

## **Sources of Stress in Teaching Physical Education in Senior High Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to conduct quantitative descriptive survey to find out sources of stress regarding the teaching of the subject Physical Education in Senior High Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. Data was collected from 30 respondents who are Physical Education teachers from 10 second cycle schools. Questionnaires were used to collect data for the study. It was found out that sources of stress in the teaching of Physical Education in Senior High Schools in Cape Coast include workload, role ambiguity, lack and insufficient equipment and facilities. The study recommended that periodic workshops on sources of stress are organized for second cycle Physical Education teachers.

**Key Words:** Role ambiguity, Coping strategies, Stress

### **Introduction**

To a scientist, stress is any action or situation that places special physical or psychological demands upon a person, anything that can unbalance his individual equilibrium. And while the physiological response to such demand is surprisingly uniform, the forms of stress are innumerable. Stress may be even but unconscious like the noise of a city or the daily chore of driving the car. Perhaps the one incontestable statement that can be made about stress is that it belongs to everyone- to businessmen and professors, to mother and their children, to factory workers. Stress is a part of fabric of life. Nothing can isolate stress from human beings as is evident from various researches and studies. Stress can be managed but not simply done away with. Today, widely accepted ideas about stress are challenged by new research, and conclusions once firmly established may be turned completely around. According to Ogden (1979), some stress is necessary to the well being and a lack of it can be harmful. Stress definitely causes some serious ailments and severe stress can make people accident-prone

Stress and its effects on human activities are as old as the span of human existence on earth. Stress, according to Cox (1978), is experienced as a result of an imbalance between a person's internal demands, such as one's needs and values, and a person's external demands, such as job task, the physical work environment, psychosocial work environment and unemployed activities. This means there are job characteristics that are perceived as threatening to a person because of a poor match between the abilities of a person and the demand of the job. This imbalance is referred to as lack of 'FIT' between the person and the environment (Caplan, 1994). According to Robbins, Power and Burgess (1997), stress is the main response of the body to any type of change and to any new threatening or exciting situation. Physical Education (P.E.) teachers in second cycle schools in the Central Region according to 2005 annual report from the regional Physical Education Unit go through a lot of stress due to the expected output by their employers or headmasters as well as team supporters. There are many stressors that affect the human body, these could be physical, that is, changes in the body's internal or immediate external environment that require the body to adapt to the situation. Diet, noise, drugs, exercise, illness and extremes of temperature are examples of physical stressors (Blonna, 2005).

According to Bucher and Wuest (1991), many of the stressors that affect our lives today are cognitive in nature. These may include parenting, poverty, work overload, rejection, divorce and marriage. Cognitive stressors occur as a sequence of an individual's perception of an event. Thus, whether or not a

demand causes stress depends on how the individual chooses to interpret an event and react to it. Given the same situation, one individual will interpret it as no stressor, while another individual as moderate stressor, and yet another individual as a major stressor. From the three interpretations given above, it could be said that the individual's ability to adapt to a stressful situation is a strong determinant of the strength of the stress on the individual.

Selye (2002) described the ways in which we react to stress as either eustress (good) or distress (bad). He contended that, in both cases, the psychological response is the same. In the case of eustress, health and performance improve even as stress increases. On the other hand, distress causes health and performance to decline. According to Selye, optimal stress is intense enough to motivate and physically prepare us to perform optimally yet not intense enough to cause the body to over react or sustain harmful effects.

Stress forces our bodies to work under less than optimal conditions yet this is the time we need to function at our best. When stress gets the best of you, it is important to find ways to cope with and manage it to our advantage. Coping, according to Iowa Association for Health, Physical Education Research and Dance 1998 conference session handouts (IAHPERD), refers to the cognitive and behavioural attempt to master, manage, reduce or tolerate a stressful situation. Like any profession, teaching has its highs and lows but if one is prepared adequately, it can be mostly highs. Coaching can be said to be one of the most popular careers within the realms of Physical Education ((Wuest & Lombardo, 1994). There is no sufficient evidence to indicate that knowledge in a particular skill in any activity necessarily guarantees success in teaching that activity. Many other factors are essential to coaching success, for example interest in the sport, personality, knowledge of human growth, development and psychology, intelligence, integrity and leadership attitude are all indicators that contribute to success in coaching.

Annan (2003), noted that "teaching Physical Education (P.E) in second cycle school in Ghana is characterized by insecurity of position". Whether a P. E. teacher feels secured or not depends on the administrators of the school for which the teacher has been employed. Secondly, the P. E. teacher's security in the school again rests on the past students of the school and thirdly on the students he or she teach and coach. According to Annan (2003) in the Ghanaian situation, right from the school level to the club levels, 95% of schools and clubs emphasize on winning once they participate in any sports competition. These schools and club level administrators evaluate the Physical Education teacher's effectiveness or performance on the basis of win record. A losing season therefore places the teacher or coach's job in jeopardy.

On the other hand, in schools or clubs where the administration preaches educational outcomes of sports, the teacher of physical education who places the attainment of educational or participatory objective as a priority may find job security. Teaching and coaching in Ghanaian schools therefore has become a problem that P. E. teachers and school officials as well as team followers have had to contend with. Annan again asserted that in many situations the problems associated with coaching school sports are sparked off by the team followers who have very little knowledge about the sport they follow and would always be the first to criticize.

There are several organizational, job and personal stressors found in teaching and coaching. These include administrative pressures such as developing budget, recruiting new players, which falls under organizational stressors. Job stressors include social stressors that originate within the team such as handling conflicts with athletes, understanding athletes' emotional responses and motivation; poor decision making, and ineffective distribution of responsibilities. There is yet another stress that falls under job stress and it is dealing with interactions within fans, media, parents and time pressure. Fans will always not understand why their team did not perform well and the blame is always on the P. E. teacher. The P. E. teacher is therefore confronted to give an explanation to the team's poor performance which is always very stressful. The media publications on the P. E. teacher's pronouncement are almost always conflicting, thus putting the physical education teacher who acts as a coach under intense pressure to explain either publicly or to certain individuals about the media publications which is always very stressful. Physical education teachers are most often given a limited time frame within which to work and produce results by the administrators largely due to financial constraints within the administrative set up. This also puts much stress on the P. E. teacher in the execution of his or her work.

Stressors that can affect the P. E. teacher directly as an individual may include perception of the job, insecurity, personal teaching and coaching expectations, self pressure to win, lack of time to meet personal and family needs and responsibilities, lack of experience, lack of teaching and coaching skills and self

doubts. Teaching and coaching performances may significantly be influenced by the ability of the teacher to cope with stressors in a positive and constructive way (Taylor, 1992).

The effect of stress may impinge upon the broad attention focus the Physical Education teachers need to observe important information about team strategies and athlete's performances. This will negatively affect the attention focus Physical Education teachers who act as coaches need to analyse information and to take appropriate action. Increased levels of stress may cause attention focus to narrow and cause P. E. teachers to miss relevant cues and interfere with decision making.

According to Bucher and Wuest (1991), the goal of stress management is to use stress advantageously, not to eliminate all stress from one's life. An optimal level of stress helps us perform at our best, too little stress or too much stress detracts us from our performance. Perhaps the best example is from the realm of athletics. Athletes perform at their best when they are "psyched up"; athletes who are insufficiently or excessively psyched typically experience a decline in performance. The ability to adapt or cope with stressors largely determines the ultimate effect. If effective coping strategies are used, the effects of a stressful situation can be more tolerable. On the other hand, if ineffective strategies are used, many problems can actually become worse (Corbin, 2003). Management of stress requires that the individual become aware of events that lead to stress, recognize when the stress response is occurring, and then take steps to reduce it by either eliminating the stressor or reducing its effects.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Al Mohammed and Capel (2007), the issue of stress on the Physical Education teachers' performance has become a worldwide problem, which has no boundaries. This problem runs through all spheres of teaching globally especially in all sporting disciplines; be it athletics, soccer, handball, volleyball, field hockey or others.

The improvement and development of various sports disciplines and the competitive nature of these sporting disciplines have placed a high demand on Physical Education teachers vis-a-vis their performance hence putting a great stress on the Physical Education teachers.

According to 2008 statistics from the Physical Education unit at the Central Region Education Directorate, there is under staffing of Physical Education teachers in the second cycle schools in the region comparing teacher workload and student population. Again records at the Physical Education unit at the Central Region Education Directorate indicates that as at July 2008 about 35% of the second cycle schools in the central region do not have proper facilities and equipment of their own for the teaching of Physical Education while the remaining 65% schools which have, do not have enough to cater for the large student population (Central Region Education Directorate Statistics, 2008).

According to the Curriculum Research and Development Division of Ghana Education Service headquarters release for 2008, period allocation for the teaching of Physical Education in the second cycle schools in Ghana, were as follows. Year one, was allotted 3 periods per week while year two and three were allotted 2 periods each per week. On the other hand, there are several challenges associated with the Physical Education profession in Ghana, the practice hours and the hours spent coaching multiple sports during sports competitions are the most visible indications of the amount of time and work involved in the teaching of Physical Education. Untold hours may be spent in preparing lesson notes to teach, setting examination questions, marking examination questions, ranking examination results of students' afternoon practical teaching and practices, reviewing the results of games and planning for the next encounter, counselling athletes and scouting sports players and other administrative responsibilities are some of the challenges which put a great amount of pressure on the Physical Education teacher. Managing stress is an additional responsibility on the P. E. teacher. This beckons an investigation, hence the study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify major sources of stress in teaching Physical Education in second cycle schools in Cape Coast.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the sources of stress to the Physical Education teacher?

## Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey. The population for the research is trained Physical Education teachers in Central Region, while the accessible population is trained Physical Education teachers in second cycle schools in the Cape Coast. There are a total of 88 trained Physical Education teachers in the second cycle schools in the Central Region. This figure is made up of 16 females and 72 males. Simple random sampling was used to select 37 trained P.E teachers for the study.

## Results/Discussions

The Sources of Stress in the Teaching of Physical Education in Second Cycle Schools in Cape Coast are presented on Table 1.

**Table 1: Sources of Stress in the Teaching Physical Education in Second Cycle Schools in Cape Coast.**

Sources of Stress	SA	%	SD	%	Total %
Teachers work load	29	97	1	3	100
Teachers age	16	53	14	47	100
Lack of funds to work with	26	87	4	13	100
General sports Programme	24	80	6	20	100
Teacher student ratio	27	90	3	10	100
Lack of equipment and facilities	27	96	1	3	100
Teacher personal expertise	19	63	11	36	100
Fear of job insecurity	19	64	11	37	100
Personality clashes	18	60	12	40	100
Lack of cooperation from Colleagues teachers	25	84	5	17	100
Misconceptions	21	70	9	30	100

### Source: Field Data

From Table 1, 97% of the P.E teachers attested to the fact that teachers' workload was a major cause of stress in the teaching of Physical Education in second cycle schools in Ghana. This is consistent with the study conducted by Blonna's (2005) in the United State of America that 60% of all stress experiences fall in 13 areas, of which workload is one. Again the respondent's responses supports the assertion by Taylor (1992) that major source of stress is work overload. Lumpkin (2002) asserted that persons in Physical Education related careers other than teaching may also find their job unrewarding or frustrating due to work overload. Again the respondent's assertion confirms Boolzin's (1991) statement that workload on the job causes stress to the worker. Extra work such as arranging and supervising afternoon games after normal teaching lessons on the curriculum are evidence of workload on the Physical Education teacher. In almost all public and some second cycle schools in Ghana, the Physical Education teacher assumes the position of a coach in all areas of sports discipline in which the school participates. This is another area where the Physical Education teacher in Ghana is over tasked.

In most second cycle schools in Cape Coast where the research was conducted, teacher to student ratio is a clear indication of teacher workload. Statistics obtained from Aggrey Memorial Senior High School indicated that population for the 2007/2008 academic year was 2800 with only 3 Physical Education teachers this gives a ratio of 1 teacher to 933 students. This ratio is too high for one teacher to handle effectively without frustrations looking at the volume of exercises and examination scripts to be marked and assessed by the Physical Education teachers

From Table 1, 16 (53%) of the respondents agreed that teachers age contribute to the causes of stress in teaching Physical Education while 14 (47%) disagreed with the statement. One reason for this could be that majority of the Physical Education teachers in the Cape Coast metropolis according to data collected have taught for over six years which is an indication of aging. Aging has its own problems such as family responsibilities, diseases, frustration in life due to inability to achieve an aim at a particular age hence the stress factor in the teaching of Physical Education. Those who disagreed to the question could be the Physical Education teachers in the metropolis who may have joined the profession and have the joy of teaching the subject. They have enough energy to work and may not have family responsibilities to think about.

Out of the total number of 30 respondents, 26 (87%) agreed while 4 (13%) disagreed to the statement that lack of funds to work with is a cause of stress on physical education teachers. This is consistent with Hammond and Onikama (1997) that lack of resources to work with has been identified as a factor that causes stress has been confirmed. This may be due to the fact that their heads of institutions feel reluctant to release funds to them to prepare teaching grounds and to buy some teaching learning materials for their teaching hence frustrating their effort in teaching. Ghana Education Service annual report for 2007/2008, stressed the need to teach Physical Education in all second cycle schools in Ghana. However the annual budget for subject teaching did not cater for Physical Education as it does for other subjects such as Mathematics, English Language and Science. Monies allocated for these subjects were specified to be used for the organization of workshops and not for teaching/learning materials. On the other hand, the 13% who disagreed to the statement probably may be the lucky ones whose heads understand what Physical Education is and are always ready to support the teaching of the subject.

General sports programme in the schools causes stress in the teaching of Physical Education as majority of the respondents 24 (80%) agreed and 6 (20%) disagreed with the statement. Any serious Physical Education teacher is always prepared to teach some skills to his students through teaching and would be glad to have enough time to teach. A glance at the Central Region Schools and Colleges sports programme from 2005 to 2009 indicates that, Physical Education teachers in the region are always out for sports competition with little time for the teaching of Physical Education in the schools. This loaded sports programme on the school curriculum will definitely frustrate the Physical Education teacher who has the teaching of the subject at heart. This confirms Blonna's (2005) assertion that work overload cause stress.

Teacher student ratio causes stress in the teaching of Physical Education in second cycle school in Ghana as majority of the respondents 27 (90%) agreed to the statement while 3 (10%) disagreed to the statement. There may be a number of reasons why teacher student ratio was a cause for teacher stress in the teaching of Physical Education in second cycle schools in Ghana. One reason may be that if the class is too large for in instance 60 students to one teacher, class management becomes difficult, the volume of students' assessment is increased, student's progress is limited, equipment becomes inadequate and this affects actual teaching time. Set objectives may not be achieved under these circumstances and the teacher becomes frustrated and stressed up.

From Table 1, majority of respondents 29 (96%) agreed that lack of equipment and facilities causes stress in the teaching of Physical Education in second cycle schools in Ghana. The reason could be attributed to the fact that when equipment and facilities are not enough, teaching becomes frustrating as students wait for their turn on the little equipment. When students have long waiting times, they engage in disruptive behaviour; some lose interest in the lesson; and lesson objective may not be achieved. All these can contribute to high stress on the Physical Education teacher. This confirms Lumpkin's (2002) statement that inadequate facilities equipment and other resources often lead to stress on Physical Education teachers.

Teacher's personal expertise can cause stress in the teaching of Physical Education in the second cycle schools in Ghana as 19 (63%) confirmed the statement while the remaining 11 (37%) disagreed with the statement. Personal expertise being a cause of stress in the teaching of Physical Education in second cycle schools in Ghana probably could be attributed to inexperienced or newly trained Physical Education teachers in the profession. As these teachers come out fresh from school they may be thinking of having everything available at their disposal for teaching, however, in situation where their perceptions are different from conditions on the ground, become frustrated and stressed up unlike the experienced teachers in the profession who may know the conditions already, may how to work things out to their advantage. For example, borrowing equipment from other schools or improvising equipment themselves to teach instead of allowing the problem to stress them up. The majority's responses supports Berry's (1990) assertion that

novice teachers are often reluctant to ask for help, they may be afraid to let anyone know that they are having problems in the classroom which could lead to stress. This also confirms Melgosa (2002) who stated that our personality and level of self control can be a source of stress.

Nineteen (67%) agreed to the fact that fear of job insecurity causes stress in teaching Physical Education while the remaining 11 (33%) disagreed to the statement. In Ghana, most second cycle school Physical Education teachers are judged by their performance in sports, not the impact they make during their teaching of the subject. As a result most of the Physical Education teachers spend most of their teaching time on sports programmes and competitions making sure to achieve results to maintain their position in the school. There is therefore not much time for the teaching of P.E. The P.E teacher then becomes handicapped and frustrated when it comes to students' assessment, because he might have taught nothing for him to assess the students hence the P.E. teacher is put under stress.

From Table 1, majority of the respondents 25 (83%) agreed that "Lack of cooperation from colleagues teachers causes stress to the teaching of Physical Education". This is in line with French and Caplan (1973) view that poor relationship with co-workers is associated with the low trust, low supportiveness and low interest. According to them, research has suggested that when employees have poor relationships with co-workers they attribute the job stress they experience to their co-workers. Uncooperative colleague teachers may alter the school time table by pushing all Physical Education lessons to the afternoon where students feel reluctant to attend classes. This will affect Physical Education teaching. Secondly, uncooperative teachers may intentionally delay students for the next lesson if it is a Physical Education lesson. This will reduce the time allocated for Physical Education lessons. Again, uncooperative teachers may also influence students not to attend Physical Education lessons because the subject is not externally examinable. To buttress what French and Caplan (1973), have said, Cole and Walker (1989) have also identified six major categories of teacher stress of which conflict with colleague is one.

Twenty-one (70%) agreed that misconception about Physical Education causes stress in the teaching of Physical Education in Ghana. In the second cycle schools in Ghana, most students do not attend Physical Education classes regularly and also look down upon the Physical Education teachers as well as the subject, this is due to the misconceptions they have about the subject. This attitude of the students in most cases triggers stress inducing factors to the teacher.

## Conclusion

It is concluded from the findings of the study that additional responsibilities, overloaded time table, teachers' workload and lack of equipment and facilities to teach, lack of funds to work with, teachers expertise, lack of cooperation from colleague teachers and misconception about physical education causes stress in the teaching of Physical Education. As a result, teachers work output decline and this will affect the teaching and learning of Physical Education in second cycle schools in Cape Coast.

## Recommendation

It was recommended that periodic workshops on sources of stress are organized for second cycle Physical Education teachers.

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