

2011-12-12

# A Qualitative Study of Workplace Stress and Coping in Secondary Teachers in Ireland

Robert A. Kerr

Jessica Breen

Mary Delaney

Claire Kelly

Kristen Miller

---

## Recommended Citation

Kerr, Robert A.; Breen, Jessica; Delaney, Mary; Kelly, Claire; and Miller, Kristen (2011) "A Qualitative Study of Workplace Stress and Coping in Secondary Teachers in Ireland," *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 3.  
Available at: <http://arrow.dit.ie/ijass/vol11/iss1/3>

## **A qualitative study of workplace stress and coping in secondary teachers in Ireland**

Robert A. Kerr, Jessica Breen, Mary Delaney, Claire Kelly & Kristin Miller  
rasputin@eircom.net

The authors of this paper were students in Trinity College, Dublin, on the MSc (Applied Social Research) course from 2005 to 2006. Robert Kerr has previously worked as a secondary teacher and a secondary principal in Ireland. He now works as an independent researcher.

© Copyright Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies ISSN 1393-7022  
Vol. 11(1), 2011, 27-38

### **Abstract**

Teacher stress has received scant attention in Ireland. This study examines teachers' perceptions of their daily stresses and how they attempt to cope with such situations. Interviews were conducted with fifteen secondary teachers from a variety of school types in eastern Ireland. The teachers showed great concern for their students, with some being prepared to ignore school guidelines in order to deal with their pupils' needs. Several particularly stressful factors were identified, including the maintenance of boundaries (especially when dealing with students with personal problems), dealing with disruptive student behaviour, and the heavy workload. These stresses closely mirrored those described in international literature. Levels of stress and methods of dealing with stress varied widely among the sample, with primary support coming from their colleagues. One strong finding was the lack of suitable training and preparation felt by the participants, particularly in methods of dealing with sensitive and stressful situations in pupils, and in appropriate means of reaction to student misbehaviour. It is recommended that teacher-training courses include explicit training in dealing with such situations.

Keywords: Stress, Secondary Teacher, Coping, Teacher Training

### **Introduction**

In Ireland the secondary teacher's workload has changed and increased considerably in the past twenty years (Parsons, 2005). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2004) has called for greater public understanding and debate into these changes, which are widely recognised to be a source of stress for teachers (Chaplain, 2008; Dunham and Varma, 1998; Kyriacou, 2001; Meijer, 2007). Secondary teachers themselves are widely recognised to be subject to stress in their daily work (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978; Troman, 2000; Wiley, 2000); however, currently there is no national stress management programme for teachers in this country. This paper describes research designed to answer the following questions about secondary teachers in Ireland:

1. What are their principal causes of workplace stress?
2. What are their main coping mechanisms?
3. How well have they been prepared to deal with stress?
4. What recommendations can be made for improvements?

Traditionally, stress and depression have been stigmatic topics in Irish society (Anonymous, 2010; Boyan, 2008; Wolpert, 2001). However, in the past twenty years there has been more open public discussion on these issues, particularly in light of the high suicide rate among young men and adolescent males. The National Suicide Review Group (2005) recommended the introduction of training programmes for all teachers to help with mental health promotion in

schools and to assist teachers to respond to crises in students, but this has not yet happened. Furthermore, the report made no mention of stress among the teachers themselves. This paper considers some of the relevant literature in this area and then describes how the above questions were examined with a selected group of secondary teachers.

### **Literature review**

Although it is clear that stress is a genuine problem for teachers in Ireland, little research appears to have been conducted. However, there is a substantial body of such research in the international arena. Montgomery and Rupp (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 65 papers from 1998 to 2003 that dealt with causes and effects of teacher stress and they were able to conclude that poor coping skills were among the principal factors that cause daily stress to become distress. This literature review considers stress and coping mechanisms for teachers.

#### **Stress in teachers**

The current use of the term “stress” originates from Selye’s 1936 definition as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it” (Selye, 1973), though later he acknowledged that no definition could comprehensively describe a qualitative phenomenon such as stress (Selye, 1976). This difficulty persists, with widely varying definitions where stress is the effect rather than the cause. Both Baum (1990) and Derogatis (1987) describe stress in terms of an uncomfortable emotional experience or feeling of pressure influenced by a person’s personality, environment and emotional response. It is generally agreed that stress involves discomfort and pressure, though Lazarus and Folkman (1984) emphasise that this is both highly variable and subjective.

Teaching is often described as a vocation (Durka, 2002; Huebner, 1992), with the teacher’s role being far more complex than merely transferring information effectively. Many writers identify disruptive pupil behaviour as the greatest stress for teachers, challenging their control and threatening the boundaries they have established (Boyle, Borg, Falzon and Baglioni, 1995; Tolker and Feitler, 1986). Stresses such as this can adversely affect a teacher’s emotional health and classroom effectiveness (Blasé, 1986; Greenwood, Olenjnik and Parkay, 1990; Yoon, 2002). Chaplain (2008) found differences in the way male and female teachers viewed disruptive behaviour, and Kyriacou (2001) identified bad behaviour and heavy workload as key stressors for secondary teachers, again acknowledging that stress is very subjective.

#### **Coping mechanisms for teachers**

Much has been written about how teachers cope with stress (Dunham, 1992; Rogers, 1996). Dunham and Varma (1998) suggest that stress can be reduced by developing new skills or by diverting attention through humour or physical activity. To cope under difficult conditions, teachers require both organisational and personal support, including training in interpersonal problem solving and skills to deal with stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) state that continual physical and mental adaptation are required to cope satisfactorily with demanding situations. Poor coping mechanisms have long been identified as a primary cause of stress (Head, 1996; Montgomery and Rupp, 2005). Good coping skills include modifying thought processes, learning problem-focused strategies (such as new skills in addressing stress), and emotion-focused strategies (releasing pent-up feelings through exercise, talking or meditation) (Admiraal, Korthagen, and Wubbels, 2000; Chan, 1998; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Chan (1998) identified problem management as the best initial approach to stress, and Arikewuyo (2004) found that teachers tend towards active management of stressful problems, separating home life mentally from work. Borg and Riding (1991) and Bowers (2004) found

teachers with poorer coping skills had more frequent absences from work and were more likely to leave the profession. From a longitudinal study in Finland, Salo (1995) concluded that stress clearly accumulates throughout a school term, although coping styles and subsequent stress levels varied widely among the participants. The literature also indicates that it is the continuous stream of daily stresses that can cause the biggest threat to a teacher's mood, rather than episodic major stressors (Admiraal, Korthagen, and Wubbels, 2000; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

## **Methodology**

### **Research approach**

Since reaction to stress is subjective, any investigation into stress is best treated qualitatively through narratives, enabling an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (Bryman, 2004; Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). Thus unstructured in-depth interviews were the chosen method for this research. The interview schedule contained questions and topics, including experiences of workplace stress, reactions to stressors, techniques for coping with stresses, and training received for coping with stress in themselves or their pupils. This schedule was amended several times following five pilot interviews. The authors also agreed important ethical considerations such as breach of confidence by a participant (e.g. naming a pupil who had made a sexual disclosure) and how to react if a participant became emotionally upset (e.g. dealing with a student suicide or similar matter).

### **Sample selection**

It was decided to aim for breadth and balance in a non-random sample of teachers by choosing different types of secondary school. This limited the potential for generalising results. Ten schools in the greater Dublin area, with a total teaching force of around 400, were chosen to include boys' and girls' schools and a spread of socio-economic designation (SED) of the school catchment area. The principals of these schools helped assign the SED for their area and participants were sought from each staff group. The final selection of 15 teachers had a good balance for sex (eight male, seven female) and SED, with five schools each from affluent areas, lower middle-class areas and disadvantaged areas. The mean age of participants was 37 years (range 22-65) and the mean teaching experience was 13 years (range 1-40). Five of the teachers taught in all-boys schools, five in all-girls schools and five in coeducational schools. Eight taught arts subjects (history, geography, languages) and the remaining seven taught mainly sciences (including mathematics).

### **Data collection**

Each interview lasted approximately ninety minutes (as per Kvale, 1996), giving participants sufficient time to expand on any matters they chose. The interview was tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the interviewer (removing all identifiable references) as soon as possible after its completion. For each interview a contact sheet was completed, outlining and organising major themes and findings and making general notes on the participant's body language and any asides made outside the interview itself. The interviews took place over a two-month period in spring 2006, during which time the authors met regularly to discuss key topics arising from the research, including boundary issues, classroom management, workload, and support structures. These themes were then used as the basis for the subsequent analysis.

## **Results**

The results are described using the major factors identified in the interviews – boundaries, classroom management, workload, and support structures. No clear associations were observed between type of stress and sex of teacher, subject(s) taught or socio-economic designation.

However, a weak link was noted between age of participant and citing pupil disruption as a stress in their daily work.

### Boundaries

All 15 participants spoke of differences between official boundaries with pupils (contractual, school policy, legal) and experienced boundaries. Each saw school policy as being “strict” or “moderately strict” and more reserved than the actual practice, typically describing their boundaries as “intermediate” or “open”. This led to inevitable inner conflict:

*Sometimes there's a pupil who's clearly upset about something and you know you could help by having a private chat, but you'd be a bit afraid to in case someone said something stupid about you. Yet you'd be afraid not to in case it's serious. It's a tough choice and I don't always get it right.*

This dilemma was most pronounced in the three teachers who were very open with their personal boundaries in schools they described as strict.

Eleven participants spoke of the constant role conflict between imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes and the more personal, caring side:

*In reality all classes are mixed ability, so some pupils are ready to fly ahead with one topic while others are struggling. I hate leaving anyone behind. I really want to help them, but there isn't always the time.*

The difficulties faced in offering pupils personal support while staying inside official boundaries was a major problem, cited by twelve participants (generally those with more open boundaries), and when dealing with students' personal difficulties they often reported methods that differed significantly from the official protocols:

*Sometimes you'd ask a student to stay behind for a minute after class, even though you know you're not meant to. Then, if they open up to you, you have to decide when to stop, even though you just want to help.*

Four teachers mentioned their frustration with the cumbersome nature of the official protocol:

*You can report depression. If there's an incident, you have to write it down, noting the date and time. Then it gets passed on to a class tutor who then passes it on to the year head who then passes onto the vice principal and then may have to pass it on to the principal or even the Gardaí.*

Five of the participants spoke of serious personal situations for their pupils that had arisen during conversations, including an abortion (kept secret from classmates), two cases of physical or sexual abuse in the home, and two pupil suicides (one at home and one in the school). None of these teachers felt adequately prepared to deal with such student distress.

Participants who described their role in terms of formality, authority, deliverance of facts to pupils, maintenance of good order in the classroom, their students' academic needs, adherence to protocol and respect for students' privacy were said to have “strict” boundaries. Those who spoke of the emotional needs of their students, a high concern for students' personal well-being, involvement in extracurricular activities and a pastoral role in their pupils' lives were said to

have more fluid boundaries. Although most teachers said they had fairly strict boundaries, their descriptions of their daily work indicated a greater degree of flexibility. Some participants felt that strict boundaries and protocols create a safe working and learning environment, but others found students becoming alienated if the teacher is not obviously caring: “I would advise a teacher to have that warmth that will show concern to the pupils,” said one. Thus, while all the teachers agreed about their concern for both pedagogy and pupil welfare, they differed widely in how this was displayed. Those with stricter boundaries focused on school policy and legal issues and tended to refer problem pupils to a year head or vice-principal, whereas those with more open boundaries tended to tackle issues themselves, only referring pupils in extreme cases.

Slightly more than half the sample cited this conflict between official and personal boundaries as stressful. While acknowledging that there are lines that shouldn't be crossed, these teachers showed loose personal boundaries, including personal conversations with students:

*I try not to become too personally involved. I know that some people are better able or qualified to deal with them, but I'm always aware of pupils' mood swings and when I see cause for concern I notify the appropriate people, though sometimes you can deal with it yourself. It's difficult; it's a very individual type of thing.*

This dilemma is often resolved through *ad hoc* methods. Many felt unsure of official protocols or believed they could sort out issues without the bureaucracy: “Nobody teaches you certain things,” said one. “A lot of your job comes from common sense so you need to have a bit of cop-on. Some people have that and some people don't.” As another remarked, “If a student's a bit down, a little word in their ear lets them know you're there if they want you.” These comments show how informal the support process for pupils can be.

On the other hand, fear of legal reprisals prompted a few teachers to report worrisome behaviour to a senior colleague immediately. One example:

*You have to cover yourself. You need to share problems, I think. If I kept something like suicide or abortion to myself and, God forbid, something happened, it'd be on my shoulders, why didn't I do more, so for the legality of things and quite often from an educational point of view, you'd need to pass it on to someone, someone who would know what to do better than I would.*

One teacher spoke of his dilemma when dealing with a potential suicide, trying to respect the privacy of the student while simultaneously protecting someone at high risk. Here, the official protocol acted as a major support by taking away personal responsibility.

Almost all participants spoke of pressures on pupils to do well in state examinations and achieve entry points for third level courses, along with personal difficulties at home or in relationships with friends or romantic/sexual partners. Younger teachers were more comfortable talking with pupils about personal issues, but all participants spoke of personal job satisfaction, especially from interactions with their pupils. While acknowledging that it was a stressful and demanding job, which required a good sense of humour, enthusiasm and energy, teachers of all ages and in all types of school saw teaching as a worthwhile career. Indeed, almost unanimously they said they would encourage anyone considering a career in teaching.

Classroom management

The participants were clearly aware that stresses and keeping control in the classroom at all times might adversely affect their performance. “You just have to be on top of everything,” said one. “You can’t be tired or have an off day or feel a bit unwell or the pupils will eat you alive.” In their narratives ten teachers highlighted classroom management as very stressful, particularly with aggressively disruptive students. Three specifically bemoaned the lack of clear guidelines, particularly when faced with problems stemming from the home, including lack of parental support or unreasonable parental demands. As one teacher said:

*At times I think I’m more of a social worker than a teacher, with the amount of difficulties these kids bring in from outside. In this school I think at least 75 to 80 per cent of problems are coming from the home.*

The lack of any job description for teachers was also mentioned, although it was acknowledged that the very nature of teaching involves constantly dealing with varied and unpredictable issues. “Teenagers by their very nature are moody,” said one teacher. Another said:

*The classroom is a battleground, where students bring their baggage, and teachers bring their baggage, and the classroom is the cauldron. The result isn’t always pretty.*

One man was distressed hearing senior male pupils misbehave for a female teacher in the adjoining classroom, not knowing whether or not to intervene, and a woman said she was particularly stressed when several disruptive students were in the same class. Others were constantly aware of the potential for disaster if pupil aggression turns into open hostility:

*You know in your head that your teaching is not going to be great, but you hope that the pupil will back down without a confrontation. It takes so much out of you.*

*Mostly I’m fine, but sometimes I begin to panic inside about what would happen if I lost control. I love science and I try to teach it practically, but how would I cope if one of the girls threw acid over another? Would I be to blame?*

Direct abuse – both physical and verbal – was also raised by a couple of the teachers, with one reporting an attack by a student that had left another teacher hospitalised for a few days. One felt that single-parent families produced disruptive children; three believed that problems often arose in the classroom because the teachers had been “kept in the dark” about problems in the home; and one found it particularly stressful passing information about disruptive students to the principal “because I know he’ll think I’m not capable of handling some pupils, but I have to because that’s the rule.” One teacher spoke of the stress when tensions arose because a relationship between two pupils had gone sour and other pupils were taking sides.

Negative comments about major reductions in parental involvement and support for their children’s education were made by three older participants. Three others also decried recent increases in materialism and litigiousness, claiming these had made their work much more stressful, and a further three spoke of reduced parental support for teachers of Irish or religion. Some were concerned that there was little they could do to reprimand misbehaving pupils in a way that was both firm but fair. One participant bemoaned:

*When I started teaching parents used to look up to me, even though I was younger than they were. If I said Johnny had to do more homework they saw to it that he did, and it usually worked out well. Nowadays, things are different. One parent said to me at a parent-teacher meeting recently, 'You're the teacher. You sort it out.'*

The feeling was that the resulting stress and de-motivation produced yet more pupil discipline problems.

Two participants were irked that the legal protections for children did not extend to teachers, leaving them feeling vulnerable in a classroom full of physically strong adolescents. Although both these teachers accepted the rationale behind standard protocol, one said:

*The rules are all about what we shouldn't do. Nowhere does it say how we CAN deal with personal, private student problems.*

Two older teachers believed that students are offered too much protection, becoming too aware of their rights but not enough of their duties. One specific difficulty mentioned by a sports teacher was the legal ramifications of giving first aid to a student injured while playing sports or in the playground.

#### Workload

Most participants felt the public saw their job as 'under-worked and overpaid', with short days and long holidays, but the reality of the hidden workload was very stressful. One struggled to get things done in spite of careful planning:

*There just isn't time; there isn't physically time in the day to deal with everything. And, far from relieving stress, break times and lunch times can be some of the most stressful times.*

Substantial increases in bureaucracy and the quantity of work throughout the school year combined to leave many teachers feeling demoralised and bitter about being undervalued.

Four participants particularly mentioned mixed ability classes as major stressors because of the significant increase in workload required, and two spoke of the stress from working late, bringing work home, and the constant pressure of having to plan ahead.

#### Support structures

Thirteen of the participants said teaching colleagues were their biggest support, turning to them for help with any issue. Comments were typically positive:

*We're all there for each other. We sort out our problems and there's always somebody there. We get on well that way.*

*The teachers are great, just giving me advice. It's brilliant. Everyone sticks together. Everyone supports everyone.  
If you've got a good working relationship with other teachers it's quite effective. You're among friends.*

However, a few gave comments about insensitive colleagues. For example:



*People have a tendency to talk. I see them in the staff room and that really vexes me. Maybe they're laughing about a particular situation for a student that I don't find funny.*

Yet others were ambivalent, receiving high levels of support from some teachers but finding relations with others “very difficult”. One senior teacher found relations with colleagues had worsened since being promoted, with friendliness and supportiveness being replaced by caution.

It is clear that teachers look first to other teachers when they feel stressed but, although twelve teachers spoke of their general respect for their principals, none felt comfortable admitting to him/her any difficulties or stress they might be experiencing. However, they were happy to report disruptive students. In these cases the teacher expected the principal to remove the cause of stress so they could “get on with the business of teaching”. Five participants listed families, friends, and outside school activities as helpful supports.

Since all permanent teachers in Ireland undergo professional training – generally the Higher Diploma in Education (HDipEd) – it might be hoped that this would prepare them for dealing with workplace stress. However, the seven participants who specifically mentioned this course were uniformly negative in their comments, saying it was “useless in almost all aspects” and “a wasted opportunity for introducing teachers to the real experience of teaching”. Furthermore, they said it did not provide them with any support mechanisms for stress, either in themselves or their pupils. Comments, which were very similar for all these teachers, included:

*We didn't get any training in the HDipEd for dealing with situations like this. You just learn by experience. The stuff we were told in college doesn't work. (12 years teaching)*

*The training I received on the HDipEd was not appropriate for the type of job I'm doing. You only learn when you start teaching. (7 years teaching)*

*Is there anything from our teacher training that taught us how to deal with stuff like this? No, nothing at all! (3 years teaching)*

A clear picture emerges here of teachers seeking solutions to problems from their peers. This was independent of size of school, socio-economic designation, age, sex and subject taught. Contrasting comments from two teachers in the same school suggest that personality is the major factor in difference of support from colleagues.

All the participants (except one) saw their role as including the relief of stress in their students. For example:

*The more you allow kids to talk about bullying and such like, the more you can listen to their thoughts. Sometimes some of the things that kids say to you are horrifying.*

Specific issues mentioned here by the teachers included rape, abuse in the home, self-harm and other indications of mental ill health:

*You're spending more time with them than their parents are. You are a friend as well to a certain degree. Sometimes you're the shoulder to cry on if they need to talk to somebody about something that they're not able to speak to a parent about.*

*I talk to the pupils outside the classroom, as people, as opposed to 'Don't be doing this, don't be doing that'. I have a lot of dealings with them.*

*I knew when I came into teaching that there'd be disruptive pupils and I felt reasonably well able to cope with that, but I had no idea I would be faced with pupils – both boys and girls and of all ages – who were coming into school trying to have a normal existence in the face of unbelievable problems. I had no preparation for this at all. I've had to learn as I go. I'm driving by the seat of my pants here, and sometimes it scares me half to death.*

According to these teachers, the only attention given to such matters in formal training courses was a legal warning about being alone with a pupil. This caused difficulties for some teachers when trying to deal with problems:

*There are some lads I'd trust a hundred percent, but I'd be wary of other pupils. I feel I couldn't trust them, so instead of helping them out I stay well clear of them. I know it isn't fair, but what can I do?*

Dealing with student problems is clearly a major concern for some teachers who feel uncomfortable when confronted with sensitive matters such as family issues, relationships or mental health. None of the participants identified professional ways of dealing with such stresses, apart from discussions with colleagues.

Each of the nine teachers with less than twelve years' experience spoke of their shock when they realised how much discipline, planning and stress was involved in teaching. This was particularly true of teaching in the early weeks of the school year before the start of the HDipEd course. Indeed a couple of the cohort had taught for a year without any qualification. Most of the sample spoke of how they had loved school as pupils and had been well behaved and so were not really expecting disruption from pupils who felt otherwise. One participant said: "You have to hit the ground running. You really don't have time to think in the classroom. It can be exhausting." Another described the teaching term as "being on a roller coaster, with the end of the ride being your next holiday, your next escape." Many of the participants had expected their teacher training courses to prepare them for the real situation.

In summary, the participants identified as major stressors in teaching:

- (i) Maintaining appropriate boundaries, particularly when dealing sympathetically with pupils' personal problems;
- (ii) Classroom management, especially when the class includes one or more disruptive pupils; and
- (iii) Total workload, condensed into the school year, resulting in high volumes of work during term time.

The most commonly mentioned coping mechanisms for stress included:

- (i) Discussing issues with colleagues;
- (ii) Passing on certain problems to the principal or a senior teacher; and

- (iii) Diversion techniques, such as exercise or socialising.

None of the participants felt in any way prepared to cope with these stresses, and almost half of them specifically mentioned the HDipEd as a missed opportunity in this regard.

### **Discussion**

The fifteen narratives showed high levels of both internal consistency and agreement with international literature. Given the small sample size this equivalence is remarkable. However, it is not clear whether this might be true of a wider sample.

Most of the teachers were keen to include pastoral care of pupils in their daily work alongside the pedagogic role, but this caused some stress. While most of the participants had been strongly advised not to be alone with a pupil, in almost every case teachers occasionally ignored that advice, putting themselves in potentially awkward positions just to help a student. Offering support while respecting pupil privacy was likened to walking a tightrope untrained, especially when faced with extreme situations such as abortion or suicide. The dilemma between personal involvement and reporting to a superior was not easy and resolution depended on both context and the individual, particularly the teacher's own boundaries. No major differences in this regard were found for sex of teacher, subject area taught or the socio-economic designation of the school.

The majority of a teacher's working time is spent being 'in charge', making decisions about the content and method of the teaching, maintaining classroom discipline, stimulating the interests of the pupils and dealing daily with the many issues that arise. For this sample pupil discipline was the single biggest stress, including increasing levels of aggression among both boys and girls and diminishing support from parents for disciplinary action. In this regard most participants felt that their teacher training courses had not prepared them adequately to deal with indiscipline, ranging from passive disobedience to outright physical violence.

Over the past twenty years the amount of bureaucracy demanded of teachers has increased significantly. However, few of the participants cited this as a stress and no teacher said they had been unprepared for the workload. High volumes of work during the school term were both expected and accepted, and this seems to have reduced this stress to manageable proportions.

It appears from the results that mutual support and teamwork are characteristic of most teaching staffs, although a few participants referred to unhelpful colleagues. For serious problems, teachers are protected by school policies, and they found it a great relief to be able to pass major issues to someone higher. However, other potential sources of support are notable by their omission. These include teacher unions, the law (with some teachers feeling pupils had more protection than them), training courses and, especially, the HDipEd.

Many spoke very negatively about the preparation they had received for teaching in the HDipEd course. They felt these courses contained little or no preparation for dealing with seriously disruptive students and absolutely nothing at all for methods of handling situations where pupils are stressed or mentally ill. It is concerning that not even one of the teachers had found the HDipEd to have any use in a real classroom. This perceived lack of professional support and appropriate pre-job training is found in all the subgroups of this sample – sex, age, subject area, and school area.

On the other hand, it is clear that these teachers love their jobs, particularly being in front of a class and interacting with students. Yet the job they take on daily is not just pure pedagogy but an integration of many different tasks, and almost all the participants clearly identified more active support, encouragement and training in dealing with modern youth as their most urgent requirement.

### Conclusions

The stresses identified by these teachers are similar to those found in the literature, including the establishment and maintenance of professional and personal boundaries, the demands made by recalcitrant pupils, their daily workload, and having to be in control at all times in front of the pupils, where they must act the role of the supportive and encouraging teacher, regardless of personal circumstances on the day.

Dealing directly with a stress generally involved support from other teachers in the school, with support in more serious situations coming from the principal. Indirect dealing with stressors took the form of physical exercise or socialising with friends or family.

The most consistent negative aspect of the narratives was the teachers' belief that they had not been prepared adequately by the HDipEd for the reality of classroom teaching. In particular, this included how to maintain professional boundaries when trying to deal with personal issues for pupils, how to deal with pupil misbehaviour, and how to handle stress (both in themselves and their students). It is apparent that these teachers do not feel sufficiently skilled in these areas but learn as they progress through their careers.

### Recommendations

It is strongly recommended that all teacher-training courses include modules on the establishment and maintenance of appropriate professional boundaries when dealing with pupils, methods of dealing with serious pupil misbehaviour, and methods of dealing with stress.

It is also recommended that a similar study be carried out with a much larger and more representative sample, to include a consideration of teachers' personalities and any link between this and stress, resilience to stress, and methods of dealing with stress.

### References

- Admiraal, W. F., Korthagen, F. A. J., and Wubbels, T. (2000). Effects of student teachers' coping behaviour. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70, 33-52.
- Anonymous. (2010). Men embarrassed about depression. *Irish Medical Times*, July 5, 2010.
- Arikewuyo, M. O. (2004). Stress management strategies of secondary school teachers in Nigeria. *Educational Research*, 46(2), 195-207.
- Baum, A. (1990). Stress, intrusive imagery, and chronic distress. *Health Psychology*, 9(6), 653-675.
- Blasé, J.J. (1986). A qualitative analysis of teacher stress: Consequences for performance. *American Educational Research Journal*, 23 (1): 13- 40.
- Borg, M. G. and Riding, R. J. (1991). Occupational stress and satisfaction in teaching. *British Educational Research Journal*, 17(3), 263 -281.
- Bowers, T. (2004). Stress, teaching and teacher health. *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 32(3), 73-80.
- Boyan, E. (2008). *Mind yourself: The Lundbeck Mental Health Barometer*. Dublin: Lundbeck Ireland Ltd.
- Boyle, G. J., Borg, M. G., Falzon, J. M., and Baglioni, A. J. (1995). A structural model of the dimensions of teachers' stress. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 65(1), 49-67.
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social research methods, 2nd edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Chan, D. W. (1998). Stress, coping strategies, and psychological distress among secondary teachers in Hong Kong. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35(1), 145-163.
- Chaplain, R. P. (2008). Stress and psychological distress among trainee secondary teachers in England. *Educational Psychology*, 28(2), 195-209.
- Department of Education and Skills. (2010). *Education statistics 2009/2010*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Derogatis, L. R. (1987). The Derogatis stress profile (DSP): Quantification of psychological stress. *Advances in Psychosomatic Medicine*, 17, 30-54.
- Dunham, J. (1992). *Stress in teaching, 2nd edition*. London: Routledge.
- Dunham, J. and Varma, V. (1998). *Stress in teachers: Past, present and future*. London: Whurr Publishers Ltd.
- Durka, G. (2002). *The teacher's calling: A spirituality for those who teach*. New Jersey: Paulist Press.
- Greenwood, G. E., Olenjik, S. F., and Parkay, F. W. (1990). Relationships between four teachers efficacy belief patterns and selected teacher characteristics. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 23(2), 102-106.
- Gubrium, J. and Holstein, J. (1997). *The new language of qualitative method*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Head, J. (1996). Stress and the postgraduate secondary school trainee teacher: A British case study. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 22(1), 71-84.
- Huebner, D. E. (1992). *The vocation of teaching in making sense of uncertain craft*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: Directions for future research. *Educational Review*, 53(1), 27- 35.
- Lazarus, R. S. & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Meijer, J. (2007). Correlates of student stress in secondary education. *Educational Research*, 49(1), 21-35.
- Montgomery, C. and Rupp, A. A. (2005). *A Meta-analysis for exploring the diverse causes and effects of stress in teachers*. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 28(3), 458-486.
- National Suicide Review Group. (2005). *Reach Out: The National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention 2005-2014*. Dublin: NSRG. Retrieved from: [http://www.dohc.ie/publications/reach\\_out.html](http://www.dohc.ie/publications/reach_out.html)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2004). *Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers*. Retrieved from: <http://www.education.ie/robots/view.jsp?pcategory=10861&language=EN&ecategory=40276&link=link001&doc=27921>.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2008). *Sickness and disability at work: Breaking the barriers, Vol. 3*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Parsons, S. (2005). *Report of speech to Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland*. Dublin: ASTI Website. Retrieved from: [http://www.asti.ie/uploads/media/Nuacht\\_No\\_7.pdf](http://www.asti.ie/uploads/media/Nuacht_No_7.pdf)
- Rogers, W. A. (1996). *Managing teacher stress*. London: FT/Pitman.
- Salo, K. (1995). Teacher stress and coping over an autumn term in Finland. *Work and Stress*, 9(1), 55- 66.
- Selye, H. (1973). The evolution of the stress concept. *American Scientist*, 61(6), 692-699.
- Selye, H. (1976). Forty years of stress research: Principal remaining problems and misconceptions. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 115(1), 53-56.
- Tolker, E. and Feitler, F. C. (1986). A comparative study of teacher stress in American and British middle schools. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 6, 77- 82.
- Wolpert, L. (2001). Stigma of depression – a personal view. *British Medical Journal*, 323(7217), 221-224.
- Yoon, J. S. (2002). Teacher characteristics as predictors of teacher-student relationships: Stress, negative affect and self-efficacy. *Social Behaviour and Personality*, 30 (5), 485-494.