

STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR TEACHERS: REFLECTION ON SCHOOL'S DAILY ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: This paper describes common features of stress for employers and specific problems faced by teachers. The focus of the discussion includes stress definition, various factors cause teacher stress, and the effect of stress for the teacher. After understanding all about stress and indication, it is hoped that teacher will be able to identify and diagnose it. The way how to anticipate and cope with the stress is discussed in this paper.

Key-words: stress, reflection, transformation.

STRESS on the job is something common for employee. Fletcher and Payne (1980) in Travers and Coopers (1996) estimated that between 8 and 10 per cent of the working people are suffering high level of stress. This modern disease could attack whomever and wherever people work. The cause of stress is also varied. It depends on how people react and the ability to identify the sign of it earlier. Something that stressful for a particular person could be fun and pleasant for another person. And it vices versa.

Recently psychologist and doctor have begun to study the problem of stress on the job more closely. They discovered that the most stressful professions are those that involve danger and extreme pressure and those that carry a lot of responsibility without much control. The result of study was surprising because teacher especially those who work in the inner city schools suffer more stress compared to any other professions. In fact it is in the top place out of ten jobs with high stress. Dunham (1983) in Coopers (1996) reported that between one-fifth and one third of teachers in England suffer great deal of stress. In the same book Coates and Thorsen (1976) also reported that based on survey conducted by the national Education Association revealed that 70 % US teachers experience moderate to considerable level of stress. It really makes sense since there have been a massive and huge change in education and society that relate with the role of teachers; For example, Curriculum innovation, the changing policy, evaluation, and supervision. All these had serious implications for the working environment of teachers. Teachers feel that they must deal with more pressure and burden in the schools. The pressure put on teachers does not only come from government but also from parents and community that demand more quality in education. As a result teachers must work harder and stay in the school longer than before. Teachers also often must bring the work papers home. Unfortunately the increased demand and pressure are not adequately accompanied by appropriate changes in facilities and training to equip them with more skill, knowledge and expertise to deal with these new demands.

In Indonesia, The conditions of teachers even getting worse. In one hand the government and society demand better quality of education, on the other hand the government pays less attention in the welfare of teachers. Many teachers must struggle with financial problems, as their salaries are not enough for monthly expenses. Teachers are paid less than any other professions. As a result there are many teachers who work part time in the private school or drive taxi to earn extra money. These conditions are very potential to trigger stress among the teachers.

However, there are many teachers who are unable to identify the precaution of stress. They become aware of it when it has been very acute. Teachers are also often reluctant to admit the extent to which they experience stress due to the fear that it may be seen as a weakness.

This paper therefore will attempt to discuss the stress in the teacher context and the implication of it towards teaching performance. It also will try to identify the signs of stress and possible ways to cope with it effectively. The writer tries to reflect his personal experiences over the stress he suffers during his service as a teacher in an Indonesian junior high school.

DEFINITION OF STRESS

Stress is a very common word or term used in daily conversation and discussion among people in the community either by professional or ordinary people. However, there are only few people who really understand what it is. There are also disagreements and arguments among researcher over the definition of stress it self. Among those varied definitions we still find similarities that could lead us to the same perception over the definition of stress.

Ward (1990) defines:

“ Stress is the physiological and psychological reaction which occurs when people perceive an imbalance between the level demand placed upon them, and their capability to meet those demands.”

The definition outlined by Ward emphasis on the need of balancing between duty, responsibility, task and the capability, capacity, and expertise possessed by people. When a teacher is given a task and responsibility beyond his or his power will create a conflict internally or externally. This conflict will accumulate from time to time, and in the end it will lead to the stress. The cases of stress suffered by teachers in the schools are often triggered by this situation. The demands from governments, parents, and society and even by the head teachers are not accompanied with adequate attention and efforts to empower the teachers. Another example that is suitable with the definition outlined by Ward is when parents expect too much from their children without understanding the power, intelligence and talents possessed by the children. As a result there are many children who fail or unable to meet their parent's expectation. Children often feel guilty and helpless. If the children are not strong to deal with these demands, they will get stress and frustrate.

Gray and Freeman (1987) Says that it is hard to define the term of stress as it is used so loosely in ordinary conversation. They prefer to define the words that closely

related with stress such as anxiety, depression, breakdown and burnout. By defining and understanding the words that related with the stress we will be able to comprehend the real definition of it as they are intertwined and interrelated. Furthermore, Gray and Freeman (1987) defines these words as follows:

“ Anxiety is a negative state that includes the feelings of tension, apprehension and worry. Then, Depression is a mood or state of mind in which we feel in low spirit, lacking in energy and hopeless. Breakdown is the extreme end of continuum of anxiety and failure to cope “ (Gray and Freeman, 1997).

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979a) in Cooper (1996) even define teacher stress specifically.

“Teacher stress is a response syndrome of negative affect (such as anger and Depression) usually accompanied by potentially pathogenic physiological changes (such as increased heart rate) resulting from aspects of teachers job and mediated by the perception that the demands made upon the teacher constitutes a threat to his or her self esteem or well-being and by coping mechanism activated to reduced Threat.”

In order to get better understanding on the term of stress, this paper does not contradict and argue the definition outlined above. Indeed, this paper will marry them into one definition. However, it is only the interpretation and perception of the writer after reading some literatures and relates to the experience of stress on his job. This paper defines stress as the state of mind as a result of physiological and psychological reaction when people receive a particular pressure or burden physically or mentally beyond their capability. The forms of stress are varied and it is very much based on the level of reaction. It might appear in the form of anxiety, depression, and breakdown.

CAUSES OF STRESS FOR TEACHERS

In order to be able to cope with stress successfully and effectively, we need to identify its cause and the implication toward our body and daily activities. In general, the cause of stress or stressors is varied. It is much more depend on how people perceive and respond the stress. A particular situation or event that might cause stress for us might not work for other people. Indeed, it might be fun and pleasant. However, stress suffered by teacher at schools share common stressors. Travers and Coopers (1996) report that teachers are being stressed by the workload, the behavior of the pupils, lacks of promotion prospect, unsatisfactory working conditions, poor relationship with colleagues, pupils and administrators, and a host of other problems. Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) in Cooper (1996) also found similar job stressors among the teachers. They are:

- Poor career structure
- Individual misbehaving student.
- Inadequate salary
- Inadequate disciplinary policy of school
- Noisy pupils

- Difficult classes
- Trying to maintain or uphold standard.
- Too much work to do.

Asteve(1989) in Cooper (1996) prefers to divide the stressor for teacher into two parts, They are primary factors and secondary factors. Primary factors refers to things which have direct effect on the teacher in the classroom (e.g. pupil behavior, lack of teaching resources) whereas the secondary factors refers to rapid changes over the role in the society and the increased demand placed upon teacher by the government through repeated innovation and policy. The stressors that belong to the secondary factors are:

- of the role of the teacher and of the traditional agents of social integration
- Increasing contradiction in the role of the teacher.
- Changes in the attitude of society towards the teacher.
- Uncertainty about the objectives of the education system and the furthering of knowledge.
- The deterioration of the image of the teacher

Cooper (1986b) prefers to see the causes of teacher stress from both inside and outside of work. We cannot talk only inside or outside stressors separately as they are closely related. The combinations of these two kinds of stressors are:

1. Stressors intrinsic to the actual job-i.e. Physical working condition and working load.
2. Role in the organization - i.e. role ambiguity and role conflict
3. Relationship at work.
4. Career development
5. Organizational structure and climate
6. Home and work interface.

After presenting some stressors that are outlined by some experts above, I would like to relate with my own experience in dealing with stress in the school. I have worked as a teacher for 10 years, however officially I have begun my career as a teacher for the state schools or as a civil servant for 4 years. During that period of time, I have experienced and suffered stress many times.

As far as my experience concerns, most of stress and pressure that I experienced were caused by primary factors such as misbehaving students in the classroom, number of students and classes that I have to teach.

Misbehaving students are very stressful for me as they often create troubles in the classroom by making noises and doing as they want in the classroom. Their behaviors are not only disturbing and distracting their fellow students' concentration but also disturbing the process of teaching and learning process as a whole in the classroom. As a result, the classroom turns to be chaos and disturbing the neighboring classroom. In the end teacher and students are not able to achieve teaching and learning target as written in the lesson plan.

I always try to be flexible and open to deal with the students who become troublemakers in the classroom. I asked them to sit down and discuss the problems to get the best solution for the class. When the problem is very serious and I am unable to find the resolution, I bring the case to the head teacher. However, the respond of the head teacher often even disappointed me. The head teacher, even blame me unable to manage the classroom effectively. Teacher always put in the disadvantage position. Teacher needs support from the head teacher to deal with troublemakers in the classroom. This situation is similar with the case in one of the school in Manchester as cited in Cooper (1996) from the Independent on Sunday, 24 march 1991.

“Teachers at the Bishop of Liandaffhigh School were on strike last week because of the governors refusal to expel three boys who are allegedly assaulted a girl. The governors suspended for four weeks. The case brings echoes of Poundswick School in Manchester. Staff who refused to teach the boys were suspended without pay for nine months.”

Another stressor that also still related with primary factors is the number of students and the classrooms. Every day I have to teach four different classes. Each class has 45 to 50 students in it. In other words, I have to teach for 6 hours and interact with 200 students. As a result I am not able to give attention to my students equally. I feel very tired and overloaded. The situation is even more stressful when the time of evaluation comes. I have to make questions sheets, marking and reporting the scores to the head teacher and parents.

In the evening, I have to teach in the private schools, as I need extra money to cover my monthly expenses. The amount of salary paid by the government is not enough for one month. It is not only happened to me, my fellow teachers also do the same thing. It is a common thing for teacher to do part time work after the school hour. All of these are very tiring and stressful.

The lack of resources is the commonest problem in Indonesian schools especially in the suburbs and villages. My school has undergone the shortage of teaching staff and teaching facilities such as laboratory, books and audio visual aids. Therefore, during the first year of my arrival in this school, I also teach the subject or lesson that is not my subject expertise. Consequently, I had to study hard preparing the lesson the night before. It is really times consuming and makes me stress. Before entering the classroom, I always get nervous and worry. I am afraid that I could not answer the questions from the students because it will make me embarrassed and lost face in front of my students.

As a new teacher, I tried hard to implement the new teaching approach as I learned in the university. I have a strong commitment to keep standard in my teaching quality. Unfortunately, both the head teacher and fellow teachers do not support these efforts. The lack of resources also makes these very difficult to implement. My fellow teachers even blamed me to be a poser. This working climate also contributes stress to me.

THE EFFECTS OF STRESS FOR TEACHER

In general, stress on the job results in lower productivity and performance, unnecessary employee sick leave, and higher medical cost. The stress does not only affect a company or an organization but also an individual personally. How much it affects the organization and the individual is heavily depends on to what extent the individual reacts and responds to stress.

For many people, Stress is always viewed as something negative and destructive. For these types of people stress will result in the low performance and motivation over the job in the office. However, there are also few people that view stress differently. They assume stress a positive thing that enhances the performance and productivity. It also could boost the motivation and spirit in the office. Wards (1993) states that everyone needs a certain level of pressure to perform well as, it provides the stimulation necessary to achieve creativity and innovation, and without sufficient pressure our performance will be restricted. On the contrary, when stress is faced with insufficient resources will become very unproductive because when we feel anxious, tense and nervous, our energy is sapped and our perspective on live becomes distorted.

For teachers, Stress could influence the quality of their teaching performances. The level of absenteeism increases, as they often get ill. Brewer (1976) in Travers and Cooper (1996) found that poor health is a major cause of absenteeism. The case in Indonesian school is even more saddened, as there is lack of teachers in the school. If one of the teachers is absent, the students will be abandoned, as there is often no substitution.

At the extreme level, stress will decrease the motivation and spirit of teacher to teach. In the end it will trigger their intention to retire earlier or quit from school.

THE WARNING SIGNS OF STRESS

In order to manage stress effectively and successfully, we need to know the warning signs of it earlier. The symptoms of stress are almost the same between one to another. Therefore, people need to understand themselves well mentally and physically. They must be fully aware even a minor changing within their body.

There are many warning signs of stress, firstly these warning signs are mild and do not really disturb our activities, However they will become more severe if people do not succeed in making proper action dealing with them or if people fail to recognized their emerging. Therefore, It is very important to recognize what are happening in our body, even to minor changes.

The symptoms of stress could be divided into three major categories. (Mills, 1995). They are Physical signs, mental or emotional signs and Behavioral signs. Physical signs are anything that happens to our body as a result of stress. For example, frequent headaches, chest pains, trembling hands, muscular pains especially in back, shoulders and neck. Whereas emotional signs are anything related with emotion and feeling inside. They are also referring to anything that related to the capability to use our brain. For example, losing interest and motivation in teaching, marking and making preparation, losing sense of humor, losing concentration easily, Taking offence easily and over reacting. Behavioural signs are anything related with the way we conduct ourselves: what we do, how we do it, what we say, how we say it.

HOW TO COPE STRESS

In order to cope with stress effectively, we need to identify and develop some strategies that are suitable for us. Some strategies might work for us but might not for others. Therefore, we need to select the method and strategies that best match with our personality and situation. The ability to develop and adopt appropriate strategies in managing stress will lessen the impact of stress.

Ward (1990) suggests some techniques that could be applied in coping with stress. They are:

- Releasing emotion
- Emotional distance
- Emotional support
- Emotional control
- Diet, rest, exercise
- Balanced body
- Relaxation
- Positive stance
- Realistic expectation
- Self-management.

Travers and Cooper (1996) outlined four major stress management techniques that could be applied individually. They are:

- Exercise
Physical exercises are viewed as the practical and contemporary way to fight stress. For example, aerobic exercise, walking, running and sporting games. It is cheap, easy and fun to do. People also could do it anywhere and anytime. Research on physical exercise shows the positive impact toward stress management. Ismail and Trachtman (1973) in Travers and Coopers (1996) states that systematic and regular exercise could improve mental function by increasing blood circulation to the brain, which enhances the availability of glucose and also improve the distribution and transportation of oxygen. Furthermore, during or after doing exercise, electrical activity to the muscles will be reduced and it may lead to a relaxed state or reduced Anxiety State.
- Relaxation
Relaxation also could be a very good alternative to fight the stress. However, It is little bit difficult to do, as it requires some skills and patience. Relaxation could be done in various ways such as Yoga, meditation, and relaxation tapes, engaging in an absorbing hobby or past time and Baths.

Meditation could be done in two ways, by focusing on our breathing and by focusing on a word or mantra. Ward (1996) states that out of existing techniques,

meditation is probably the most powerful and effective way for dealing with stress. Recent research suggested that meditation could expand the function of brain by encouraging a balance between the left side and the right side of the brain.

- Biofeedback
It is also a technique that could be applied individually. It requires us to control the function of our body voluntarily such as heart rate, stomach acidity and blood pressure.
- Cognitive technique.
Although Travers and Coopers only suggest four techniques, they also cover ten techniques outlined by Ward.

If I begin to feel something wrong with my body, I will try to find out the cause and take some necessary action to cope it. The commonest things that I do are Exercise and relaxation. However, when they do not work effectively, then I apply another techniques as suggested by Travers and Coopers. Kind of exercises that I like to do are hiking and plying badminton. I get two advantages from hiking, It does not only make my body fit, but also freshen my mind because I could enjoy the beauty of nature along the track. It also very cheap and does not require a special skill.

I also like to do meditation by focusing a single word that I believe have a strong power in my religion. There are some stages and conditions that we should give close attention in order to give significant affect to stress that we experience. Ward (1996) suggest the following stages:

- Choose a special time when we could spend 20 minutes without any disturbance.
- Choose the place that is calm and peace that enable us to relax comfortably.
- Choose a position that suitable for us, it could be lying flat on the floor, sitting up right on a hardback chair or sitting cross legged on the chair.
- Wait until we are really ready to start.
- Occupy the mind by repeating our chosen word.
- Simply repeat the mantra each breath and reject any other thoughts that disturb.

This technique needs to be done regularly in order to get benefits from its effects. The oftener we do the more skillful we are. Some stages above are also suggested by the stress foundation in Mills (1995).

CONCLUSSION

Stress is a common disease suffered by employee at work including teachers. Research shows that Teachers who teach in the inner city schools suffer more stress compared to other professions. Unfortunately, Many teachers are reluctant to admit that they suffer from stress as it is often regarded as a weakness.

Teacher stress is often triggered by the increased demands and responsibility placed upon them by the government and society. Ironically, the increased demands are not accompanied with sufficient resources and capability. The government still pays less attention on the teacher's welfare. As a result, the teachers often fail to meet these demands. In the end, teachers feel frustrate and get stress. Another potential stressor for

teachers is the great deal amount of teaching activities such as preparation, marking, and dealing with misbehaves students.

The effect of stress is varied among the teachers. It is much more depend on how they view and react toward the stress. Stress is often viewed negatively. It effects people physically and mentally. Consequently it will lead to low motivation and spirit in the office. For the company or organization it will effect the level of productivity and quality. However, some people also view stress positively. They face stress as a challenge instead of threat. As it is viewed as challenge, it could even generate more energy in the body to meet the demand placed upon them.

The ability of teacher to identify the symptoms or the signs of stress as early as possible is very important to lessen the negative impact of stress. It enables teacher to take proper actions immediately. Teachers also need to develop techniques and methods for managing stress effectively. As people responds to stress differently, they must be able to select techniques that suitable for themselves.

In order to increase the level of awareness toward the effects of stress and its existence in the life of teacher, they need to change the existing view over the stress among them. Stress does not mean the sign of weakness incompetence as stated by Hoyland (1990) in Coopers (1996).

“ The first important step for education sector management to recognize that stress is not an indication of weakness or incompetence “

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