2015).

The researcher analyzed the text from interview transcripts to identify themes concerning teacher stress in rural elementary schools. The raw data of the transcribed interviews were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) seven-step, modified Van Kaam method of phenomenological study. The method used four analytical steps and three descriptive steps. The four analytical steps included epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences. The three descriptive steps entailed formulating representative narratives of individual participant beliefs concerning teacher stress. The seven steps of the modified Van Kaam phenomenological method of research by Moustakas (1994) included the following:

1. List and make preliminary groupings. List every expression relevant to the experience (horizonalization).

2. Reduce and Eliminate. Determine the invariant constituents by testing each expression for two requirements: (a) Does the expression contain a moment of experience necessary and sufficient for understanding it? and (b) Is it possible to define and label it? If both requirements are met, it is a horizon of the experience; if not, it is eliminated along with overlapping and vague descriptive terms. What remains are the invariant constituents of the experience.

3. Cluster and thematize the invariant constituents. Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the fundamental themes of the experience.

4. Make the final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application. Check the invariant constituents and the accompanying themes against the complete record of the research participant. Are the themes expressed plainly in the complete transcript? Are the themes compatible if not plainly expressed? If they are not compatible, they are not relevant to the research and should be deleted.

5. Generate individual textural descriptions. Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, compose for each participant an individual textural description of the experience that includes verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

6. Construct individual structural descriptions. For each participant, write an individual description of the experience grounded on the individual textural description and imaginative variation.

7. Create textural-structural descriptors and composite descriptors. For each participant, construct a textural-structured description of the sense and essence of the experience, including the invariant constituents and themes. Develop a composite description of the meaning and essences of the experience representing the group as a whole from individual textural-structural descriptions.

The researcher coded the transcriptions of the interviews while analyzing the data using the modified Van Kaam steps. The purpose of coding the transcriptions is to make sense of the text data by categorizing the information into common themes to understand the phenomenon of teacher stress. After several iterations of analysis, the following themes emerged:

- Sociopolitical domain

- Institutional domain

- Intrapersonal domain

- Interpersonal domain

Role of the Researcher

In a phenomenological qualitative study, the role of the researcher is vastly different than it is in a quantitative study. In a qualitative study, the research itself is an instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). A main concern with phenomenology is the researcher's own personal feelings, bias, and prior knowledge with the phenomena while conducting research (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). Epoché or the suspension of judgment was mentally administered through engaging in mindfulness practices to address this concern. The process was transcendental in nature since the phenomenological researcher views the phenomenon as a new thought to be discovered (Simon el at., 2011). The qualitative researcher seeks to interpret, understand, and describe the phenomenon in a reflexive process (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005).

This reflexive process allowed the researcher to see the phenomenon before his own empirical knowledge, consciousness, and definition. The researcher was not looking for an idealistic standpoint of the data, but rather the presence of the imaginative variation. Preconceptions and natural attitudes were suspended. When engaging in the coding process, the researcher engaged in mindfulness practices to actively, and intentionally, suspend judgment. When not engaged in the coding process, the researcher let the data percolate within his mind in order for the data to be reduced to a mere conscious object framed from the individual participant's voice. The researcher maintained an awareness of presumptions, which lessened concerns of bias in this phenomenological research and allowed the data to speak beyond the researcher's own perspective, preconceived ideas, biases, and definition.

The researcher combined epoché with a mindfulness mentality throughout the analysis. Mindfulness is rooted in the fundamental capabilities of consciousness and meta-awareness; it is a practice that promotes a method of processing information without an attachment to any specific point of view (Davis & Hays, 2011) Mindfulness is a deliberate approach of moment-to-moment awareness of experience devoid of judgement.

Limitations

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the causes of stress in rural elementary schools. Educators face job stressors that challenge the maintenance of their emotional balance. These stressors not only affect the teachers physically and emotionally but have wide-ranging detrimental consequences for the entire educational system. The participants were selected outside of the researcher's realm of influence; however, the researcher did have a vested interest in improving the working environment for teachers in the studied districts. A limitation of the study is the researcher's perceived bias of the causes of stress in teachers in the

rural educational setting. The researcher's experiences, philosophies, and formal education must be considered as limiting factors, and the topic selection is clearly a response to the researcher's own life experiences. The researcher had a vested interest in the results of the study, not only to understand how the researcher was feeling about his own stress but to understand co-workers' feelings as well. The research appropriately used epoché and mindfulness attention when collecting and analyzing data to minimize this limitation to the study.

The sample size used in a qualitative research study is frequently smaller than in a quantitative study. The researcher conducted six interviews with people who had varying years of instruction, background, and education by using purposeful sampling. Qualitative methods are focused on collecting an in-depth comprehension of a particular phenomenon and on the why of the experience. A limitation of the study is the number of in-depth interviews conducted. Creswell (1998) suggests between five to 25 for a phenomenological study, and Morse (1994) suggests at least six (Mason, 2010). The researcher sensed that after analyzing six interviews, a point of saturation had been reached in the data collection process. Saturation is the continual sampling of the data collected from the participants until repetition was achieved and no new information was obtained (Bowen, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To clarify further, thematic saturation means that coding and analysis ended when the theme had been "adequately explained" (Hyde, 2003, p. 48). Thus, data collection from the participants continued until thematic saturation in coding was reached (Saldaña, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, the researcher reached a point in data collection that sampling more data would not lead to more information related to the research questions. Researchers recognize similar instances in their data continually and are confident their analysis is robust, and theory can emerge. The

researcher recognized that further interviews would not yield new or relevant data and would not

be a catalyst for further theoretical insight.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

According to a 2018 study conducted by the University of Missouri, 93% of elementary school teachers report they are highly stressed. Teaching is considered one of the most stressful occupations, and research has revealed that teaching has the second highest clinical depression rate in the public service industry (Stiglbauer & Zuber, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to place an emphasis on identifying the principal sources of these negative stressors to improve education inclusively. Teachers' stress has a detrimental effect not only on their personal health, but on student achievement as well. For example, Oberle & Schoner-Reichl (2016) conducted research that revealed stress affects teachers' relationship with students, which in turn has a negative impact upon student achievement.

In the present study, the aim of the research was to understand stressors specific to the teaching profession, particularly in rural areas. The following questions were used to guide the study:

1. What are the perceived stressors of teachers in rural elementary schools?

2. What are the effects on mental and physical health of perceived stressors for teachers in rural elementary schools?

3. How do teachers in rural elementary schools rank stressors?

The intent of the study was to focused on hindrance stress in the teaching profession, disregarding beneficial stress and general job stress associated with all occupations. Hindrance stress is detrimental to an individual and obstructs personal goals and accomplishments, whereas beneficial stress can provide opportunities for personal learning and growth (Stiglbauer et al.,

2018). General workplace stress is related to any occupation, not just the teaching profession, and is based upon such things as workload, job control, and social support within the organization (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). However, a plethora of studies have indicated that teachers are under more general workplace stress from problems in areas such as workload, job scope, job control, and social support than other professions (Ghanizadeh et al., 2015).

To explain the results of this particular study, this chapter will provide the findings of the participant interviews and how these findings were categorized into themes by using a modified Van Kaam method of analysis. The themes provided insight to the research questions that were developed for this study.

Research Question #1

To find the perceived stressors of teachers in rural elementary schools, the researcher explored the results of the teacher interviews through a modified Van Kaam method of analysis by Moustakas (1994). Horizonalization of individual transcripts yielded 182 quotes that were relevant to the phenomenon of teacher stress in rural schools. Horizonalization generated the preliminary themes: home/student, hats, local/state/federal policy, time, respect, discipline, personal, and money. In the reduction and elimination process, 166 invariant constituents were determined to meet the criteria of being a quote important to the lived experience that could be reduced to its underlying meaning.

In the process of theming the invariant constituents, the researcher explored the underlying meanings for each participant's dataset and determined the themes were not a true representation considering the grouping of the horizons. The individual datasets were re-examined for themes with deeper consideration given to the latent meanings of the horizons

using a profound sense of mindfulness and bracketing of personal beliefs, judgments, opinions, and theories through the process of epoché. The resulting themes were checked against individual datasets to insure an accurate representation of each participant's experience concerning the phenomenon of teacher stress in rural schools. The resulting themes include: sociopolitical domain, institutional domain, public policy, time, respect, discipline, personal, and money.

Individual textural descriptions were constructed from the remaining 166 invariant constituents. Considering these datasets, the invariant constituents were corresponding with multiple themes, which indicated that a further modification of the thematic process was necessary to portray an accurate description of the lived experiences. The construction of individual structural descriptions assisted in the process of understanding the horizons through examining the emotional, social, political, and cultural connections. The 166 invariant constituents were scrutinized for various meanings and perspectives using imaginative variation. Again, this process integrated a deliberate mindfulness approach to the analysis along with the suspension of natural attitude in order to circumvent judgment, bias, and opinion. The primary interpretation of the data as a whole produced the following themes used throughout the conclusion of the analysis: sociopolitical domain, institutional domain, intrapersonal domain, and interpersonal domain.

The final step in the analysis of the data was to create a composite textural and structural synthesis to form a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of teacher stress in rural schools from all participants. The concluding synthesis of the data involved 166 invariant constituents organized into four distinct themes. Table 5 shows the classification of each horizon based on theme, and Figure 3 depicts the occurrences of the invariant constituents.

Table 5

Composite Structural-Textural Description

Themes	Number of Invariant Constituents
Sociopolitical Domain	96
Institutional Domain	33
Interpersonal Domain	25
Intrapersonal Domain	12

Figure 3

Occurrences of Invariant Constituents in the Thematic Breakdown
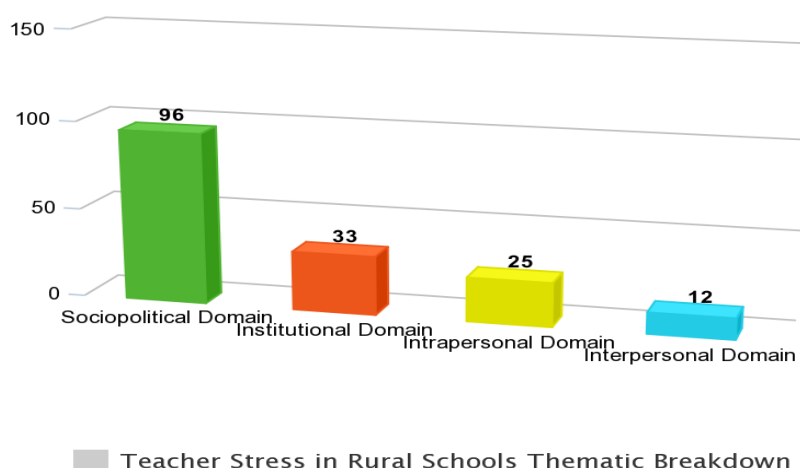
Sociopolitical Domain. Socio is a prefix relating to society, which is described as a group or groups of people who live together in a particular social system (Cambridge Dictionary). Politics are defined as the activities of government, politicians, and political parties exercising control of a human community (Cambridge Dictionary). In this study, the sociopolitical domain refers to the present-day ideologies, policies, practices, conditions, laws, and traditions that interconnect to define culture related to education.

Social factors. The results of the analysis indicated a majority of stress for teachers in rural elementary schools originates from societal issues. The primary societal issues deal with students' physiological needs, belongingness/love needs, safety needs, and self-esteem needs. An underlying societal issue is the lack of respect given to teachers.

The participants in the study indicated that many students in rural areas start with disadvantages in all aspects of their lives. The data indicate the lack of having physiological needs met in students creates stress for teachers. Jodi stated in her interview that, "It would be great if we all lived in a wonderful world where they're all taken care of at home, and they're not. They have such a hard time and such a pitiful home life, it's sad, and makes you want to cry. I think that there's no one there to take care of them, to love them." Jodi said it is stressful to have to fill so many roles for the students. "They look to us, because we're kind of the only stable adult figure some of them have; you have to be everything they need and it's hard to give them all that and teach." She went on to point out that many students do not have their basic needs met. Jodi said, "They're just worried about where they're going to find a meal and where they're going to sleep that night, which is sad." Jessica reiterated, stating the following:

> We feed them. We clothe them. We bring supplies to them. A lot of them don't have
> what they need; if it was not for free lunch and breakfast they'd probably not get any
> meals a day. I'm sure that some of them go home (and) that's all they get. Plus, teachers
> will either buy things for them they need or will bring clothes or try to get them clothes.
> You worry about them, and worry would be stress because you do worry about them
> when they go home. You're just involved in every aspect of their life. There's not an
> aspect of their life that you don't have to help them. They are starved for attention.

Jessica also stated that often children do not get enough rest and are not prepared to learn. She added that she has seen many good teachers leave because of the workload and stress. She said, "If I could afford it I would (quit)."

The data gathered from the participant interviews indicate than many students in rural areas lack security at home and a safe family atmosphere; they lack a stable environment. The lack of a stable household creates stress for teachers. Dana expressed her thoughts on the safety and security of students. "I know it causes some of my colleagues stress calling the Department of Child Services; one of my colleagues, who is not a counselor, does it all the time." Jessica also communicated that many children do not live in a safe and secure environment. According to Jessica, "One little boy was (supposedly) living with his mom and dad. Mom, dad, and granddaddy are in jail. Who's taking care of that child? That causes you to worry about them." She also stated, "We're a poor county. Most people is either on disability, or they might be addicted to drugs. We have a problem in this county." Jodi revealed in her interview the relationship between teachers and students' safety needs. She stated, "We're not only the teacher, we're everything. You have to be everything they need. You feel like you're their guidance counselor, you're their mom, you're their dad, you're their therapist, you're just everything they need and it's hard." Jodi concluded that she feels teachers are often the only stable adult influence some students have.

The analysis of the participant interviews indicates students lack a sense of belongingness and love which can cause stress for teachers. Jessica elaborates on the teachers' role in today's rural school environment. She explains, "Most of us (teachers) care about children and want them to learn and develop the whole child. Some kids don't get that at home. There're (students) arguing because they don't know how to deal with others." In Jodi's interview, she explained the

lack of belongingness and love in some children's lives. According to Jodi, "Almost minute to minute they need different stuff, and if you don't supply them with what they need, it's almost like they shut down and they're incapable of learning. I think our kids, more so than any, they have to know you love them. It's almost like they don't have any loving or caring anywhere else." Dana considers her role in providing a sense of belongingness in her daily calling as an elementary school teacher. Dana revealed in her interview that when they tell you about their daily lives, you have to be a guidance counselor and give them whatever coping strategies you've learned throughout the years. She stated, "Teachers everywhere have to wear many hats."

The analysis of the data indicates that the lack of emotional support and prevalence of low self-esteem for students create stress for teachers. Lizabeth addressed the stress that stems from students' lack of emotional support. She stated:

Kids that are not motivated is stressful to me; it's like I try to think of ways to motivate kids. They have a lot of baggage. They have things they have to deal with emotionally. Some students are raised by great grandparents and I don't know that a lot of times those grandparents or great grandparents and sometimes even parents are educated enough to help their child at home. One of the things that's most stressful to me is they don't push them to let them know how important their education is for their future.

David also stated that many students have very little intrinsic motivation for their own learning and do not see how education will benefit them in the future. Jessica reiterated the lack of emotional support for students. She expressed her thoughts: "They're starved for attention. If they don't get that filled at home, which is the majority, they're going to get filled here." Dana also stated she thought it is unreasonable to expect children in poverty to perform at levels with children that have a support system that instills a sense of confidence and self-esteem. When the

question was posed to Jodi concerning emotional support and creating self-esteem for students related to education, she answered, "I feel that their focus is on everything but education. Education is not an importance of theirs. It's not important at their home. There's not a support system. They don't care." In Jessica's interview she touched on self-esteem and aspirations of students that are conveyed from the lack of support. She articulated, "We've had a lot of kids that their goal is to get on disability. They want a check coming to the mailbox and don't want to work. That's what they've been told. They see it at home." David also states that students are not given proper self-esteem and emotional support. He states, "Students have very little intrinsic motivation and can't see tomorrow." Jodi discussed the lack of self-esteem expressed by one student who stated, "I know what I want to do when I grow up, I want to be a foster parent and I'm going to get my check in the mail." Jodi expressed, "There is no teaching that child, because there was no focus, push, or value of education. They don't feel it's valuable for them. They found another way to use the system so they can have an income without having an education." Jon discussed the lack of students' sense of accomplishments concerning education. Jon stated, "I don't know how to show the importance to everybody that needs to know the importance, as far as students or their parents, because parents don't care in most cases; basketball rules the world."

The data indicated that another stressor for teachers from a societal standpoint is the lack of respect given to them as professionals. Teachers feel this stress from concrete instances provided from numerous societal factions. Jodi stated, "No respect at all from society. I feel we're almost looked down on. I think the media and with everything has made our profession where people look down on us that we're not professionals." She explained this issue as follows:

I think that because they cannot blame the parent for anything, that we get the blame for everything. You can't blame the kid and you can't blame the parent. You blame the teacher for everything. The teacher is responsible for test scores. It's not the parents and the kids that didn't study and work hard and come to school ready to learn. It's the teacher.

Lizabeth explained how the lack of respect given to teachers by society has changed over her career. Lizabeth said, "I don't think teachers are respected today like they were when I started teaching in 1980. I don't." She added that society has no idea what teachers do and the extra time they put in and don't get paid. Historically, teaching has been one of the most respected professions, but frequently and more recently, society blames teachers for many of the problems within society.

Maslow's hierarchy in the sociopolitical domain. The analysis of the sociopolitical domain exposes a deeper concern to contemplate that is essential to the research questions and understanding teacher stress in rural elementary schools. Considering the amount of data concerning societal issues, it is imperative to examine the privation of students regarding the physiological necessities of safety, love, and self-esteem. Abraham Maslow (1954) conducted research concerning human motivation that is extensively accepted in the educational realm. This research examines Maslow's original theory of human motivation.

In Maslow's theory, individuals must satisfy a series of needs beginning with physiological needs such as food, water, and shelter, before their full potential can be realized. It is important to consider in Maslow's theory that a person's full potential or self-actualization is seldom achieved; however within this stage of human motivation are attributes such as achievement, creativity, morality, and problem solving that can be realized by individuals. These

attributes are essential in developing core cognitive skills for students to be able to think, read, learn, remember, reason, and be attentive to receiving information in order to gain knowledge. Figure 4 depicts Maslow's theory.

Figure 4

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Note. From https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html
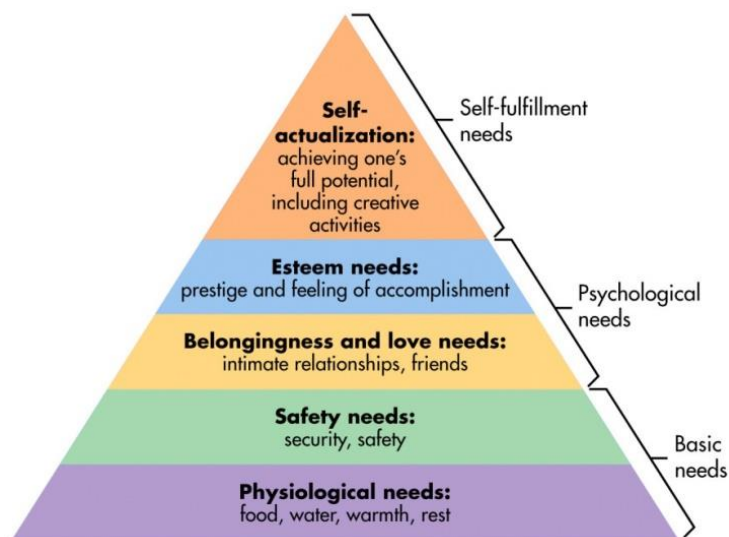
Humans are fueled by a desire to achieve goals, and attaining these goals helps satisfy human needs and desires. These needs are categorized into a hierarchy system in which lower needs must be satisfied before higher-order needs can be obtained. (Maslow, 1943). At the lowest level are physiological needs that include food, shelter, clothing, and proper rest. If these basic needs are not met, students' efforts and motivation are focused on obtaining these needs. For example, if a student is not properly fed, their attention is centered around satisfying hunger. The same holds true if a student does not have proper rest; their motivation is centered around the need for sleep and not learning. Deprivation at this level can manifest as student disruptions

and cause them to be defiant. This can create a negative learning environment for all students and also creates stress for teachers.

If physiological needs of food, proper shelter, clothing, and rest are met, the subsequent need in Maslow's theory of motivation is the feeling of safety. Safety needs include security, health, protection, and social stability. Safety needs include the environmental conditions the student is nurtured in; this can include the student's home life, school, and community. Students that have bad home lives have unmet safety needs. This can occur in an atmosphere of substance abuse, hostile guardian relationships, health neglect, and absent parents. A student's learning can also be affected if they do not feel safe at school or live in a high crime and violent community. If a student is not nurtured in a stable and supportive environment, there is not a sense of predictability and order. The student can develop anxiety in social situations and can be apprehensive when it comes to learning. The student can develop animosity toward school and put little emphasis on learning. The student may also cause disruptions and be defiant towards others. This can create a stressful teaching and learning environment for all students. If the needs of safety are not met, the student is unable to develop healthy relationships and have a sense of connectedness.

If physiological needs and safety needs are met, the next step in students' motivation is love and developing of a sense of belongingness. This includes healthy friendships, strong family relationships, acceptance, and acts of receiving and giving affection. Positive relationships are an important contributor to human happiness and are often a support system in difficult times. When students are lacking love and a sense of belongingness, they crave the emotional support and feelings of being accepted. If students' needs are not met, they can suffer from depression and feel an overpowering sense of loneliness. This can be very detrimental to a student's psyche

and cause emotional problems. These issues can manifest as behavioral problems for students, which can prevent creating a positive learning environment for all students, thus causing stress for teachers.

Once the needs of love and belongingness have been met, the need for self-esteem becomes the principal desire to be satisfied. Self-esteem involves feelings of accomplishment, prestige, respect of others, confidence, and the need to be perceived as a distinct individual. Students that lack self-esteem are looking for a sense of personal importance, social acceptance, and validation of the individuals they truly are. Often, students portray a person that is at odds with their true personality in order to gain esteem from certain groups. The students are validated as long as the act is sustained. However, true self-esteem emanates from self-belief; this is an internal quality affected by outside influences such as validation from others and peer approval. Self-belief is the first step toward esteem and it originates from accomplishments and success. When students are unable to achieve accomplishments and gain confidence under the realistic interpretation of themselves, they are not able to gain the social status and prestige needed to satisfy their self-esteem. The feeling of esteem is absconded from their thoughts and they are left with a concept of being mediocre and substandard to others, and they often feel abandonment. This can lead to acting out, causing disruptions, cynicism, social detachment, and defiant behavior. These issues can trigger an unfavorable teaching atmosphere that is detrimental for all students and can lead to teacher stress.

The lower levels of Maslow's theory of motivation are expressed as deficiency or deprivation needs. The student's motivation is centered around satisfying these lower level needs. The participants felt the majority of students in rural elementary schools had a deprivation of needs and their motivation was not personal growth, but satisfying physiological,

safety, love, and esteem needs. The participants did not give specific percentages but used the words "a lot", "lots", "many", and "most", to describe the number of students in rural elementary schools they perceived were deprived of lower level needs.

Their motivation is not gaining cognitive knowledge and discovering their full potential. This causes stress for teachers in rural elementary schools. The student is not motivated toward the teacher's purpose of transferring knowledge and growing the student. Students are often apathetic and unconcerned when it comes to their obligations as a student. Teachers are left with feelings of diminished accomplishment, and often a cynical attitude sets in which can lead to a sense of dread concern their job.

The final step in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and motivation is the idea of self-actualization. Self-actualization is the idea that one has achieved his or her potential. The person has purpose and meaning and is creative, spontaneous, and demonstrates a moral character. As stated previously, Maslow conveys the idea that few people ever reach this level; however many of the attributes of self-fulfillment can be realized by students to a certain level and to a lesser potential. Students that have satisfied the lower levels of the hierarchy to some degree will be able to comprehend a sense of their underlying potential and recognize their abilities. Students will be able to nurture their unrealized abilities and comprehend that school, education, and teachers are all quintessential elements that can help them evolve into a happy, productive member of society. This creates a favorable learning environment for all students and lessens teacher stress.

The perception that students not only can achieve the desire to learn but also have the ability to learn is detailed in research conducted by Benjamin Bloom (1956) and his hierarchical order of cognitive skills. Bloom's taxonomy contains six categories of cognitive skills that range

from lower-order skills to high-order skills that require a deeper degree of cognitive thought

(Adams, 2015). These include the following cognitive skills: remember, understand, apply,

analyze, evaluate, and create.

An optimal healthy learning culture, then, is one in which guardians satisfy physiological

needs, needs of safety, and needs of love and support, and foster respect and self-esteem for

students. Teachers are then able to actualize the potential, the talents, and the capabilities of each

student. They are able to work with students to hone their cognitive skills and help them reach

the deeper levels of analysis and creativity. Educators have many opportunities to inspire

students to reach their potential, but there are situations in the lives of students that are out of

control of the teacher. Society has demanded and expects teachers to have the intellect of

Marilyn von Savant, the caring nature of Mother Theresa, and the vision of Martin Luther King

Jr., and play the part of parent doling out tough love while through it all, they provide a shoulder

to lean on for courage and support.

In Table 6, the sociopolitical domain as it relates to Maslow's hierarchy and represented

by the invariant constituents is shown. Figure 5 then graphically shows the occurrences of the

invariant constituents.

Table 6

Social Factors in the Sociopolitical Domain

Sociopolitical Domain Breakdown Social Factors	Number of Invariant Constituents Total 49
Students' Physiological Needs are Not Met	25
Students' Belongingness/Love Needs are Not Met	9
Students' Safety Needs are Not Met	7
Students' Self-Esteem Needs are Not Met	4
Society Does Not Respect Teachers	4

Figure 5

Occurrences of Invariant Constituents: Social Factors
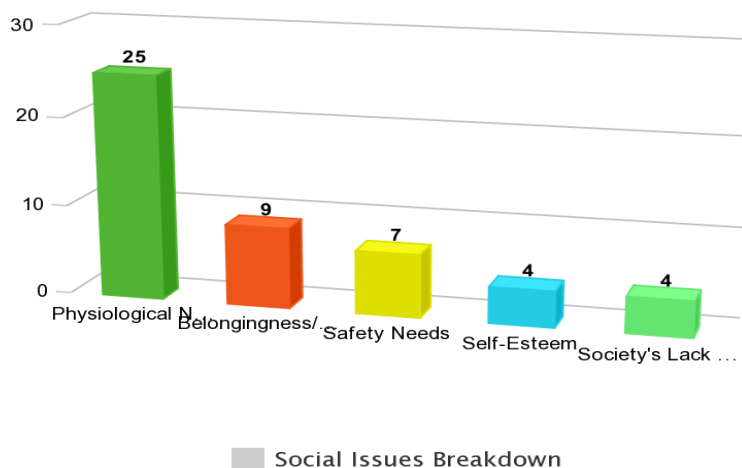
Political factors. The results from the analysis of interviews with rural elementary school teachers indicate state and federal political regulations, mandates, and policies have created enormous stress for teachers. One stressor experienced by teachers stems from the enormous workload brought forth from state and federal policy and the absence of adequate time to complete it. The teacher evaluation system implemented by state policy is also a stressor for teachers. In addition, the mandates of common core curriculum and state standards are a stressor for teachers in rural schools, along with the anxiety felt from the pressure of high-stakes testing. The abundance of professional demands coupled with lack of training and deficiency of time to complete these responsibilities are major stressors for many teachers in rural schools. Common core curriculum has also left many teachers feeling as though they are not in charge of their instruction, which takes away from their teacher self-efficacy (TSE) and the ability to be effective teachers. High-stakes testing has also decreased numerous teachers' morale and

feelings of self-efficacy because teachers are regarded as highly skilled professionals or failures based upon students' scores.

The political landscape around education has created unparalleled pressure for teachers. The political mandates such as No Child Left Behind, the SUCCESS Act, Race to the Top, and the Improving America's School Act have generated accountability measures that teachers feel are unrealistic. These political directives, and other state and federal policies, have generated school-level performance data that has fueled greater attention toward the academic achievement of students and the proposition that teachers are the weak cog in the educational wheel. This is a fundamental issue that leads to teacher stress.

In the analysis of data, a significant stressor for teachers from a sociopolitical standpoint emerged as being the amount of workload put upon teachers due to state and federal mandates. David stated that stress comes from many things in education, and one is the workload considering all the paperwork and meetings. Dana also stated she suffered stress due to the tremendous caseload of students, amount of meetings, and the fact her schedule does not allow for ample time to complete all tasks. She stated:

Right now I have about 70 kids on my caseload. That would be fine if all I had to do is teach them, but I have an IEP on every single one. Then I have to do evaluations. Last year I did about 35 evaluations. I'm face to face with a kid for about two hours, but everything else adds up to about five hours. So, it's basically a full day that I have to spend on evaluations. It's always like, what is due next.

She stated that she has state and federally mandated paperwork that must be completed, extensive student evaluations, and countless meetings, all which take a tremendous amount of time. She added, "There's at least two things I have to do at every moment of everyday,

sometimes three or four things I have to do." Lizabeth's perspective on the tremendous amount of paperwork is, "My joy is not paperwork. It seems like paperwork is too overwhelming. If I have paperwork that's due, I want it done and I'll stay late. It's stressful looking at all that paperwork that's sitting there for you to do." She stated she comes in at least an hour early every day and often stays after work, "I could work probably to midnight and I wouldn't be done." Jodi also feels the stress and strain from the tremendous workload and lack of time. She expressed her feelings:

> We're in a meeting; it seems like every time we have a break, there's a meeting; we're [there's] PLCs we're in. I think that's coming from (the) State down of what we have to do. It feels there is just so much put on us. There's no time to plan to make sure you are covering what the State tells you to cover. It's almost a 24-hour (per) day job; I could stay here all night, and it still wouldn't be enough. That's very frustrating."

Jon concurred with his statement, "I think it's (workload) highly ambitious." When asked how to get it done he stated, "I take it home." He added that he takes home a lot of work.

The analysis of the sociopolitical domain revealed that the method in which teachers are evaluated is a source of stress for teachers in rural elementary schools. Jon was very vocal concerning the stress that stems from state mandated teacher evaluations. He stated, "I hate everything about it. I don't understand how it's fair. It's not fair. They're (students) are not even going to try to do well, and that's a huge part of how I'm graded as a teacher is how well they do." He reiterated that the evaluation system is terrifying. Lizabeth stated that she takes work home to insure that she is ready for an evaluation at any time during her instruction day. She stated, "Planning is essential to relieve stress." Jodi also had an opinion about how the state evaluation system of teachers affects her and the stress it adds to her profession. She added, "I

think it's (evaluation system) personal opinion. I think it's just very opinion driven. In no other profession do you feel like you're held to this accountability." Jessica also voiced her opinion on the matter of fairness considering how teachers are evaluated. She stated, "No. The only way in the world it could be fair if the same person did it throughout the county. It's not fair. The rubric is not good. That causes stress, not only for the evaluator but for them (teachers) as well." Dana stated, "Well, as far as being evaluated, the state testing is part how I'm evaluated. I don't know much about this, I only heard it once." The current evaluation system, according to the analysis of the participant data, is a conundrum of personal opinion and confusion that causes stress for teachers in rural schools.

The investigation of the sociopolitical domain data also delivered an understanding of how state and federal mandates involving common core curriculum implementation and the practice of high-stakes testing have resulted in stress for teachers in rural elementary schools. David spoke on the accountability of common core curriculum and testing that is required by state and federal policy. He stated, "One (stressor) is just trying to teach the common core to kids. For the most part, I don't care where you teach, they never have the prerequisite skills they need coming to where you're supposed to teach them." He also added, "The pressure is there to get all kids at that level, when everyone knows they can't." Jon shared his feelings concerning high-stakes testing: "First of all, the fact that they're called high-stakes is very stressful. I don't know how to show importance to everybody that needs to know the importance; as far as students or their parents, (they) don't care in most cases." Jodi stated her opinion concerning high-stakes testing. She said, "That doesn't motivate me; I get more agitated and aggravated. We have children that have not bathed in a week, that may not have eaten all weekend, and you (State Department) want a proficiency test score from that child. That's not going to happen."

She added that high-stakes testing creates unrealistic goals for everyone. Lizabeth voiced her

frustration concerning her confidence in the state's ability to deliver reliable and accurate high-

stakes testing results. She added, "It just seems like teachers work so hard and they do present

their standards to their students. Then when it goes down to the real test, then it's not ready. It's

discouraging. Very discouraging to teachers and to students, and I think students get the attitude

of why bother."

The political factors of the sociopolitical domain are shown in Table 7, and Figure 6

depicts the occurrences of the invariant constituents.

Table 7

Political Factors in the Sociopolitical Domain

Sociopolitical Domain Breakdown Political Factors	Number of Invariant Constituents Total 47
Workload and Lack of Time	28
Evaluation Policy and Procedures	12
Common Core/High-Stakes Testing	7

Figure 6

Occurrences of Invariant Constituents: Political Factors

Political Issues Breakdown
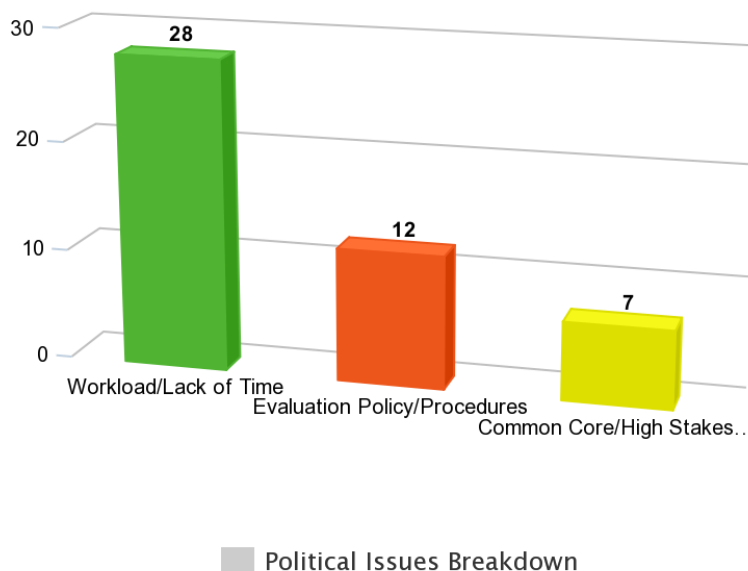
Institutional Domain. The institutional domain includes the systematic policies and

procedures organized at the school and district level. The institutional domain theme includes the

following composite textural descriptions: authoritative decisions, role strain, lack of resources,

and disruptions. These stressors do not include state and federal policies and mandates. They are

derived from school-level and district-level established and accepted procedures.

Authoritative decision making occurs when the individuals in authority have total

decision making power and control over subordinates. Teachers in rural elementary schools feel

authoritative decisions cause stress in two ways. First, teachers feel that if they do not agree with

the authority's decision, they will receive negative repercussions. Secondly, teachers feel stress

from how institutional decisions are made, why institutional decisions are made, and the outcome and consequences of the institutional decisions.

Teachers feel that if they do not agree with an authoritative decision, they may be at risk for losing their job, and this causes stress for teachers. When Jessica was asked about decisions made by her proximal supervisors, she stated, "We just come in (and) they tell us what we're doing. I'm scared to death. Anytime your boss comes in you say, 'Yes ma'am' or she'll be saying, 'Go home.'" This statement comes from an educator of 42 years of professional instruction. Jon, a teacher of three years, discussed his thoughts on stress that comes from local authority decisions. He said, "I'd say it's the district level really. It's not fair." He expressed that decisions made at the district and school level are not based on student needs or teacher qualifications. He said, "They (decisions) are based on what teachers don't want. I was always told not to be that squeaky wheel." This statement referred to moving teachers to various positions during the school year because they were considered arrant to authority. He added, "I am afraid at any given moment they'll just say, 'You have to quit doing this (teaching position) and go somewhere else.'"

Teachers also feel stress from the institutional level that causes them to lose focus of their principal role as a teacher. Role strain is the stress and tension experienced when a single role— in this case, the teacher—is given multiple statuses. Jessica talked about how institutional decisions have created role stain and stress for teachers in rural schools. She said, "I have never understood why when people leave or retire they do not hire someone. I wonder what they are doing with that extra $40,000." She explained that this institutional decision places stress on teachers because they are expected to pick up extra classes and teach outside of their expertise.

She stated, "You're not doing what you're supposed to be doing; you need to do something else and we've stood on our heads and done everything we can and it's never enough."

Jon's interview also indicated that local policy and procedures have created role strain. He stated that often roles are put upon him because he is talented and creative. He also voiced, "I'm punished because of what my degree is, because I'm one of like one of three teachers in the school that can teach K-8, all subjects. I get what is left over." Jon confirmed he has thoughts of quitting and has animosity toward local administration. David also commented on the stress of role strain from an institutional standpoint. He stated, "In rural schools, you wear more hats than you would in a large elementary school."

Teachers also feel stress from the institutional level because they feel funds are not available and perhaps, when available, are misappropriated causing a lack of resources. Jodi stated, "I don't think we are as well-equipped as other schools or other counties in our state. It seems like when we do have money in our county, we don't necessarily spend it on things kids really need." David also stated that he is never given enough supplies, and there are so many things he would like to do for his students, but he is unable because of lack of funds. Jon agreed with these views on lack of resources. In fact, he initially stated that his main stressor was the financial situation with the county. He stated, "Probably one of the biggest for me so far is the financial situation with the county. Not getting everything that I need for my classroom." He added that he has sent home letters asking parents for donations for his classroom. Jessica felt that teachers experience a tremendous amount of stress from issues stemming from the amount of paperwork and lack of staff. She stated, "Right now, the amount of paperwork that's put on individual teachers, not only trying to get ready like doing evaluations and things, because in the past few years when a teacher retires, they haven't replaced that teacher."

The final theme that emerged in the institutional domain involved disruptions. Lizabeth stated her frustration concerning disruptions. She said, "That's another thing you got to deal with. Fire drill, tornado drill, lockdowns. It takes time out of your day." She also added that people coming to her door and the intercom system are unwelcome distractions that cause stress. Jodi also stated that she feels stress from disruptions in her classroom. She felt like there was always someone from central office or school administration at her door, and this causes disruption to instruction and stress.

In table 8, the number of invariant constituents are shown in the institutional domain. Figure 7 then graphically shows the occurrences of the invariant constituents.

Table 8

Themes in the Institutional Domain

Institutional Domain	Number of Invariant Constituents Total 33
Authoritative Decisions	14
Role Strain	12
Lack of Resources	5
Disruptions	2

Figure 7

Occurrences of Invariant Constituents: Institutional Domain
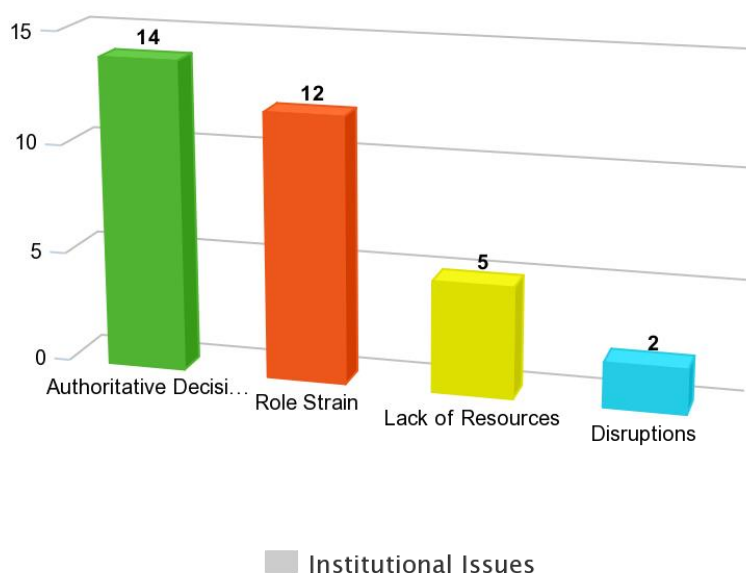
Intrapersonal Domain. Intrapersonal factors exist within a person; they involve personal thoughts and feelings. This domain contains the following internal perceptions that cause stress for teachers: lack of respect, responsibility for the welfare of others, low self-esteem, role ambiguity, lack of self-efficacy (TSE), and difficult financial situations.

Teachers feel stress due to their perception of respect given to them as professionals. Jon's internal feelings indicate that veteran teachers and teachers of different grade bands do not respect him. He stated, "I'm not taken seriously, I don't know why. The other hallway, they don't respect us." Dana also feels the pressure from lack of respect. She said, "I am in constant stress of being judged; I've had teachers not respect me because they don't think I'm working hard enough." Jodi also stated she had the intrapersonal perception that she is not respected. Her intrapersonal beliefs indicate she feels "no respect at all."

Teachers also feel stress from the intrapersonal concern of others. Teachers often put this apprehension and anxiety upon themselves as stated by Dana. She said, "It's my own issue." She stated she simply wanted to do everything she can for her students. Jodi also voiced that concern and worry for others causes stress in her life. Jodi stated, "I worry about our kids, and I worry about our group of teachers and how hard we work. It's frustrating." Worry and frustration causes stress for teachers. Teachers interviewed for this study indicated they worry about students' home lives, they worry about students' welfare and needs, and they worry about other teachers' emotional and physical well-being.

Teachers interviewed from rural elementary schools feel intrapersonal tension due to lack of self-esteem as well. Self-esteem is the personal belief in one's worth and abilities and is akin to self-respect. Jon stated he lacked self-esteem, and this has caused him stress. He stated that no matter how educated a person is, most of the evaluation system rubric is difficult to understand and interpret. He said, "I always feel like I'm in the dark." And further, "Maybe it's I don't know what I'm doing, but all they (state) do is hand you this (standards) and say good luck." Jodi also feels stress from the lack of self-esteem. She stated that no matter what she does, she feels it's never good enough. Jodi said, "I could work (my) tail off and feel I do, and it's never good enough." She added that some days she feels like a failure. Dana similarly stated, "With all those responsibilities that I have to do, I'm in constant stress of being judged." Dana worries how the hundreds of colleagues and 70 sets of parents view her. She said, "I have to win them over while trying to manage my time the best I can. If the adults in the room don't believe me, that I care, then I will lose my job." However, Dana also explained that the lack of physical and mental attention given by guardians is a stressor for many of her colleagues but is not a stressor for her. Dana stated she consciously takes care of her own emotional well-being and protects herself. She

said, "I pretty much do everything I can to protect my emotional well-being, because if I don't, then I break down and I can't do anything."

Teachers feel additional intrapersonal stress from their uncertainty of role expectations. Jessica touched on the stress that stems from role ambiguity and the lack of clear expectations. She stated in her interview, "We have people come in all the time that tell us what to do and they never come back and touch on it." She added, "And when they come back they never mention it; it's totally forgotten." Jon also feels the anxiety of role expectations. He stated, "I feel like I'm a parent, definitely a counselor, and sometimes a friend." He said the role expectations cause stress for him because he was not trained for these roles. Jodi also feels anxious concerning clear expectations in her position as a rural elementary school teacher. She stated that "the state does not know what our roles are as teachers." She added, "The last thing we get to do is be a teacher."

A perceived lack of TSE causes additional intrapersonal stress for rural elementary teachers. They doubt their ability to succeed when challenges arise. David felt the ability to have each student at proficient level was impossible when students do not try. He stated, "Why even bother. When you're trying and doing your part but they're not even attending to the task." Jon discussed in his interview his lack of perceived ability to carry out the many roles he must perform such as counselor, friend, and disciplinarian. He stated, "It causes stress, but I am glad to be whatever students need, but I'll be honest. I wasn't taught how to do it in school. It's hard to know what is appropriate." Jodi described the stress she experiences by feeling inadequate to meet all of the state and federal education mandates:

> The other one is definitely just the stress you feel from the State Department—the stress
>
> you feel from just every aspect of anyone that's over you. It feels like especially in this

day and time, nothing's right in education. It feels, as a teacher in your own classroom, nothing you do is right. It's always negative or what we could do better. You always feel inadequate.

The final intrapersonal stressor was felt by one teacher in particular and involved personal financial situations. This teacher stated that major stressors were student loans and having to work two jobs to pay them off. This teacher added that trying to maintain high quality work in both positions was very difficult. Having to manage energy levels and take care of physical and mental well-being were stressors.

In table 9, the number of invariant constituents are shown. Figure 8 then graphically shows the occurrences of the invariant constituents.

Table 9

Themes in the Intrapersonal Domain

Intrapersonal Domain	Number of Invariant Constituents Total 25
Self-Respect	7
Worry About Co-Workers/Students	6
Self-Esteem	6
Role Ambiguity	3
Self-Efficacy	2
Financial Situations	1

Figure 8

Occurrences of Invariant Constituents: Intrapersonal Domain

Interpersonal Factors
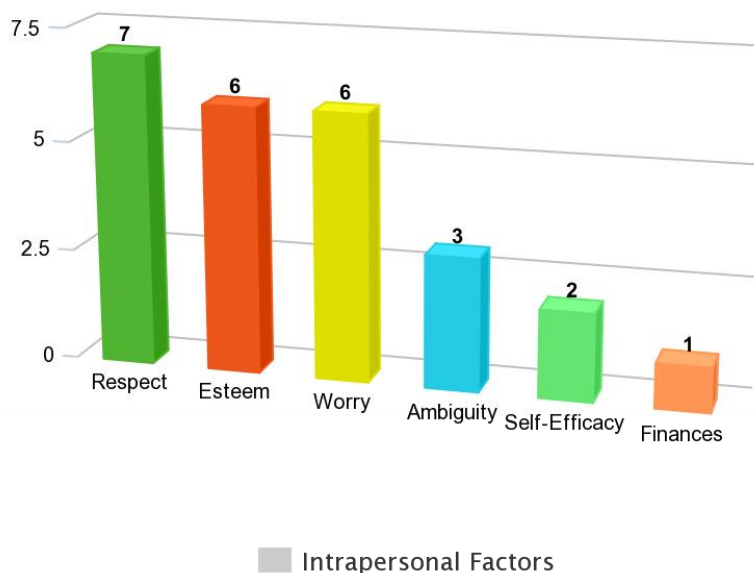
Interpersonal Domain. The interpersonal domain is defined by control and affiliation. Control represents the degree of influence that applies to the relationship between teacher and job. Affiliation, in this study, represents the degree of negative emotional immediacy. The interpersonal domain contains teachers' thoughts of affiliation that bring forth stress and hostility. Teaching is a stressful position, due in part to the many relationships with students and other entities. The relationships that teachers reported caused the most stress were those that involve students—in particular, students who are disruptive, and students who lack engagement. Teachers often reflect on these negative interpersonal relationships at home, and it can cause stress within their families.

Teachers feel stress from interpersonal relationships with students who cause disruptions. Lizabeth stated, "We have to deal with discipline problems during instruction. Someone may

have an emotional problem (and) you have to stop instruction." She added that students who are disruptive take away from the ones that are pushing themselves to try and further their education. Jon state this about discipline at his rural school:

> It's really hard to discipline. Basically, there's no discipline that's allowed. It's a lack of backup on the discipline from administration. I think of the kids a lot, because we are in a very poor school and there are lots of foster children and then just lots of problems. That does make me worry about them.

> Jessica said, "Certain ones will disrupt your class because they need attention." She explained that if the students do not get enough attention at home they will "get it filled here" and often it is negative attention. In Dana's interview, she discussed the stress that comes from interpersonal relationships when students are physically abusive and disruptive. She added, "Physical abuse is a stressor." She stated she has had to seek physical therapy due to students' acting out and disrupting class.

Teachers feel stress from the interpersonal relationship with students who lack engagement. David said that students have very little intrinsic motivation and the teacher must act like a "salesman" to engage them. Jon talked about the lack of engagement in students and parents. He said, "They don't see the importance. As far as the students and their parents don't care in most cases." Jodi also stated similar frustrations in her interview. She said that learning was the last thing on students' minds. Jodi added:

> I feel their focus is on everything but education. Education is not an importance of theirs. It's not important at their homes; it's hard to make it important here. Then when there is no support system, they don't value education, then they're not going to do well. They don't care.

Jessica echoed the sentiments concerning interpersonal relationships and lack of student engagement. She said students don't care about education. She added these sentiments from a student perspective: "There's no need. I don't need to work, I don't need an education because I'm going to get on disability and the government is going to support me."

Interpersonal relationships that are negative from the job can have a damaging effect on the interpersonal relationships at a teacher's home. Jodi discussed how she takes the stress from interpersonal relationships home with her. She said it has affected her physically and mentally because she can't leave the stress at work. Jodi said she has been told by family members to not talk about school at home—don't talk about it, don't fuss about it and don't contemplate it. She said it has a definite impact on her life at home with her family. Jon said:

> For like 30 minutes when I get home, I just don't want to talk. My wife, she understands. I just sit there and I'm like, "Okay. I just need to make sure I don't go crazy." I don't want to hate my job is really what I think I'm trying to do.

Lizabeth added that her children would say they've spent a whole lot of time with mom at school, and her husband realizes she spends a lot of her own time at work instead of being at home.

In table 10, the number of invariant constituents are shown. Figure 9 then graphically shows the occurrences of the invariant constituents.
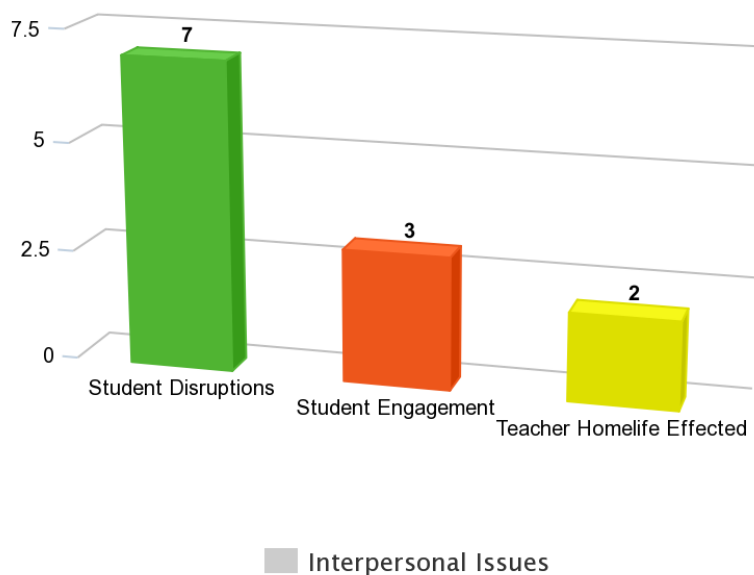
Table 10

Themes in the Interpersonal Domain

Interpersonal Domain	Number of Invariant Constituents Total 12
Disruptive Students	7
Lack of Student Engagement	3
Teachers' Home Life Affected	2

Figure 9

Occurrences of Invariant Constituents: Interpersonal Domain

Research Question #2

The second question for the study was: What are the effects on mental and physical health of perceived stressors for teachers in rural elementary schools?

Participants were asked if they felt the stress from teaching has affected them mentally and physically. One stated, "I've had to go on anti-anxiety medication." When asked about experiencing TSB, the participant added, "I feel like if I don't at least hope for change then I will be (experiencing TSB) very soon." This participant has had thoughts of quitting the teaching profession. Another participant stated that teaching has had a negative effect mentally and physically. The participant reported being physically abused by students, which caused emotional depression. This participant added that because of the job demands, there is not time to care for personal health. The participant added that TSB was a factor and is considering a different job.

Jodi stated the stress does affect her emotionally and physically. She said:

I think so because I don't leave it (stress) here. I take it home. If I could leave it here, I don't think it would be. But I don't leave it here. I take it home with me. I feel like it has an impact on me.

She added that she took a year off from teaching because of the stress and feelings of inadequacy. Lizabeth stated that stress from her positon has affected her physical and mental health, however she did not elaborate. She said there have been times she didn't want to go to work and had suffered from minor bouts of TSB. She added that if she had it to do over again she'd "probably" choose a different career. Jessica stated her job has negatively affected her also. She said, "You're resentful, you're a little bit irritable because you don't enjoy your job as much because it's too stressful. You have too much to do and no time, and emotionally it's not

rewarding." Jessica said she had feelings of TSB because "it's just too much to do" and "it's too much responsibility." She would quit if she could.

One participant stated the stress from a current teaching position does not affect his/her emotional and physical wellbeing. However, previous teaching positions have. The participant stated, "I've worked in bad places." The participant has a spouse who is a teacher and who has many medical issues because of stress from that position.

Research Question #3

The third question for the study was: How do teachers in rural elementary schools rank stressors? The overall answer to this question, first broken out by the four domains, is depicted in Figure 10.

Figure 10

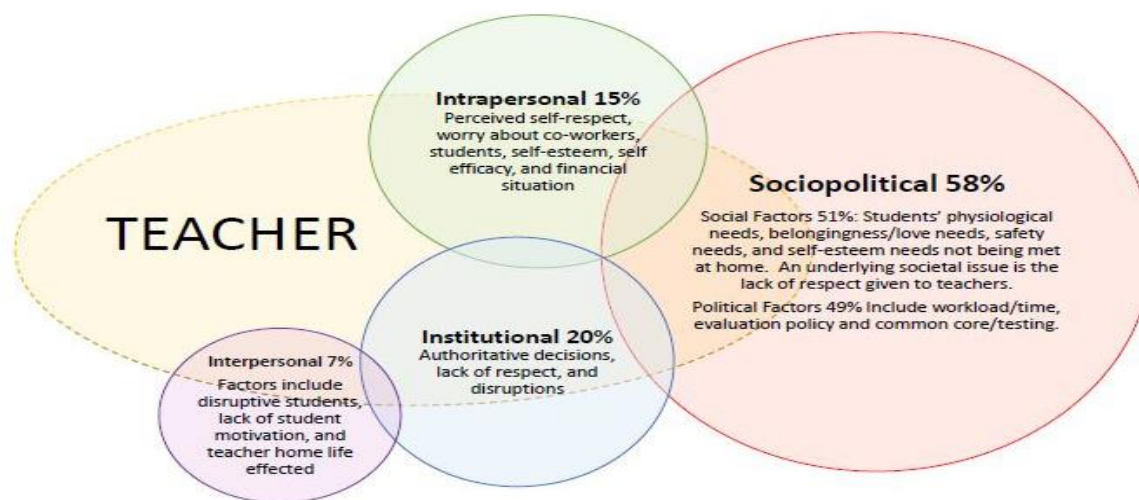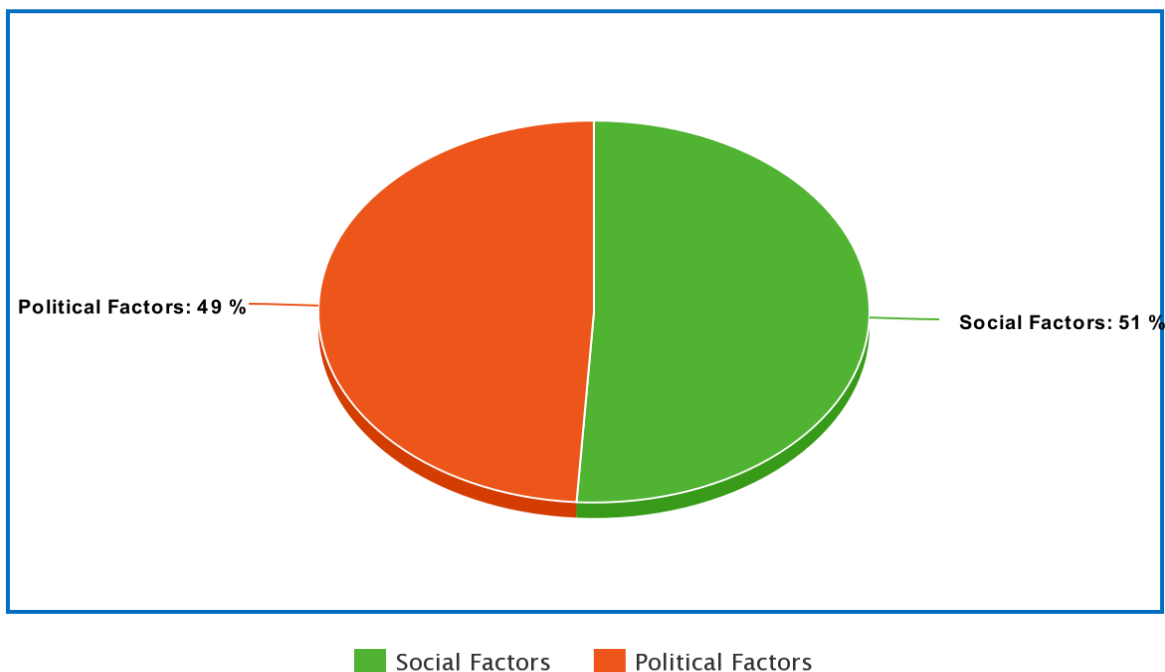*Percentages of the Four Domains of Rural Teachers' Stressors*

Figure 11 graphically depicts the percentages of social and political factors in the sociopolitical domain.

Figure 11

Sociopolitical Domain: Factor Percentages

The highest ranked stressors for the interviewed teachers dealt with the sociopolitical domain. Social factors ranked first with 51% of total invariant constituents involving students' physical and emotional needs. Political factors contained 49% of the invariant constituents in this domain, which involved state and federal policies and mandates.

Figure 12 graphically depicts the societal factors of the sociopolitical domain based on textual description percentages.

Figure 12

*Sociopolitical Domain: Social Factors Composite Textural Description Percentages*
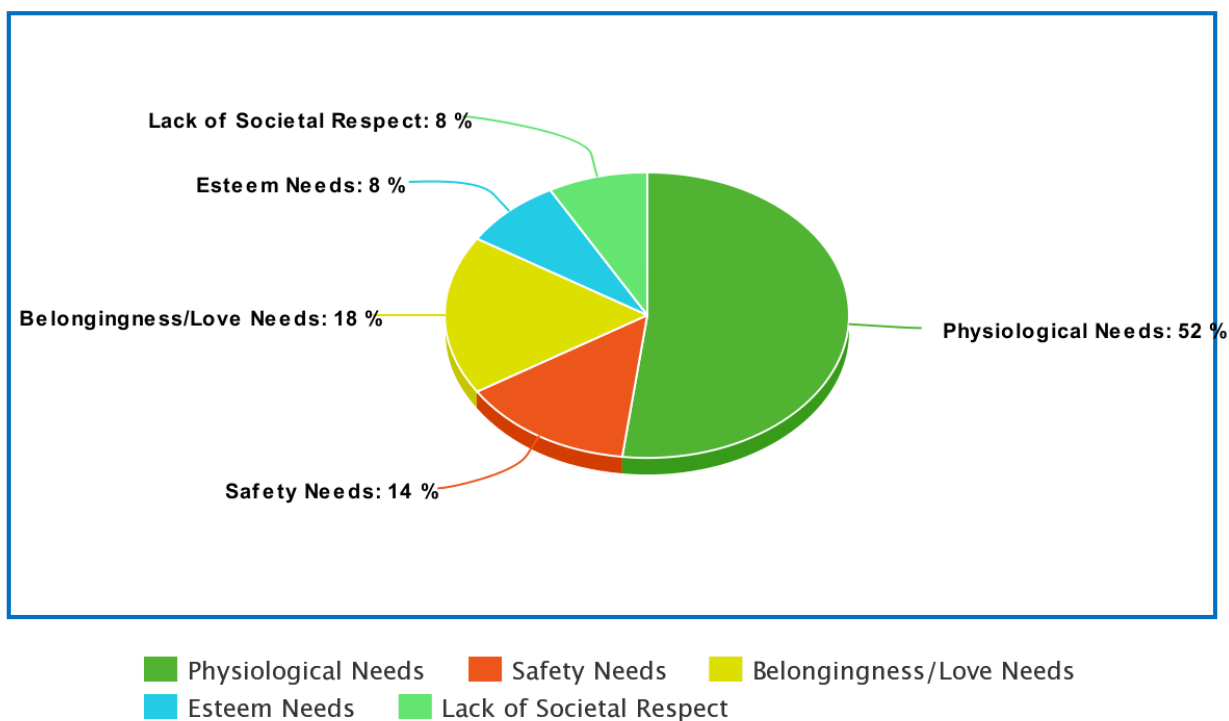
The social factor that ranked the highest for participants was the lack of physiological needs of students with a total of 52% of the invariant constituents. The second highest stressor for teachers was the lack of love and sense of belongingness students feel with 18%. Teachers in the study indicated that safety needs were the third societal issue that causes stress with 14% of the invariant constituents. The needs for students' self-esteem and societal respect were the final categories with 8% each.

Figure 13 graphically represents the political factors of the sociopolitical domain based on composite textural description percentages.

Figure 13

Sociopolitical. Domain: Political Factors Composite Textural Description Percentages
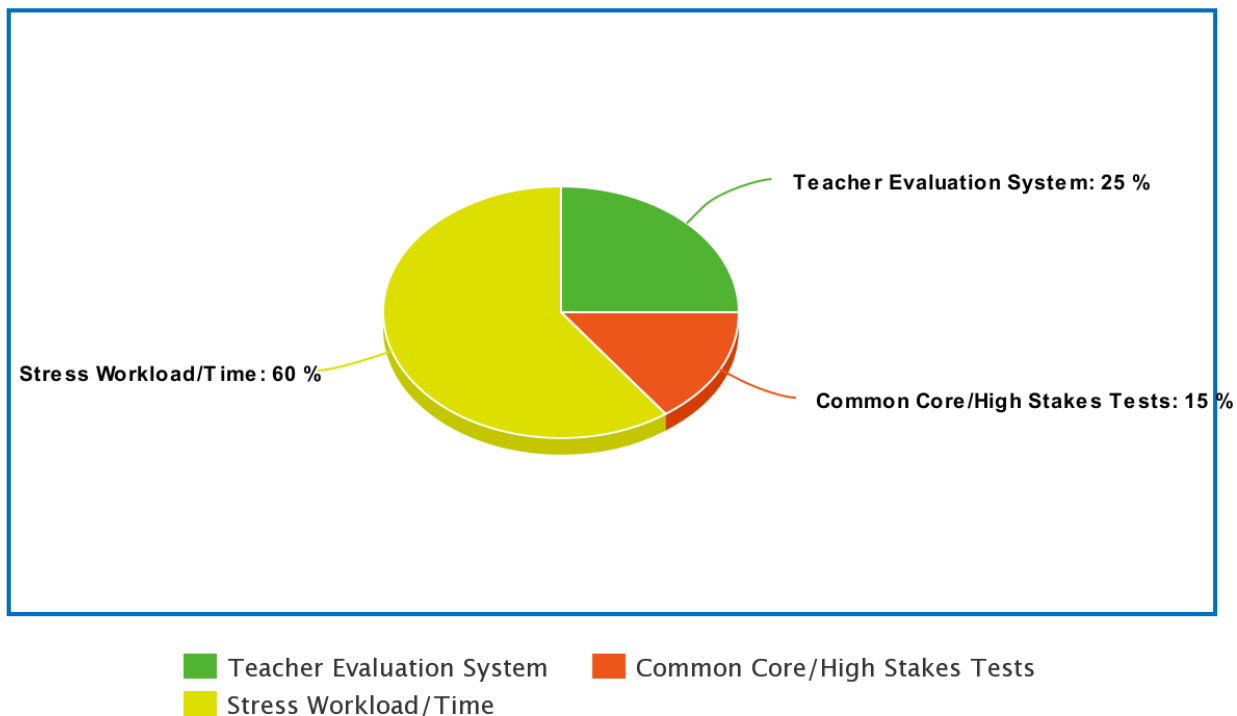
Teachers ranked state and federal mandates as the second issue that causes stress in rural elementary schools from the sociopolitical domain. The stress that stems from workload and time to complete it encompassed the majority of the invariant constituents at 60%. The stress felt from the state teacher evaluation system ranked second at 25%. Stress from state and federal common core mandates and high-stakes testing was indicated by participants to be 15% of the stress felt from the political subdivision of the sociopolitical domain.

Figure 14 graphically represents the institutional domain factors based on composite textural description percentages.

Figure 14

Institutional Domain: Composite Textural Description Percentages
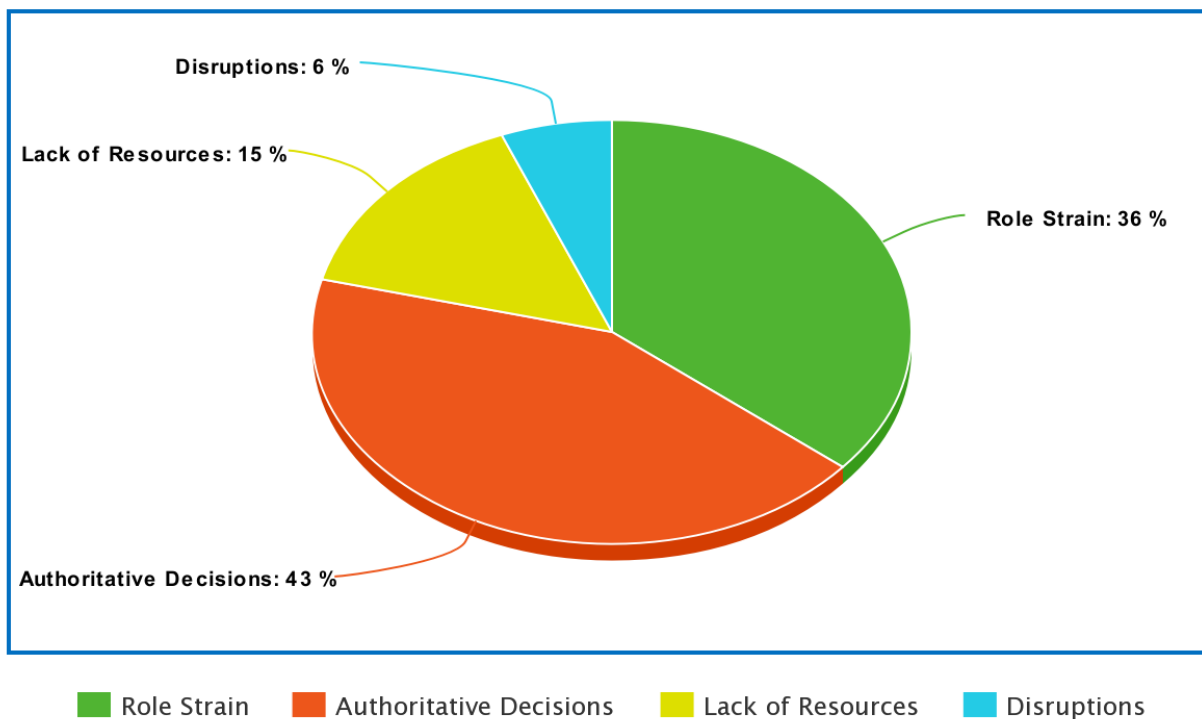
The institutional domain ranked second. Stressors in this domain stem from issues regulated by local administration. Authoritative decisions encompassed 43% of the stressors at this level, and stress from role strain included 36% of the invariant constituents. Participants' feelings of lack of resources held 15% of the total, and 6% felt stress from institutional disruptions.

Figure 15 graphically represents the intrapersonal domain factors based on composite textural description percentages.

Figure 15

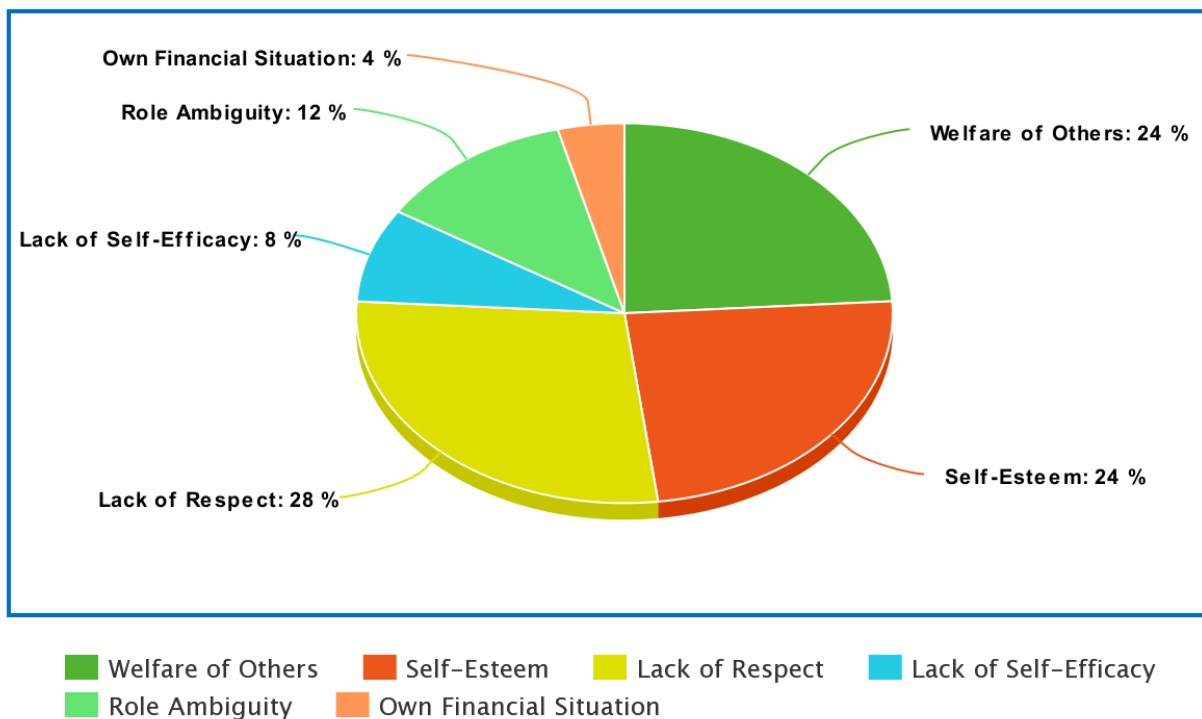*Intrapersonal Domain: Composite Textural Description Percentages*

The intrapersonal domain is the third domain ranked by teachers according to the interview data. In this domain, teachers felt the lack of respect was the main stressor at 28% of the invariant constituents. The concern for the welfare of others ranked second in this domain with 24%, and teacher self-esteem was tied at 24%. The intrapersonal domain also contained teachers' beliefs on role ambiguity, and this was ranked at 12%. Role ambiguity was followed by lack of self-efficacy at 8%, and teacher's own financial situation at 4%.

Figure 16 graphically represents the interpersonal domain based on composite textural description percentages.

Figure 16

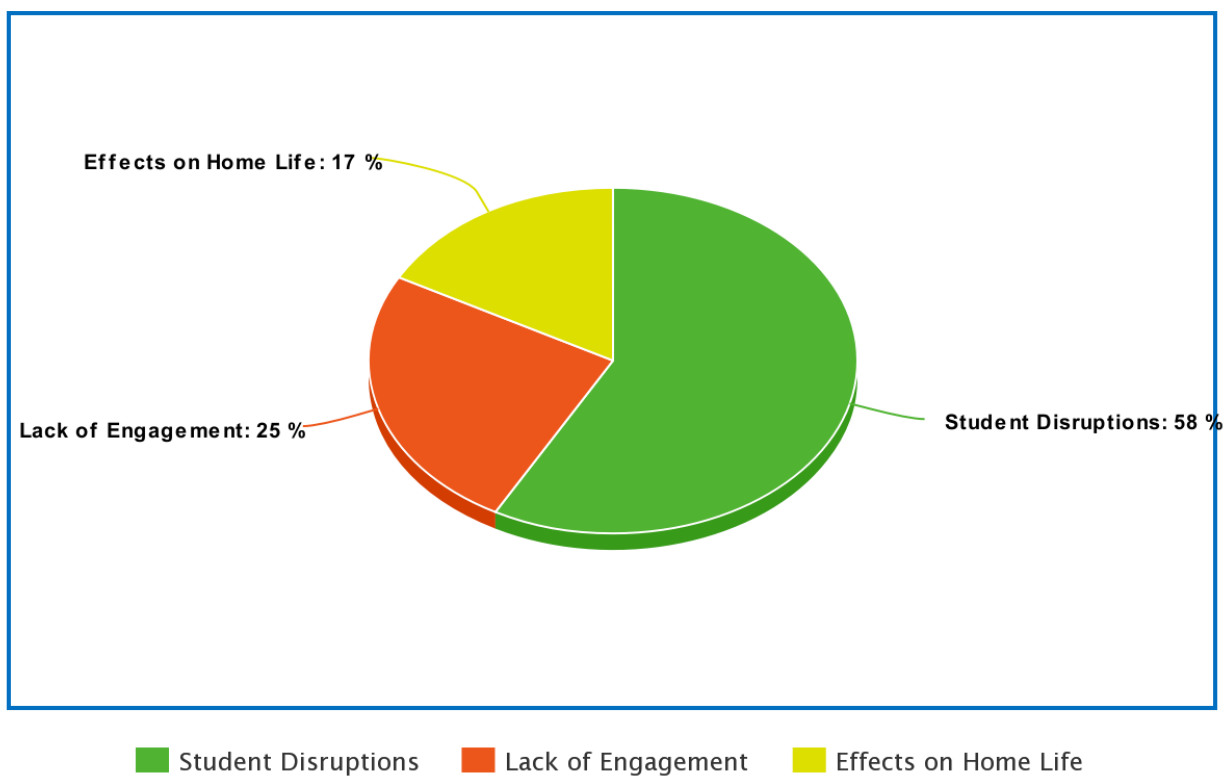*Interpersonal Domain: Composite Textural Description Percentages*

The interpersonal domain was ranked last with only 12 total invariant constituents. These include student disruptions, lack of student engagement, and the effects of stress on home life. Student disruption encompassed the majority with 58% of the invariant constituents, and students' lack of engagement was next with 25%. The lowest stressor for teachers in rural schools was how interpersonal dynamics affect them at home with 17% of the invariant constituents.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

Ever since the concept of stress emerged in medical science by Selye (Selye, 1936), it has received a lot of attention and is a commonly used term in contemporary society. We exist in a highly developed and fluid world that requires people to be highly adaptive, due in part to technology changes in our world, along with our social habits, values, and social structures. (Maheshwari, 2019). In today's highly complex educational system, teachers face unprecedented challenges from political and societal issues and must possess the ability to change and adapt in the face of adverse conditions and resistance from stakeholders (Lacks & Watson, 2018). The stress teachers face are results from interactions with various aspects of their occupation such as resources, human relationships, security, and recognition, which are generating different psycho-social dynamics such as teacher frustration, teacher anxiety, and detachment, and are creating an environment in which teachers live under constant stress (Kaur, 2018).

In the present study, the aim of the research was to understand stressors specific to the teaching profession, and in particular, within rural areas. There is a plethora of studies that deal with occupational stress of those employed in the human service industry. A measurable quantity of the research on stress deals with the teaching profession, reflecting the perception that teachers are under a tremendous amount of pressure. However, there is a dearth of research aimed exclusively at rural schools compared to their urban and suburban counterparts. Rural educational research is relatively small within the immense amount of research dealing with educational issues (Coladarci, 2007).

The purpose of the study was to add to scholarly literature concerning the issue of teacher stress in rural elementary schools and how teachers perceive it affects them on an emotional and physical level. This investigation sought to better understand the major and minor causes of stress through ranking. Furthermore, this study on the phenomenon of teacher stress explained the root cause of teacher stress through an understanding of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning, and Husserl's theory of intentionality.

The participants of the study consisted of six teachers from rural elementary schools who had diverse teaching experience and a wide range of teaching degrees. The participants also taught in various teaching capacities ranging from librarian to middle school mathematics. Purposeful sampling was used to create a population of participants who met the research criteria of experiencing stress that stems from a position as a teacher in a rural elementary school. The inclusion criteria for the participants were a) the ability to read and speak English, b) currently self-identified as an elementary education teacher in a rural school, and c) maintained the perception of experiencing stress directly related to being a teacher in a rural elementary school. Participants were also screened for depth of experiences of the phenomenon, and the ability to clearly and openly articulate experiences and thoughts concerning the central focus of the phenomenon. Through semi structured interviews, the participants revealed amazing data based on their unique experiences that provided a significant amount of knowledge to assist in understanding the phenomenon of stress in teachers in rural areas. Member checks were conducted at the conclusion of the analysis to insure the participants true voice was represented within the findings of the study. Participants provided positive feedback indicating the data painted a picture of teacher stress in rural schools.

Summary of Results

Several studies from the literature review and current research indicated the following conclusions concerning the causes of teacher stress:

- Kyriacou's (2001) research indicated that lack of student motivation, student discipline, time pressure, coping with change, evaluation by others, dealing with peers, low self-esteem, unsupportive administration, role conflict, and poor working conditions are sources of stress for teachers.

- A study conducted by Sims (2013) at the University of Missouri-St. Louis stated stress stems from student apathy, student discipline issues, shortage of supplies, low attendance, overcrowding, mounds of paperwork, and excessive mandated testing.

- In a doctoral dissertation from Walden University, Jacobson (2016) concluded stressors stem from failure to properly manage classroom and student behavior, school work environment and lack of peer collaboration, lack of support and respect, and unrealistic demands put upon teachers from society, bureaucracy, and administration.

- Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana, and Van Veen (2018) reported that teacher stress emanates from high job demands, pupil misbehavior, poor working conditions, poor relationships at work, role conflict, role ambiguity, lack of autonomy, poor school ethos, and lack of development opportunities.

- A current study conducted by Holmes, Parker, and Gibson (2019) indicated that teacher stress stems from lack of principal effectiveness, weak administrative structures, student behaviors, uncompromising district policies, and poor pay.

- Maheshwari's (2019) current study indicates teacher stress stems from heavy workload and time pressure; educational reforms; pursuing further education; managing student

behavior, learning, guidance, and discipline; trying to maintain positive working relationships; and salary cuts.

- A study by Ismail and Abdullah (2019) indicated that student misbehavior is the most important factor in stress, followed by workload and teacher relationships with school administrators.

Research recognizes there are many issues that generate stress in teachers; however, two influences seem to be among the most prevalent: constant—and often overwhelming—demands, and taxing interpersonal relationships. This premise holds true within the results of this study. Additionally, the analysis of this study disclosed the underlying issues and causal sequence that create many of the stressors uncovered by this study and previous research.

This investigation was driven by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived stressors of teachers in rural elementary schools?

2. What are the effects on mental and physical health of perceived stressors for teachers in rural elementary schools?

3. How do teachers in rural elementary schools rank stressors?

To answer these questions, the researcher selected six rural school teachers by using a purposeful sampling strategy. Each individual interview was transcribed and coded to develop themes.

Research Question #1. The researcher identified four themes that categorized the stressors revealed by the interviews. The four themes included: 1) sociopolitical domain, 2) institutional domain, 3) intrapersonal domain, and 4) interpersonal domain.

Sociopolitical domain. Discussion with the six teachers from rural schools produced responses that discussed how the social and political systems were the leading causes of stress in their careers. Those discussions are explained in Chapter IV.

Intertwined with the teachers' understanding of the problems was Maslow's (1954) theory of human motivation. This theory provided the framework for understanding the primary foundation of teacher stress. Students are less likely to perform at their full potential if lower level needs of food, shelter, safety, love, belonging, and esteem are not met. This creates an unhealthy learning environment where students have animosity toward school and teachers. Students are unmotivated and often display bad behavior in the form of disruptions and lack of self-discipline. Commitment to educating students, according to the participants, primarily involves the fulfillment of students' lower level needs, and this puts them in a stressful position considering the number of roles they must play before they ever have the chance to play the role of teachers.

The analysis of the data also indicated that teachers develop stress from the lack of respect given to them from society. The interview comments on this stressor were outlined in Chapter IV.

Political factors ranked second among the issues that cause teacher stress and included the workload channeled by state and federal mandates, teacher evaluation systems, and common core/high-stakes testing.

Institutional domain. Discussion with the six teachers from rural elementary schools produced responses that discussed how policy and procedures from district school boards, district superintendents, and local school administration cause stress. These do not include state and federal policy. These stressors stem from authoritative decisions, role strain, lack of

resources, and disruptions. Teacher responses categorized in this domain are explained in Chapter IV.

Intrapersonal domain. Discussion with the six teachers from rural schools produced responses that discussed how intrapersonal thoughts and feelings produce stress in their lives. This domain contains the internal perceptions that cause stress: lack of respect, feeling responsibility for the welfare of others, low self-esteem, role ambiguity, lack of self-efficacy, and being in difficult financial situations. These stressors are emotions teachers put upon themselves that stem from their jobs in rural schools.

Interpersonal Domain. The interviews with rural school teachers produced responses indicating how interpersonal control and affiliation causes stress. Interviewees agreed teaching is a stressful job due to the many interpersonal relationships and the dynamics that exist in those relationships. Teachers agree that relationships with students cause the most stress due to apathy and disruptions toward the learning environment. The participants habitually reflect upon these hostile relationships at home, causing interpersonal conflict with family members.

Research Question 2. What are the effects on mental and physical health of perceived stressors for teachers in rural elementary schools? Participants all agreed their job as a teacher in a rural elementary school was stressful and were very outspoken concerning the causes of stress; however, participants were apprehensive about sharing how stress affects them mentally and physically. The interview data did reveal that many of the participants felt TSB had a negative effect upon their health. Several participants stated that effects upon their well-being were so severe, they would like to quit their job or have deep regrets that this was their chosen career. Several of the participants stated that medication, counseling, and co-worker companionship helped to avoid the negative effects of stress on their well-being.

Research Question 3. How do elementary teachers rank stressors? The analyzation of the data indicates that stress for teachers in rural schools is derived primarily from societal issues, and students' needs not being met was the biggest societal factor. Political factors ranked second from the interpretation of the data gathered on teacher stress. The utmost stress from a political perspective was federal and state policy that increases a teacher's workload but doesn't allow adequate time to complete it.

Institutional issues were ranked behind societal and political concerns that cause stress for teachers in rural schools. These are issues that stem from local governing authorities such as district leaders and school administration. Participants ranked local authority decisions as the leading stressor at the institutional level.

Intrapersonal issues ranked behind institutional issues according to the analyzation of the data from participants, and the intrapersonal lack of respect was the main stressor.

Interpersonal issues ranked last according to the analyzation of the data. Stress from the interpersonal relationship with students was ranked as the first issue.

Conclusion

According to the analyzation of the data with six participants from rural elementary schools and previous studies, teaching is a stressful job. Qualitative phenomenological research is concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a particular experience and deriving meaning of why and how. This research, through phenomenological reduction, concluded that the relationship between noema and noesis is the cause of teacher stress. Teachers, according to the data, are stressed due to the perception of their role and the role they actually play, and this is mainly attributed to societal and political factors. Teacher noema, being the ideal essence of the character, involves the simple premise that teachers teach and students are motivated to learn.

Noesis is the construction of actuality, and teacher noesis is the realization that they are unable to teach students due to sociopolitical factors, institutional issues, intrapersonal issues, and interpersonal conflict. The data strongly indicates the relationship between noesis and noema are in conflict, which creates stress.

This research also concludes that the underlying cause of teacher stress in rural elementary schools is the idea that teachers are expected to help students reach higher-order thinking contained in Bloom's taxonomy when students have concerns that take precedence over learning contained in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These precedencies include suitable nutrition, proper shelter, family stability, and confidence in their abilities. Students must have Maslow before they can reach Bloom, and the sociopolitical domain expects the classroom teacher to provide both.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recent research, current media and political perspectives, and the results of this phenomenological study all indicate that the teaching profession will continue to be one of the most stressful human service jobs if more research is not conducted to create a better understanding of teacher stress and ways to combat it. Teachers are leaving the profession at alarming rates due to TSB, and the cost to the education of children is a price too high to pay.

Future research on this significant issue is a necessity. The following recommendations for future research from this study are based on both the results and the study's limitations.

- A similar study should be replicated with more teachers at the rural elementary school level. This study did follow the recommended guidelines for number of participants in a phenomenological study; however, data from more participants would yield more reliable generalizations concerning TSB and the effects on physical and emotional well-being.

- A similar study should be replicated with more emphasis placed on how stress in rural schools affects teachers' physical and emotional well-being. This study did make this determination; however, it was limited based upon the amount of data gathered in the interviews.

- A study should be conducted with teachers in rural elementary schools to further explore the impression given by this study that social and political factors are the underlying cause of teacher stress.

- A similar study should be replicated in urban and suburban school districts and compared to rural school stress. This would help differentiate the unique stressors in rural schools and help determine those that are universal to all.

- A study should be conducted in rural schools from the perspective of students regarding feelings of their needs being met by their guardians. These needs would include the deprivation needs of Maslow's hierarchy of motivation. This study would encompass a great deal of difficulty and would be controversial in nature.

- A quantitative study should be conducted in schools with high percentage of low socioeconomic status and schools with a high percentages of high economic status to distinguish and compare the effects of sociopolitical factors, institutional factors, interpersonal factors, and intrapersonal factors on teacher stress.

Implications for Professional Practice

The following recommendations for educational practice are based on the results of the study.

- Teachers, students, guardians, local school authorities, state and federal policy makers, and the media should collaborate to discuss the sources and consequences of teacher stress as well as ways to collectively alleviate teacher stress. The two most predominate

sources of stress for teachers in rural schools are providing needs for students that should be provided by students' homes and a political system that demands and expects the impossible from teachers and holds them accountable when the impossible is not achieved.

- Local authority should recognize the strong relationship between teacher stress and their decisions. This study and past literature has shown several stress factors that are influenced by local school authority, such as lack of time, lack of resources, poor relationships with colleagues, lack of collaboration, and lack of professional development. Administrative decisions can help eliminate or exacerbate these factors.

- State and federal policy makers should recognize that disadvantageous home factors and genetics are out of the span of control of teachers. They should take these factors into account instead of creating policy that states every child can learn the same curriculum at a proficient level. State and federal policy makers should recognize teachers as professionals and extend them the courtesy of allowing them to teach a broad spectrum of standards based on their perception of student need. Teachers should also be recognized as being trained, qualified, specialized, and proficient professionals based upon receiving their initial education from college, qualifying tests, professional development, and teaching license. This recognition should replace being judged by constant evaluations and having to defend their credibility based upon student scores.

- Teachers should have professional development opportunities to assist in understanding their sources of stress and in developing skills to monitor their stress levels. Many teachers know they are stressed but do not understand why. The first step for teachers in reducing stress is to develop their awareness.

- Teachers and local school authority should collaborate to discuss the ways they could work together to lessen stress within their realm of control. This study identified many factors that are out of the control of teachers and local authority. However, local authority could create benefit by setting the precedence of being pro-teacher and lessening some of the burden that causes stress such as bad decision making, lack of resources, and disruptions. Local authority should focus on improving the school ethos through administrative support and positive communication.

- Lastly, teachers should be aware of resources available to them for assistance with stress. The participants in this study indicated a considerable amount of awareness on the vast causes of stress as a rural elementary teacher. However, when it came to understanding how it affected them physically and emotionally, the participants seemed to lack an understanding. It is imperative for teachers to understand the detrimental effects of stress and how to deal with stress in a constructive manner.

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Appendix A

NIH Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Patrick

Randall successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human

Research Participants."

Date of completion: 01/19/2017.

Certification Number: 2279318.

Appendix B

Superintendent's Email District #1

Matt Eldridge: My name is Patrick Randall and I am a 5th and 6th grade teacher in Overton County. I am enrolled at Northwest Nazarene University in the Doctoral program and am beginning the research phase of my dissertation. I request permission to contact willing participants in the Clay County School District for participation in my research. I have attached a letter of approval if your district will be willing to participate, simply add your letterhead to attachment.

TEACHER STRESS IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON STRESS AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHER PERCEIVED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

My dissertation is an empirical phenomenological model that uses teachers' experiences to obtain comprehensive descriptions to create themes. These themes will provide the basis for a reflective analysis to depict a portrait of teachers' experiences dealing with stressors and their perceived effect on mental and physical health. A majority of the research on teacher stress focuses on urban schools; few studies have reported the causes of stress among those instructing in rural areas. This phenomenological study investigates the definition of what is rural, the history of rural schools, importance of teachers, teacher satisfaction, stress in teacher, burnout, the causes of burnout, epiology of teacher stress, and the implications of teacher burnout. Relevant research has revealed that teachers' perception of multiple roles and lack of self-efficacy were major causes of stress in teaching at rural and urban schools. Research suggests that stress could lead to cynicism, detachment, and depression, triggering burnout that has a detrimental effect on physical and emotional health. The detrimental effects of stress not only effect the teachers mental and physical health but have interpersonal implications relating to student relations and achievement, caregiver relationships, and peer interactions.

Thank you,

Patrick Randall

Appendix C

Superintendent's Email District #2

██████████ My name is Patrick Randall and I am a 5th and 6th grade teacher in Overton County. I am enrolled at Northwest Nazarene University in the Doctoral program and am beginning the research phase of my dissertation. I request permission to contact willing participants in the ██████████ School District for participation in my research. I have attached a letter of approval if your district will be willing to participate, simply add your letterhead to attachment.

TEACHER STRESS IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON STRESS AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHER PERCEIVED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

██████████ My dissertation is an empirical phenomenological model that uses teachers' experiences to obtain comprehensive descriptions to create themes. These themes will provide the basis for a reflective analysis to depict a portrait of teachers' experiences dealing with stressors and their perceived effect on mental and physical health. A majority of the research on teacher stress focuses on urban schools; few studies have reported the causes of stress among those instructing in rural areas. This phenomenological study investigates the definition of what is rural, the history of rural schools, importance of teachers, teacher satisfaction, stress in teacher, burnout, the causes of burnout, epiology of teacher stress, and the implications of teacher burnout. Relevant research has revealed that teachers' perception of multiple roles and lack of self-efficacy were major causes of stress in teaching at rural and urban schools. Research suggests that stress could lead to cynicism, detachment, and depression, triggering burnout that has a detrimental effect on physical and emotional health. The detrimental effects of stress not only effect the teachers mental and physical health but have interpersonal implications relating to student relations and achievement, caregiver relationships, and peer interactions.

Thank you,

Patrick Randall

Appendix D

Superintendent's Email District #3

████████ My name is Patrick Randall and I am a 5th and 6th grade teacher in Overton County. I am enrolled at Northwest Nazarene University in the Doctoral program and am beginning the research phase of my dissertation. I request permission to contact willing participants in the ████████ School District for participation in my research. I have attached a letter of approval if your district will be willing to participate, simply add your letterhead to attachment.

TEACHER STRESS IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON STRESS AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHER PERCEIVED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

My dissertation is an empirical phenomenological model that uses teachers' experiences to obtain comprehensive descriptions to create themes. These themes will provide the basis for a reflective analysis to depict a portrait of teachers' experiences dealing with stressors and their perceived effect on mental and physical health. A majority of the research on teacher stress focuses on urban schools; few studies have reported the causes of stress among those instructing in rural areas. This phenomenological study investigates the definition of what is rural, the history of rural schools, importance of teachers, teacher satisfaction, stress in teacher, burnout, the causes of burnout, epiology of teacher stress, and the implications of teacher burnout. Relevant research has revealed that teachers' perception of multiple roles and lack of self-efficacy were major causes of stress in teaching at rural and urban schools. Research suggests that stress could lead to cynicism, detachment, and depression, triggering burnout that has a detrimental effect on physical and emotional health. The detrimental effects of stress not only effect the teachers mental and physical health but have interpersonal implications relating to student relations and achievement, caregiver relationships, and peer interactions.

Thank you,

Patrick Randall

Appendix E

Superintendent's Email District #4

██████████ My name is Patrick Randall and I am a 5th and 6th grade teacher in Overton County. I am enrolled at Northwest Nazarene University in the Doctoral program and am beginning the research phase of my dissertation. I request permission to contact willing participants in the ██████████ School District for participation in my research. I have attached a letter of approval if your district will be willing to participate, simply add your letterhead to attachment.

TEACHER STRESS IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON STRESS AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHER PERCEIVED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

My dissertation is an empirical phenomenological model that uses teachers' experiences to obtain comprehensive descriptions to create themes. These themes will provide the basis for a reflective analysis to depict a portrait of teachers' experiences dealing with stressors and their perceived effect on mental and physical health. A majority of the research on teacher stress focuses on urban schools; few studies have reported the causes of stress among those instructing in rural areas. This phenomenological study investigates the definition of what is rural, the history of rural schools, importance of teachers, teacher satisfaction, stress in teacher, burnout, the causes of burnout, epiology of teacher stress, and the implications of teacher burnout. Relevant research has revealed that teachers' perception of multiple roles and lack of self-efficacy were major causes of stress in teaching at rural and urban schools. Research suggests that stress could lead to cynicism, detachment, and depression, triggering burnout that has a detrimental effect on physical and emotional health. The detrimental effects of stress not only effect the teachers mental and physical health but have interpersonal implications relating to student relations and achievement, caregiver relationships, and peer interactions.

Thank you,

Patrick Randall

Appendix F

Superintendent's Email District #5

██████ My name is Patrick Randall and I am a 5th and 6th grade teacher in Overton County. I am enrolled at Northwest Nazarene University in the Doctoral program and am beginning the research phase of my dissertation. I request permission to contact willing participants in the ██████████ School District for participation in my research. I have attached a letter of approval if your district will be willing to participate, simply add your letterhead to attachment.

TEACHER STRESS IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON STRESS AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHER PERCEIVED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

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Thank you,

Patrick Randall

Appendix G

Permission From District #1

520 Brown Street
Celina, Tennessee 38551
(931) 243-3510

Clay County School District
Director Mark Eldridge
520 Brown Street
Celina, TN 38551

February 22, 2018

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
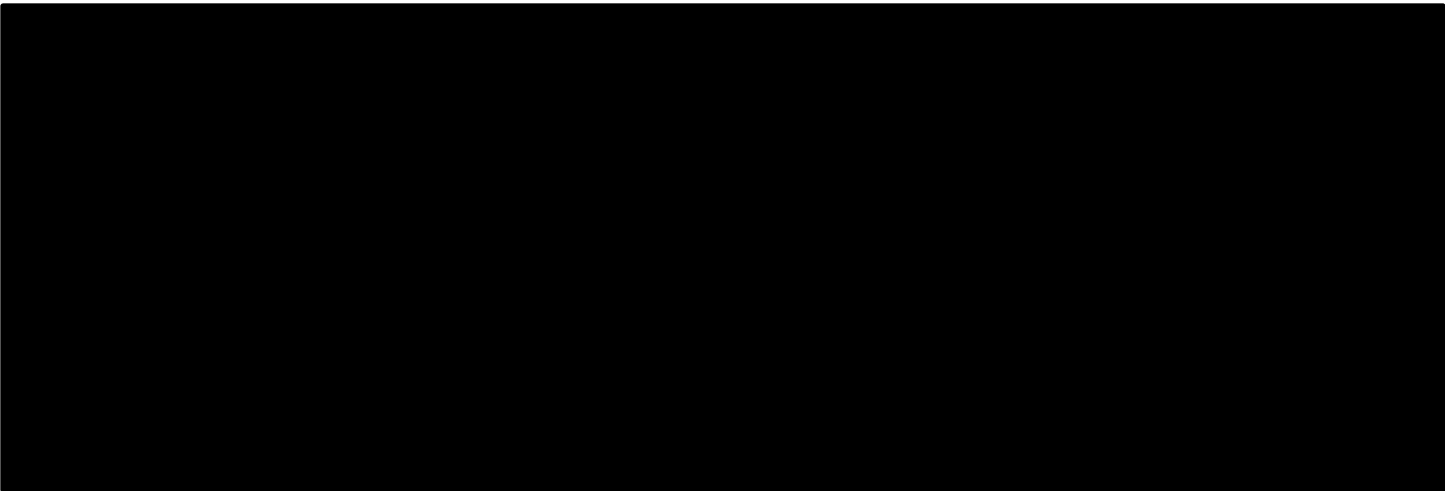623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Patrick Randall

Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that Clay County School District has reviewed the proposed
dissertation research plan including subjects, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection
procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. Clay County School District understands the
topic of teacher stress in rural schools will be researched at the elementary level using interviews, focus
groups, and observations. The total time requested by each teacher will be approximately 30 minutes
to run interview, approximately 45 minutes for a focus group, and approximately 60 minutes for an
observation. Mr. Randall has permission to conduct his research study at Schools within the Clay
County School District. The authorization dates for this research study is the 2018-2019 school calendar.
Respectfully,

Appendix H

Permission From District #2

August 10, 2018

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686
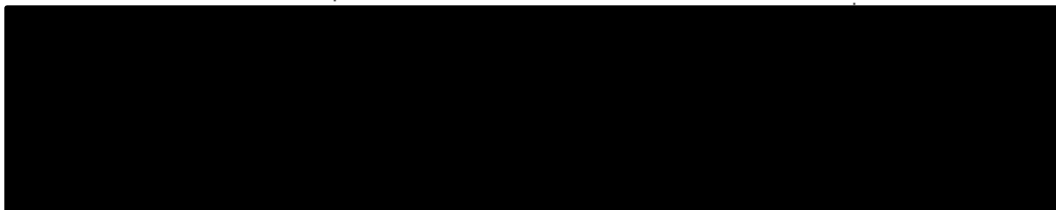
RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Patrick Randall

Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School District has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan including subjects, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School District understands the topic of teacher stress in rural schools will be researched at the elementary level using interviews, focus groups, and observations with teachers who choose to voluntarily participate. The total time requested by each teacher will take no more than 30 minutes for an interview and 45 minutes for a focus group. Mr. Randall has permission to conduct his research study at Schools within the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School District. The authorization dates for this research study is the 2018-2019 school calendar.

Appendix I

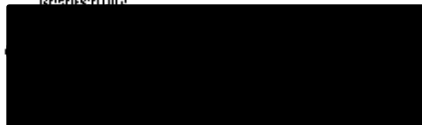## Permission From District #3

February 22, 2019

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Patrick Randall

Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School District has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan including subjects, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. Jackson County School District understands the topic of teacher stress in rural schools will be researched at the elementary level using interviews, focus groups, and observations. The total time requested by each teacher will take no more than 30 minutes for an interview, 45 minute focus groups and 60 minute observations. Mr. Randall has permission to conduct his research study at Schools within the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School District. The authorization dates for this research study is the 2018-2019 school calendar.

Respectfully,

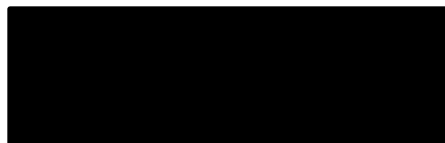# Appendix J

Permission From District #4

February 22, 2018

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Patrick Randall

Dear HRRC Members:

This letter is to inform the HRRC that ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School District has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan including subjects, assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and purpose of the study. ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School District understands the topic of teacher stress in rural schools will be researched at the elementary level using interviews, observations, and a focus group. The total time requested by each teacher will take no more than 30 minutes for an interview, 60 minute observations, and 40 minutes for a focus group discussion. Mr. Randall has permission to conduct his research study at Schools within the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School District. The authorization dates for this research study is the 2018-2019 school calendar.

Respectfully,

Appendix K

Permission From District #5

April 4, 2018

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
6223 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Patrick Randall

It is my understanding that Mr. Patrick Randall, a graduate student at Northwest Nazarene University, is working on his dissertation in the Doctoral Program. I hereby grant him permission to conduct his empirical phenomenological model within [redacted] School System during the 2018-2019 school year. The direct contact for the study school will be administrator of the selected teacher and myself. The participation of any PCSS employee is on a voluntary basis and any time may opt out of the study. Mr. Randall's agreement with PCSS includes the following commitment to PCSS:

1. A copy of the results of her study **must be submitted** at the conclusion of the study with PCSS Department of Strategic Decisions Support;
2. **Compliance** with FERPA, TN Public Records Act, and PCSS Board Policies.
3. **Agree to destroy** all PCSS student/teacher data, electronically and/or paper;
4. A formal submission of PCSS External Researcher **"Statement of Assurances"**;
5. Involvement of students in the study including, but not limited to surveys, questionnaires, and/or interviews **shall require Board Approval**; and
6. If any changes occur from the original submitted proposal, PCSS will immediately be notified in writing of the changes and seek permission once again for the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the District office.

Sincerely,

Appendix L

Email for School Principals

Mrs. Cassetty: My name is Patrick Randall and I am a 5th and 6th grade science teacher at Hilham Elementary in Overton County. I am a Doctoral student at Northwest Nazarene University in Idaho and in the research phase of my dissertation. I am requesting a participant from your school to participate in a 30 minute interview concerning the stress that is unique to teachers in rural elementary schools. If possible could I have two minutes at your next staff meeting to see if anyone is interested or I could draft an email to send to your staff for anyone interested in participation. Thanks so much, I am conducting interviews in all counties in the Upper Cumberland region.

Title of Dissertation: A Phenomenological Study of Teacher Stress in Rural Elementary Schools and Its Effects on Teachers Physical and Mental Wellbeing

Appendix M

Introductory Email to Participants

My name is Patrick Randall and I am a 5th and 6th grade teacher in Overton County. I am enrolled at Northwest Nazarene University in the Doctoral program and request your assistance in the following study.

TEACHER STRESS IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON STRESS AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHER PERCEIVED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

My dissertation is an empirical phenomenological model that uses teachers' experiences to obtain comprehensive descriptions to create themes. These themes will provide the basis for a reflective analysis to depict a portrait of teachers' experiences dealing with stressors and their perceived effect on mental and physical health. A majority of the research on teacher stress focuses on urban schools; few studies have reported the causes of stress among those instructing in rural areas. This phenomenological study investigates the definition of what is rural, the history of rural schools, importance of teachers, teacher satisfaction, stress in teacher, burnout, the causes of burnout, epiology of teacher stress, and the implications of teacher burnout. Relevant research has revealed that teachers' perception of multiple roles and lack of self-efficacy were major causes of stress in teaching at rural and urban schools. Research suggests that stress could lead to cynicism, detachment, and depression, triggering burnout that has a detrimental effect on physical and emotional health. The detrimental effects of stress not only effect the teachers mental and physical health but have interpersonal implications relating to student relations and achievement, caregiver relationships, and peer interactions. If you would be willing to assistance with an interview, classroom observation, or participate in a focus group please let me know. My contact information is below.

Thank you,

Patrick Randall
2640 Hilham Hwy
Hilham, TN 38568
(931) 397-6591
prandall@nnu.edu

Appendix N

Interview Setup Email

Ms. Smith: I can't thank you enough for being willing to participate in my dissertation research. I have complete Institutional Board of Review approval and full approval from Clay County Schools administration. The information you present will be completely anonymous through the process and you have the right to withdraw at any time. I would like to set up a 30 minute interview at your convenience and at a location of your choice. I have attached the interview questions, my findings from literature about teacher stress, and more information concerning my study. Again, I appreciate your time and assistance.
Patrick Randall
prandall@nnu.edu

3 Attachments

    ReplyForward

Appendix O

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND
Patrick Randall, student in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to causes of teacher stress in rural schools. The research will define what is considered rural and the causes of teacher stress and burnout (TSB). The research will examine the extent in which educational reforms, student/teacher relationships, administration/teacher relationships, and other aspects of education generate stress in teachers and their perceived effects on physical and mental wellbeing. We appreciate your involvement in helping us investigate how to better teacher students from rural areas. I am under the direction of my dissertation chair Dr. Lynn Bohecker. If at any time you wish to contact Dr. Bohecker please use the following information: email: lbohecker@nnu.edu phone: (208) 467-8184

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a volunteer, over the age of 18 and teaching at a rural elementary school.

B. PROCEDURES
If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

You will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.

You may answer a set of interview questions and engage in a discussion on teacher stress. This discussion will be audio taped and is expected to last approximately 30 minutes.

You will answer a set of demographic questions on standard paper and pencil. It should take approximately 3 minutes to answer these questions.

You will be asked to read a debriefing statement at the conclusion of the interview.

You will be asked to reply to an email at the conclusion of the study asking you to confirm the data that was gathered during the research process.

These procedures will be competed at a location mutually decided upon by the participant and principal investigator and will take a total time of about 40 minutes.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
Some of the discussion questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

For this research project, the researchers are requesting demographic information. Due to the make-up of Tennessee's population, the combined answers to these questions may make an individual person identifiable. The researchers will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, audio tapes, and disks will be kept in a locked file cabinet and the key to the cabinet will be kept in a separate location. In compliance with the Federal wide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help educators to better understand the triggers of stress in rural schools.

E. PAYMENTS
There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS
If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Patrick Randall can be contacted via email at prandall@nnu.edu, via telephone at 931 397-6591 (C) or by writing: 2640 Hilham Hwy, Hilham, TN 38568

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

Signature of Study Participant   Date

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio taped in this study:

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

Signature of Study Participant   **Date**

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   **Date**

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTE HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

Appendix P

Interview Protocol

Patrick Randall- Doctoral Student Northwest Nazarene University

TEACHER STRESS IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON STRESS AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHER PERCEIVED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

 Randall: Interview Protocol

Header:

The purpose of this interview is to gather information related to the causes of teacher stress and its effects on physical and mental wellbeing. According to research, teaching is considered one of the most stressful occupations among professionals. The data collected during this interview will assist in understanding key stressors and its effect on emotional and physical distress. This study is focused on the unique stress of teachers in rural schools.

Interviewer: Patrick Randall

Interviewee:

Race:

Years of teaching experience:

Educational background:

Interview date/time:

Question #1 (grand tour): Considering your position as an elementary school teacher in a rural school, what are the major sources of stress among teachers in this rural settings?

Question #2 (core): Considering your position as a teacher in a rural school, what are the major roles that teachers play?

(probe)

What are your thoughts considering teachers in rural schools "wearing many hats", and does this cause stress in your position as a rural elementary teacher?

Question #3 (core): Considering your position as a teacher in a rural school, what are your thoughts on how teachers are evaluated?

(probes)

What are your thoughts concerning high stakes testing in rural schools?

What are your thoughts concerning teacher evaluation scores being based primarily on student achievement in rural schools?

What are your thoughts concerning the amount of supervisory personnel conducting evaluations of teachers in rural schools?

What are your thoughts on teachers in rural schools being treated as professionals with the degree of performance evaluations being conducted? (constant measure of performance)

What are your thoughts on the workload put upon rural teachers?

Question #4 (core): Considering your position as a rural school teacher, what are your thoughts on parents (caregivers) view of education in rural areas?

(probes)

What are your perceptions on the amount and quality of attention (attending to physical/mental needs) given to students in rural areas?

What are your thoughts concerning the respect given to teachers by students, parents, administration, society, and politicians?

Question #5 (summative): Considering your position as a rural school teacher, if you do have undue stress; how does it have effect your emotional and physical wellbeing?

(probe)

Have you ever reached the point of considering yourself burnout and have a desire to seek another profession?
Gather information on role ambiguity and efficacy

Appendix Q

Participant Debrief

Thank you for participating in this study.

After I have an opportunity to analyze the data, I will email you the results for feedback. Mainly I want to ensure I captured the essence of our discussion and accurately portrayed our discussion and your thoughts.

Questions

In the meanwhile, if you have any questions or concerns, I can be reached by email at prandall@nnu.edu, 931-397-6591, or by writing: Patrick Randall, 2640 Hilham Hwy, Hilham, TN 38568.

Thank you for your participation!

Patrick Randall
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University
HRRC Application # TBA