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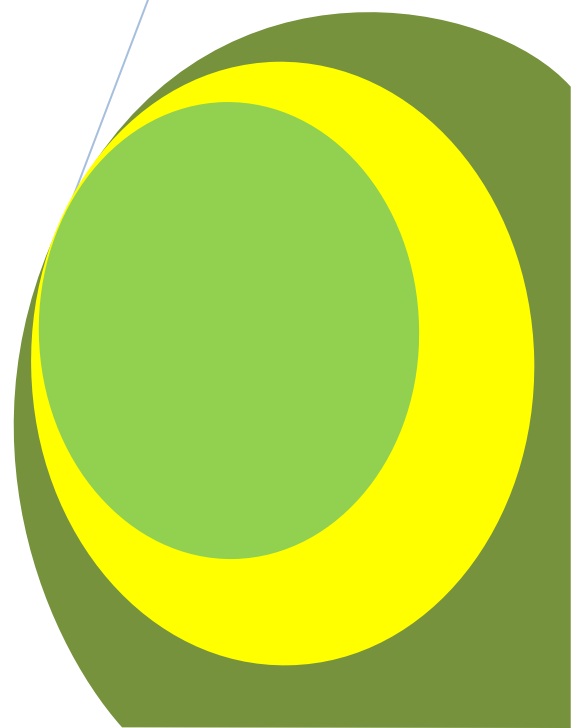
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Stress Management Coping Strategies used by Female Principals in Kenya: A Case Study of Rachuonyo North and Homa Bay Sub Counties

By

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Stress Management Coping Strategies used by Female Principals in Kenya: A Case Study of Rachuonyo North and Homa Bay Sub Counties

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ABSTRACT

School principals in Kenya do experience stress mainly due to administrative related stressors than teaching stressors. Such stressors include: Limited opportunities for professional development, tight time deadlines for tasks, delayed disbursement of school funds, interpersonal relations, social support, expert assistance, work overload among others. Some studies have revealed that both male and female teachers experience same stress levels, while other studies have contradicted these findings by asserting that females experience more stress than males (Gebrekirstos, 2015; Bray, Camlin, Fairbank, Dunteman & Wheelless, 2001). Notwithstanding these contradictions, school principals must embrace coping strategies to function effectively. To collect data for the study, stressor coping strategies questionnaire was used. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to estimate and describe the findings of the study. Accordingly, the study established that female principals experienced stress and used different strategies to cope. The relationship between coping strategies and levels of stress among female principals was strong and significant. The coping strategies accounted for 43.8% of variation in stress levels. The strategies were found to be significant predictors of stress among female principals; and that for one unit increase in the use of the coping strategies, stress level would improve by 0.523 units. The study recommended that stress management coping strategies should be adopted appropriately and used to sustain optimum stress levels among female principals. This is because optimum stress level is good for the functioning of men and women (Bray et al, 2001).

Key Words: Stress Management, Coping Strategies, Female Principals, Kenya: Rachuonyo North and Homa-Bay Sub-Counties.

INTRODUCTION

The government of Kenya is concerned with the global agenda of achieving education for all. The academic performance of students has become a great concern to stakeholders of education. This has led the government to formulate and implement policies to improve academic performance. Stress has also been found to be a major contributing factor to academic performance. Robbins (2001) states that, although an optimal level of stress can enhance learning ability, too much stress can cause physical and mental health problems and may affect the academic achievement of students. Boyland (2011) in a study on job stress and coping strategies of elementary principals; a statewide study in USA found out that a large majority of Indiana's elementary principal participants were experiencing moderate to high levels of job stress. In addition, most of the experienced principals indicated more stress than previous years. A total of 193 principals from 79 counties in Indiana responded to the survey. This was a return rate of 67% and represents 86% of the counties in the state of Indiana.

Attracting female teachers to school principalship positions in Kenya is apparently easy. However, developing and retaining them is one major concern. First, beginning female principals face many unique challenges, stress being the main one. Although stress has both positive and negative effects, the commonplace perception is that stress is negative. This is why it is common to hear principals make remarks to the effect that they are stressed whenever they fail to achieve their objectives. However, whenever success comes their way there is no mention of stress.

It is important to note that challenges, difficulties or problems as they are usually referred to, elicit tension or pressure which in real sense may either be energizing or overwhelming to workers, female principals inclusive. These facts were supported by Mbibi, Oluchiand Nwamuo (2013) who in their study "principals perceptions of stress and stress management strategies by junior secondary school principals in Abia state Nigeria" established

that principals experience stress and to some extent, stress influences principals' performance negatively and in some cases it rarely affects principals' functioning. Specifically, they found that stress hampers principals' ability to manage time well and meet deadlines, however stress rarely influences principals' feelings of inadequacy in performance at work, reduction in effectiveness, having less interest in the job, persistent negative thoughts, absenteeism and lack of concentration. Altangerel, Ruimei, Elahi and Dash's (2015) study in Mongolia established that stress induced by desire for education, experience and salary had positive impact on employee's performance, while age, family size, no relaxation and work overload had negative impact on employees' performance.

Studies world over have revealed that many strategies work for school administrators in coping with stress. Such strategies include: use of humour or laughter, venting, prayer, physical exercise (jogging, swimming and cycling), prioritization of tasks, time management, reduction of work overload, planning work and working plan (scheduling time for work and sticking to your work unless a real emergency like fire, flood, earthquake gets your way), giving up, self-control, confrontation, expert assistance, delegation, social support, eating balanced diet, socializing with colleagues and sharing problems (Gebrekirstos, 2015; Mbibi et al, 2013; Altangerel et al, 2015; Appley, 1967; Cherniss, 1980; Health promotion Research Trust, 1989, Health and Safety Commission, 1990; Kyriacou, 1980; Selye, 1956 & Simpson, 1987). However, since stress management is a complex phenomenon, it was necessary to carry out a study with a view of generating knowledge on stress management strategies and female principals.

Research Objective

The research objective was: To establish stress management coping strategies used by female principals in public secondary schools in Rachuonyo North and Homa Bay Sub counties, Kenya.

SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE ON FEMALE PRINCIPALS' STRESS MANAGEMENT COPING STRATEGIES

If one is suffering from stress, the aspect of life that causes it has to be identified. Changes in lifestyle or other small strategies can help to deal with stress. The work can be delegated or shared to avoid confrontation with problematic colleagues. Learning to be assertive, taking regular exercise, avoiding alcohol, drugs can reduce stress. On the other hand, eating a healthy, balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, finding humor in stressful situations, time management, talking to friends or family, and sharing thoughts and fears can fight stress. The person who is stressed should never take up more work than that he knows he can cope with. Listening to music or relaxation tapes, tensing and relaxing muscles are some of the simple ways to manage stress (DeNobile & McCormick, 2005).

Stress-management research conducted by Bunce, and West (1996) found that many successful intervention programs begin by building participants' knowledge and awareness of stress and burnout. Awareness sessions presented in a non-threatening environment provide participants with updated information about the nature, signs, causes, and symptoms of stress. For example, one stress management training program for school should focus on the definition of stress, the causes of stress in schools, the frequency of stress, and the effects of stress on students and teachers. However the realization that you are in control of your life is the foundation of stress management. A stress journal can help female principals to identify the regular stressors in their life and the way to deal with them. Each time you feel stressed, keep track of it in your journal. Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no "One size fits all" solution of managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation. Female principals can increase their resistance through physical health and physical activity, which play a key role in reducing and preventing the effect of stress.

Following an initial awareness presentation, a more active and participatory component of stress management is often provided to help participants determine, identify, and understand the origins of stress. Once causes of stress have been recognized and identified, preventive measures can be taken. Bunce and West (1996) demonstrated that participants can become empowered through various activities. After helping employees identify primary stressors, employers can provide training in counseling skills so that staff members are able to offer support and guidance to colleagues who are facing difficulties at work and also, environmental adjustment and mind control can help in coping with stress. Principals can be trained on strategies that help them either change their reaction to specific stressful situation or alter their work environment strategies for changing how one thinks about stressful or stress-producing situations, that is, cognitive coping strategies are an important component that leads to the reduction or prevention of stress (Bunce & West, 1996).

Today's leaders not only live and work at a faster pace, but must also deal with uncertainty and change. They need effective methods for coping with the kind of stress that affects anyone in leadership positions. People popularly identify principals as those most susceptible to stress and disease, however, at all levels of management, leaders find themselves exposed to comparable pressure (Poornima, 2010). In order to cope successfully with stress,

leaders need to recognize stress as a facilitation as well as a barrier to effective leadership. Stress apart from causing emotional, mental and physical problems, can also provide opportunities for higher productivity. Prolonged exposure to stress on the other hand, can reduce resistance to disorder with the consequences that productivity diminishes (Robbins, 2001).

Job stress has been defined as the non-specific response of the body to any demands made upon it (Selye, 1956). It is considered to be an internal state or reaction to anything we consciously or unconsciously perceive as a threat, either real or imagined. Robbins (2001) defines stress as a dynamic condition in which the individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, or demand related to what he or she desires for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. Stress can be caused by environmental, organizational, and individual variables (Cook & Hunsaker, 2001). Organizational-based factors have been known to induce job stress for employees at the workplace (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). These factors are commonly termed as organizational stressors since they serve as agents that trigger the various stress reactions (Von Onciul, 1996). Among the numerous organizational sources of stress, only five variables were investigated in this study namely; conflict, blocked career, alienation, work overload and unfavourable work environment.

Stress involves an interaction of person and environment. Something happens out there which presents a person with a demand, or a constraint or an opportunity for behavior. Stress occurs when the environment imposes demands which are perceived as being substantially out of balance with the person's capabilities, the environmental demands exceed the person's capabilities or the person's capabilities exceed the environmental demands. Female Principals in public schools can cope with stress in many different ways. Simple tactics that can help a principal control stress include a balanced diet, exercise, adequate sleep as well as being able to recognize work overload and stress resistant workplaces. Certain coping mechanisms can also have a negative effect on a person's mental health. Relieving stress using anger-induced methods, such as placing blame on others and yelling can increase mental health problems such as insomnia and depression. When a principal does not delegate some aspects of duties appropriately, she may encounter stress. A preliminary survey prior to this study found that, up to one third of principals perceive their occupation as highly stressful. Several principals both male and female remarked that female principals were more stressed than their male counterparts because of combinations of domestic work with official roles. Studies reviewed did not focus on strategies used by female principals in Rachuonyo North and Homa Bay Sub-Counties to cope with stress, the gap in knowledge that this study sought to fill.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by a conceptual framework which postulates that stress management coping strategies can be used by female principals to regulate their stress levels (Figure 1).

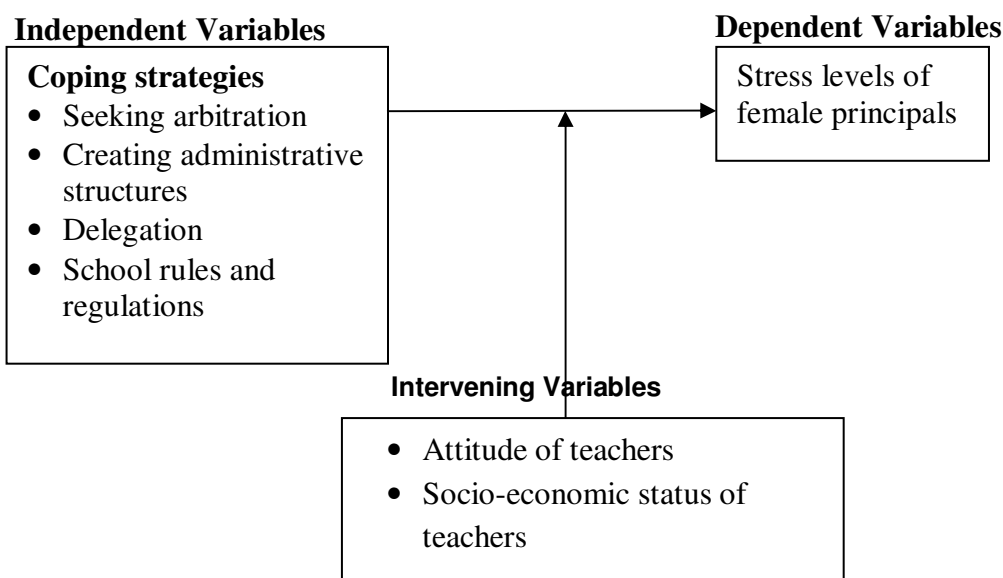


Figure 1: A conceptual framework showing influence of Stress Management Coping Strategies on Stress Levels among Female Principals

The conceptual framework shows the relationship between the independent variables (Coping strategies) and dependent variable (stress levels of female principals). Stress management coping strategies can be used to regulate stress level among female principals. Such coping strategies included; compromise, arbitration, delegation, working faster, use of proactive approach, use of official guidelines, labour laws among others. The success of these coping strategies depends on the mediating factors which are; attitude and socio-economic status of teachers. That is, intervening variables.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey and correlational research designs was adopted. The study population consisted of 43 female Principals, 43 Deputy Principals, 80 Heads of Department, 43 Board of Management chairpersons and 2 Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer. Fisher et al. formula was used to determine sample sizes. Saturated sampling technique was used to select 2 Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers, while simple random sampling technique was used to select 39 Principals, 39 Deputy Principals, 72 Heads of Departments and 39 Board of Management chairpersons. Questionnaire, interview schedules and document analysis guide was used to collect data. Face and content validity of the instruments were determined by experts whose input was incorporated. The reliability of the instrument was determined by test re-test approach, whereby, a correlation coefficient of 0.7 and above was considered reliable at a p-value of 0.05. The reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.84, meaning it was reliable. Quantitative data was analyzed using frequency counts, means, percentages; and regression analysis, while qualitative data was analyzed for content in emergent themes and sub themes.

RESULTS

Table 1: Female School Principals Gender and Headship Experience (n=40)

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	39	100
Age		
31-40	5	12.8
41-50	25	64.1
51-60	9	23.1
Total	39	100
Highest level of Education		
Diploma	1	2.6
Bachelors Degree	27	69.2
Masters degree	10	25.6
Doctorate	1	2.6
Total	39	100
Headship Experience in current schools		
1-5	20	51.2
6-10	12	30.8
11-15	4	10.3
16-20	1	2.6
21-25	2	5.1
Total	39	100
Headship Experience in other schools		
1-5	5	35.8
6-10	9	64.3
Teaching experience		
6-10	6	15.3
11-15	16	41.0
16-20	10	25.6
21-25	5	12.8
26-30	2	5.1
Total	39	100

From Table 1, it can be noted that 30(76.9%) of female principals were aged between 31 and 50 years. This means they were capable of providing good data on stress management strategies among female principals. Most female principals' 27(69.22%) highest qualification was Bachelor of Education degree. With regard to headship experience in the current schools, most principals 32(82%) had an experience of one to ten years, while headship experience in other schools' 14 had an experience of 6 to 10 years. In terms of teaching experience, 26(66.6%) had experience of 11 to 20 years. This bio-data means that all the respondents had the capacity to identify and rate accurately their stress levels and coping strategies that were in use and their effectiveness.

Table 2: School Data

Location	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Rural	35	89.7
Urban	4	10.3
Total	39	100
Number of Teachers per School		
1-5	10	25.6
6-10	11	28.2
11-15	9	23.1
16-20	5	12.8
21-25	2	5.1
26-30	2	5.1
Total	39	100
Enrolment		
50-89	5	12.8
90-121	9	23.1
130-169	6	15.3
170-209	7	17.9
210-249	3	7.7
250-289	2	5.1
290-329	0	0
330-369	1	2.6
370-401	1	2.6
410-449	3	7.7
450-489	1	2.6
490-529	1	2.6
Total	39	100

From Table 2, it can be noted that most schools 35(89.3%) were located in rural areas, while 4(10.3%) in urban areas. Most schools were under-staffed as 21(53.8%) had between 2 to 10 teachers. Enrolment in schools was generally low as 27(69.22%) had enrolment below 209 students.

Research Question: The research question responded to was: What stress management coping strategies are used by female principals in public secondary schools in Rachuonyo North and Homa-Bay Sub counties?

To respond to this research question, first stress levels among female principals was established using a five-point rating scale (Table 3) and coping strategies (Table 4).

Table 3: Stress Levels of among Female Principals in Rachuonyo North and Homa Bay Sub counties

S/N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Stress index based on descriptive statistics
1	2.60	1.19	3
2	2.95	1.47	3
3	2.50	1.40	3
4	3.90	1.33	4
5	3.10	1.17	3
6	3.20	1.44	3
7	3.24	0.44	3
8	3.35	1.42	3
9	3.05	1.28	3
10	2.90	0.97	3
11	3.00	1.30	3
12	2.05	0.97	2
13	2.86	1.41	3
14	1.90	0.91	2
15	2.37	0.83	2
16	1.70	1.38	2
17	3.40	1.35	3
18	3.45	0.69	4
19	2.90	1.83	3
20	4.05	1.32	4
21	2.40	1.35	2
22	4.05	1.31	4
23	3.45	1.39	4
24	1.74	0.65	2
25	2.90	1.12	3
26	2.95	1.15	3
27	2.85	1.18	3
28	4.60	0.60	5
29	2.58	0.77	3
30	2.75	1.83	3
31	4.15	0.81	4
32	2.90	1.29	3
33	2.85	1.14	3
34	1.45	0.69	2
35	3.05	0.69	3
36	2.00	1.15	2
37	3.00	1.26	3
38	3.00	1.70	3
39	3.80	1.11	4
OVERALL MEAN	2.95	1.16	3

Interpretation of Mean Ratings

1.0 -1.44 = Very low 1.45 – 2.44 = Low
2.45 – 3.44 = Moderate 3.45 – 4.44 = High 4.45 - 5.00 = Very high

Interpretation of Stress levels Indices

1 = Very low; 2 = Low; 3 = Moderate;
4 = High 5 = Very high

From Table 3, it can be observed that 8(20.5%) female principals were established to be experiencing low stress levels as their indices were 1. Twenty three (59%) were established to be experiencing moderate stress with an indices of 3, while 7(18.0%) female principals were experiencing high levels of stress and one was experiencing very high level of stress with an index of 5. Overly, female principals in Rachuonyo North and Homa Bay Sub counties were established to be experiencing moderate stress with an index of 3.

The female principals were asked to rate coping strategies they used in management of their stress levels based on common stressors. They were informed that coping meant changing a situation which is stressful by either altering the nature of the situation itself or by modifying a person's perception of the situation and /or dealing with the thoughts, feelings and bodily reactions to stress rather than attempting to change the stress situation or a person's perception of it. A checklist was used. The results were as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Coping Strategies to Manage Stress among Public Secondary School Female Principals

Stressor	Coping strategy	Mean Rating	Overall mean rating	Effectiveness indices of coping strategies
1. Role conflict				
• Disagreement with co-workers	Seek Arbitration	3.33	3.12	3
• Disagreement with supervisors	Seek Arbitration	3.14		
• Caught up in the middle	Recant	2.89		
2. Blocked Career				
• Critical supervisor	Respond politely	3.30	3.18	3
• Unacceptability by employer	Work harder	3.32		
• Unacceptability by employer	Complain less bitterly	2.63		
• Not noticed or appreciated		3.46		
3. Work Environment				
• Hazardous	Proactive approach	3.36	3.58	4
• Lack of privacy	Create structures	3.76		
• Dealing with many little hassle	Programme activities and meetings	3.63		
4. Work Overload				
• Too little time to do it	Work faster	3.48	3.60	4
• Tackling new and old responsibilities	Delegate	3.59		
• Interference with personal life	Be principled	3.65		
• Size of workload	Delegate	3.66		
5. Information gap				
• Unsure about responsibilities of my job	Seek advice from senior	3.76	3.68	4
• Lack of information to perform tasks	Get assistance from experts	3.61		
• Under qualified for certain tasks	Go for capacity building	3.78		
• Unsure of criteria used to evaluate my performance	Seek clarification from supervisor	3.56		
6. Sponsor				
• Insistence on religious tone	Compromise	3.33	3.41	3
• Undermining other religious groups in school	Use MOEST policies	3.44		
• Recruitment of staff and employment	Use official guidelines	3.47		
7. School discipline				
• Undisciplined teachers	TSC Code of Regulations for teachers 2005, Act 2012	3.31	2.96	3
• Undisciplined students	School rules and regulations	3.58		
• Undisciplined support	Employment Act 2007	126		
• Staff Incompetent staff	Retraining /capacity building	3.69		
8. Board of Management				
• Hiring of staff	Employment guidelines	3.59	3.53	4
• School projects	MOEST policies	3.74		
• Meetings	MOEST policies	3.26		
9. Creditors				
• Court cases	MOEST policies	2.94	3.09	3
• Supply of goods	Negotiation	3.00		
Overall Mean		3.35	3.35	3

Interpretations of Effectiveness of Coping strategies indices

1 = Least effective strategy;
4 = more effective and

2 = Less effective; 3 = Effective strategy;
5 = Most effective strategy

Interpretation of Mean Ratings

1.0 -1.44 = Least effective strategy 1.45 – 2.44 = Less effective
2.45 – 3.44 = Effective strategy 3.45 – 4.44 = more effective
4.45 - 5.00 = Most effective strategy

KEY: MOEST- Ministry of Education Science and Technology
TSC – Teachers Service Commission

From Table 4, it can be noted that arbitration and recantation were rated by female principals as effective strategies in coping with role conflict induced stress, polite response, working harder and complaining less bitterly were rated as effective strategies of dealing with blocked career induced stress. Proactive approach, creation of structures and programmed activities and meetings were rated as more effective strategies in dealing with work environment induced stress. Working faster, delegation of duties and responsibilities and being principled were rated as more effective strategies used by female principals to cope with work overload induced strategies. Seeking advice from seniors, getting assistance from experts, capacity building and seeking clarification from supervisors were rated as more effective strategies in dealing with information gap induced stress. Compromise, use of Ministry of Education Science and Technology policies and The Basic Education Act, 2013 were effective strategies used by principals to cope with sponsor induced stress. Teachers Service Commission Code of Regulations for Teachers 2005, Teachers Service Commission Act 2012, School Rules and Regulations, Employment Act 2007 and capacity building were rated as effective strategies used by female principals in coping with school discipline induced stress that emanate from undisciplined teachers, support staff and students. Employment guidelines, Employment Act 2007, Ministry of Education Science and Technology policies were rated as more effective strategies for coping with Board of Management Induced stress, which emanate from recruitment and selection of staff, school projects and meetings. Ministry of Education Science and Technology policies and negotiation were rated as effective strategies for coping with creditors induced strategies that emanate from Court case and poor supply of goods. The overall the stress management strategies index of three meant that they were effective coping strategies.

Table 5: Individual Ratings of Effectiveness of Coping Strategies used by Female Principals in Public Secondary Schools (n =39)

Female Principals			
S/N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Effectiveness indexes based on descriptive statistics
1	3.72	.79716	4
2	3.79	.99469	4
3	4.00	0.00000	4
4	3.30	1.78403	3
5	4.17	.87428	4
6	3.79	.81851	4
7	3.03	1.21721	3
8	3.69	1.44181	4
9	4.03	1.03335	4
10	2.10	.85960	2
11	3.40	1.35443	3
12	1.66	.85673	2
13	1.40	.8550	11
14	2.97	1.12903	3
15	3.20	.40684	3
16	1.40	.85501	1
17	3.97	1.06620	3
18	3.00	1.31306	3
19	4.40	1.00344	4
20	4.59	.94556	5
21	4.59	1.23974	5
22	4.38	.90292	4
23	4.10	1.29131	4
24	2.33	.92227	2
25	3.67	.88409	3
26	3.61	1.40580	4
27	3.83	.83391	4
28	4.68	.47610	5
29	2.68	1.00369	3
30	4.53	1.10589	5
31	4.37	.80872	4
32	3.47	.77233	4
33	3.30	1.26355	3
34	1.62	.69725	2
35	3.60	1.13259	4
36	1.33	.54667	1
37	3.43	1.33089	3
38	2.60	1.67332	3
39	1.30	.51120	3
Overall mean	3.31	1.28155	3

Interpretation of means

1.00 -1.44 = Vey low effect;
3.45 – 4.44 = High effect

1.45 – 2.44 = Low effect;
4.5 – 5.0 =Very high effect

2.45 – 3.44 = Moderate Effect;

Interpretation of strategies' Effectiveness Indices

1 = Vey low effect;
4 = High effect

2 = Low effect;
5 =Very high effect

3 = Moderate Effect;

From Table 5, it can be noted that 4(10.3%) rated coping strategies as least effective, 4(10.3%) as less effective, 12(30.7%) as effective, 15(38.4%) as more effective and 4(10.3%) and most effective. Overall, the coping strategies were rated as effective strategies in management of stress among female principals.

To determine the impact of stress management coping strategies on female principals stress levels, the coping strategies effectiveness indices were correlated with those of stress levels using Pearson's r correlation and regression analysis. The results were as shown Table 6.

Table 6: Relationship between Coping Strategies and Stress Levels among Female Secondary School Principals

		Stress level
Coping strategies	Pearson Correlation	.674
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	39

From Table 6, it can be observed that coping strategies had a strong positive significant influence on stress level. Thus the moderation of mediating power was strong. To estimate the influence they had, regression was performed and coefficient of determination was as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Regression analysis of Stress Management Coping Strategies and Stress Levels of Female principals

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.674 ^a	.454	.438

Predictors: (Constant): Coping strategies

From Table 7, it can be noted that the coefficient of determination was 0.438. This meant that the coping strategies accounted for 43.8% of the stress mitigation. It also meant that other factors were responsible for 56.2%. These factors included jogging in the evenings, organizing and attending get –together in involvement in “self help group” activities as indicated in the open-ended items in the questionnaire under the section titled any other important information.

To determine as to whether these strategies were significant predictors of stress level, ANOVA was computed and the results were as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: ANOVA of Stress Management Coping Strategies and Stress Levels of Female principals

Model	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.
1 Regression	8.409	1	29.888	.000 ^b
Residual	10.129	37		
Total	18.538	38		

Dependent Variable: Stress level

Predictors: (Constant): Coping strategies

From Table 8, it can be observed that coping strategies were statistically significant predictors of stress control among female principals ($F(1, 37) = 29.888, P < .05$). To determine the actual mediating influence, linear regression was computed and the results were as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Linear Regression Analysis of Stress Management Coping Strategies and Stress Levels of Female Principals

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	1.159	.339	3.423	.002
	Coping strategies	.523	.096	5.467	.000

Dependent Variable: Stress level Regression Equation: $Y = a + bx$
Predictors: (constant): Coping strategies

From Table 9, it can be noted that one unit increase in coping strategies would lead to 0.523 units increase in stress level of female principals. The regression equation would be as follows; $Y = 1.159 + 0.523bx$.

DISCUSSION

In identifying and measuring the effectiveness of coping mechanisms female principals use when they experience stress was the concern of this study. To achieve this objective, 31 items, based on different stressors were used. Accordingly, coping strategies based broad stressors experienced. The responses to all statements for every broad stressor were rated on five-point rating scale, adapted from Davis, Eshelman and McKay (1992) model of relaxation and stress reduction. The mean for each strategy was calculated to gauge the effectiveness. Regression analysis was computed to measure the effectiveness of these strategies in management of stress among female principals. To determine how female principals cope with stressful situations, female principals from Rachuonyo North and Homa Bay Sub counties were asked what strategies have worked for them in coping with stress for the 2011-2014 school years.

As far as the coping strategies are concerned in terms of effectiveness, arbitration and recantation were found to be effective strategies for managing stress that emanated from role conflict when female principals disagreed with co-workers, colleagues and supervisors, while recantation was effective when managing stress that resulted from role conflict, whereby, the female principals found themselves between a rock and a hard place. These were situations in which they were expected to counsel and discipline a worker or even a student, who was a relative. The principal became relaxed once she recanted and initiated the arbitration process. During interviews, one of the female principals explained that after recanting, most principals turn to religious events, praying more than usual, seeking God's intervention through pastors and putting trust in God more than any other strategy in order to escape from stress. However, female principals who had not internalised the power of religion continued trying other strategies. These findings concur with those of De Nobile and McCormick (2005) who found that listening to music or relaxation tapes are ways of managing stress.

Polite response, working harder and complaining less bitterly were strategies rated as effective in managing stress that arise from critical supervision, unacceptability by employers and not being appreciative. The female principals who used these strategies argued that they were effective because their supervisors were compelled not to take them for granted in their operations as principals on realization that principals were hardworking, polite and less bitter about the treatment from them. In this regard, female principals desisted from emotional outbursts and impulsive reactions and kept themselves from getting distracted by other thoughts or activities by controlling their emotions. These findings concur with those of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and Von Onciul (1996) that stress due to blocked career can be managed through hard work and avoidance of confrontation.

Proactive approach, creating of structures and putting in place programmes for activities and meetings were rated as strategies that were more effective with an index of 4 in management of female principals stress generated by work environment stressors such as hazardous environment, lack of privacy and hassles. In this case, female principals' stress was managed by arranging offices such that they could bolt the doors and relax for short periods before evening functions and read professional literature on management of stress. Arriving at school early say at 7.30am, to be available before school begins and to plan their days and try to clear their desks by 8.00am also reduced stress.

Where stress was caused through work overload, female principals found working faster, delegation of duties and responsibilities, being principled and discussion with colleagues to be more effective stress reduction interventions among stress. This was achieved through the following measures as indicated by following measures as indicated by most of them during interviews. In fact, one female principal stated; I use the following coping actions to reduce stress;

- i) Trying to be focused in my work.
- ii) Trying to relax after work
- iii) Taking immediate action on simple tasks
- iv) Acting objectively on emerging issues and keeping feelings under control.
- v) Trying to rationalise situations
- vi) Reassuring myself that everything was going to work out right
- vii) Trying to make sure colleagues are aware that I am doing my best.
- viii) Trying to forget work when the school day is over.
- ix) Trying to see humour in my work.
- x) Making concerted effort to enjoy myself with some pleasurable activities like playing volleyball.
- xi) Trying not to worry or think about overwork.
- xii) Trying to work harder and longer.

Another female principal had this to say:

- i) Working in the evenings and on weekends.
- ii) Deciding on priorities and dropping unimportant work.
- iii) Catching-up with family life during holidays
- iv) Dropping low-priority school tasks
- v) Physical exercises after work
- vi) Doing what I could but without worrying too much
- vii) Planning well ahead
- viii) Using different styles of working to enable me cope with over load.

Where information gap elements were stressors, that is, unsure of responsibilities, lack of information to perform tasks, underqualified for certain tasks and unsure of evaluation criteria; seeking advices from seniors, getting assistance from experts, undertaking capacity building and seeking clarification from supervisors were stress management strategies that were used and were rated as more effective with an effectiveness index of 4; in this regard, the study found that female principals sought for help where necessary. In fact, one of the female principals stated; "With regard to information gap induced stress the coping strategies I use are:

- i) Rigorous search for information
- ii) Free expression of ignorance to relevant persons
- iii) Asking for help from experts"

Another principal added that she used the following strategies:

- i) Developing cordial relationship with colleagues to solicit mutual support
- ii) Promoting teamwork and reliance on colleagues and juniors
- iii) Investigating problems promptly

Where stress among female principals was induced by sponsors, use of Ministry of Education Science and Technology policies, compromise and official guidelines sufficed. This was accomplished by keeping activities and programmes in perspective, avoiding confrontation and relaxation after work. With regard to insistence on religious tone, undermining other religious groups in school and biasness in recruiting and employment of staff most principals indicated that the following stress reduction actions worked well.

- i) Discouragement of change in religious faith of students
- ii) Prohibition of confrontation among religious groups in school
- iii) Handling religious emerging issues promptly
- iv) Discarding fear of unpleasant consequences when addressing religious conflict
- v) Being duly apologetic for cases of oversights to avoid being seen as ineffective.

- vi) Use of assertive skills when right
- vii) Keeping quiet rather than to disagreeing with religious leaders in public
- viii) Refusing inappropriate requests
- ix) Avoiding interruption of religious meetings in progress.
- x) Discouraging sponsor's meddling in school management

Where stress among female principals was induced by school discipline factors such as undisciplined teachers non-teaching staff and students; and incompetent staff, the following strategies were found to be effective: The use of Teachers Service Commission Code of regulations for teachers 2005, Employment Act 2007, Teachers Service Commission Act 2012, School rules and Regulations. Most female principals contended that these strategies could only succeed when the principals:

- i) Gained confidence through knowing more about the school and how it functions.
- ii) Understood how effective decisions are arrived at in discipline cases
- iii) Understood the deputy principal's area of responsibility
- iv) Had working knowledge the rights and privilege of staff and students in schools.
- v) Working knowledge of the basic history of the school and catchment area.
- vi) Had good understanding the complexity of school discipline.
- vii) Had expressed negative feelings, that is, showing annoyance when hurt.
- viii) Had expressed positive feelings, that is telling staff and students that they appreciate them rightfully, giving complements when they are done, initiating dialogue and receiving compliments appropriately.
- ix) Had developed good relationship with colleagues, especially with senior colleagues that facilitates more effective mutual support.
- x) Developed good personal relationship with staff.
- xi) Took teaching as their haven
- xii) Developed teamwork and reliance on other colleagues
- xiii) Constantly reminded themselves not to take self and day-to-day crises too seriously.
- xiv) Accepted the situation.

When stress among female principals was induced by Board of Management stressors such as hiring of staff, school projects and meetings; Ministry of Education Science and Technology Employment guidelines, Ministry of Education Science and Technology policies and Employment Act 2007 were rated as more effective stress management strategies. Most principals argued that stress pertaining to Board of management issues was well managed by:

- i) Making sure the agenda for Board of Management meetings were well defined.
- ii) Being available and setting up meetings while pressure is off.
- iii) Planning ahead
- iv) Talking to Board of Management members.
- v) Being philosophical, think of what you will do for the school rather than what the school will do for you; extending this philosophy to Board of management members and the whole school community at large.
- vi) Thinking positively – what an interesting and honourable job I have.
- vii) Accepting that some things will not be done.
- viii) Deciding on your own standards for the job of principalship rather than those of the other principals.
- ix) Attempting to discipline yourself to doing one thing at a time according to your list of priorities.
- x) Facilitating induction of Board of Management members on their mandate.

When stress among female principals was induced by creditors demands degenerating into court cases and poor supply; most principals asserted that the following strategies were effective in management of the stress.

- i) Deciding on priorities and dropping less urgent matters.
- ii) Dropping temporarily low-priority school tasks
- iii) Having closed door strategy
- iv) Constant self-reminders to oneself, "I will get organised next time."
- v) Trying to pretend that a lot of things are not important and application of religious faith.
- vi) Trying to avoid confrontation and relaxation after work
- vii) Taking immediate action on the basis of the present understanding of the situation
- viii) Thinking objectively about your creditors and keeping your feelings under control.
- ix) Reassuring yourself that things are good and will work out right.

- x) Not let the problem persist, solve it or reconcile it satisfactorily.

These coping strategies must have worked for many female principals as signified by regression analysis coefficient of .438, which meant that coping strategies on the whole accounted for 43.8% of variation in stress levels among female principals. Descriptive analysis on the other hand revealed that female principals were moderately stressed.

CONCLUSION

The stress management strategies used by female principals were effective in moderating their stress levels. These coping strategies explained 43.8% of stress levels and were significant predictors of stress levels among female principals. Stress management strategies are highly complex such that there is no single coping strategy that can be effective on its own but a constellation of them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) Stress management programmes should be organised for principals of secondary schools to educate them on stress management strategies and their effect on school principals' effectiveness and health.
- ii) Principals should concentrate on school management issues per se, that is, they should delegate the teaching load assigned to them. This would reduce work overload.
- iii) Seminars and workshops should be organised for principals on causes, consequences of stress and stress management strategies in schools.
- iv) The government should put in place mechanisms of reducing stress and depression as a worthwhile goal for principals of schools.
- v) Interventions should be put in place to improve work environments and work relationships that are a locus of stress for principals so as to mitigate the effect of stress on the quality of life and ability to function well on the job.

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