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Factors of Job-related Stress As Perceived by Middle School Principals in Virginia

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FACTORS OF JOB-RELATED STRESS
AS PERCEIVED BY
MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
IN VIRGINIA

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the Department
of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Teresa Harper Snyder
December 1999
APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Graduate Committee of

TERESA HARPER SNYDER

met on the

11th day of May, 1999

The committee read and examined her dissertation,
supervised her defense of it in an oral examination, and
recommended that her study be submitted to the Graduate
Council, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and
Policy Analysis.

[Signatures]

Chairperson, Graduate Committee

Signed on behalf of the Graduate Council

Dean, School of Graduate Studies
ABSTRACT

FACTORS OF JOB-RELATED STRESS
AS PERCEIVED BY
MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN VIRGINIA

by

Teresa Harper Snyder

This study was conducted among middle school principals in Virginia to determine their perceptions of job-related stress factors. The entire population of middle school principals (grades 6, 7, 8) was selected to participate in the study.

The Administrative Stress Index was used to assess factors that cause principals stress on the job and to measure their stress levels. A demographic data form was used to collect data on the variables of age, gender, administrative experience, assistant principal support, student enrollment, adults supervised, percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch, location of school, type of school, experience as a middle school principal, and educational attainment to determine if any of these variables correlated with the principals' stress as measured by the Administrative Stress Index.

The Administrative Stress Index contained five subscales of seven questions each, which were used to indicate the perceptions of stress factors among the middle school principals in the study.

The responses to the questionnaires were analyzed and the following statistics were computed from the data: percentage distribution, content analysis, multiple linear regression, and descriptive statistics.
The results of the study suggest that public middle school principals in Virginia are experiencing low to moderate levels of stress in their work and report that they are mainly stressed by administrative constraints such as increased workloads, excessive meetings, time constraints, and unrealistic policy demands.

Analysis of multiple linear regression revealed that the culminating effect of the principals' demographic characteristics contributed no more than 27.7% to the prediction of the principals' level of job-related stress.

Further research on stress could be conducted among elementary and high school principals and with principals of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This study indicates a need for increased awareness of the causes of stress experienced by middle school principals experience so that superintendents, school boards, staff, and community can help reduce these stressors.

Advisor: Dr. Louise Mackay Ph.D.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Mary Isabelle Harper. Her love for learning and education was always an inspiration in my life. Her strong belief that I could do anything I wanted was the reason for continuing my studies.

This dissertation is also dedicated in honor of my husband, Billy F. Snyder, who has provided me with loving support and encouragement throughout my various endeavors.
Acknowledgments

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Many thanks to my husband, Bill, for his patience, understanding, sacrifice, and love. His belief in me contributed greatly to the realization of this goal. This dissertation and all the other stages of my doctoral program would not have been completed without his continual support and encouragement. I am eternally grateful to him.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We live in an era of rapid change, a time in which increasingly large numbers of people are being asked to function beyond a healthy operative range. As a result, all aspects of our society seem to be experiencing increased stress.

By the very nature of their jobs, school principals regularly face conflicts and confrontations that require their attention (Williamson & Campbell, 1987). Stress is a prevalent and pervasive part of a middle school principal’s workday. There is increasing evidence that stress may be on its way to becoming the number one cause of managerial malfunction (Whitaker, 1992).

Middle-level managers in education such as principals, curriculum coordinators, vocational supervisors, and directors of special education appear to be particularly concerned with the day-to-day operation and functioning of the educational program. Duke (1988) reported that the middle manager position is the most frustrating position in
the organizational system. Middle management jobs, according to Brimm (1983), are the most stressful jobs in any organization because they involve the greatest amount of conflict experience. Individuals who assume these positions are likely to experience greater role conflict and tension than are others in the organization. Middle managers are responsible to those above and below them in the organizational hierarchy. Because of the nature of their position, they are exposed to the pull of conflicting demands from both boss and employee.

In education, it seems to be middle managers who are in positions of greatest stress. These individuals spend the bulk of their time working with both superiors and subordinates to enable the school organization to function successfully. Middle managers in education are responsible for making decisions that affect others and for resolving differences between superiors and themselves, as well as between themselves and subordinates (Williamson & Campbell, 1987). Brimm (1983) notes that although these middle managers have a great deal of responsibility, they lack sufficient authority to meet that responsibility. Therefore, they tend to have a greater amount of stress and tension than their superiors.
Williamson & Campbell (1987) suggested that middle managers were the persons most likely to experience job-related stress in the field of educational administration.

The existence of stress, often followed by burnout, for a principal may adversely affect efficient and effective relationships with teachers, parents, and students. The stressed principal will inevitably have an adverse effect on teachers. Eventually, the entire school organization and community are negatively affected by the principal's stress. This can happen throughout the entire chain of command in a school (Williamson & Campbell, 1987).

School administrators, of the 1980s and now the 1990s, are subject to more change, conflicts, and stress than their counterparts in any other decade. Today's principals are confronted by conflicting requirements, resource shortages, and decaying autonomy and are expected to achieve as much or more than any of their counterparts of the past (Whitaker, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

This study identifies the factors (within categories of demographic differences) of job-related stress that lead to
burnout, as perceived by public middle school principals in Virginia.

Few recent studies have been done on stress in education with a focus on administrators, specifically public middle school principals (Bucuvalas, 1987; Czeriakowski, 1995; Green, 1992; Thompson, 1985; Whitaker, 1992). Studies are needed that focus on principals who provide direct services to students (Schwab, 1986). Based on the increasing responsibilities of middle school principals, it is important that a study about stress factors of Virginia middle school principals takes place.

A number of studies have demonstrated the relationship of a school principal to student performance and teacher burnout. A study by Mazur and Lynch (1989) showed results that examined the extent to which a teacher's personality characteristics, organizational system, and principal's leadership style have had a strong relationship with teacher burnout. Their study, done with 200 teachers, demonstrated the influence of personal, experiential, environmental, and health factors on teacher burnout.

A study in Canada suggested that principals' working conditions contributing to stress were: work overload,
deteriorating status, and unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships (Sarros, 1988).

Gmelch (1983) reported that more than 100,000 articles and books, 1,000 research projects, and 6,000 new publications addressed the topic of stress each year during the early 1980s. The review of the literature indicated that an interest in stress has continued. Much of the research on stress in education has focused on stress among teachers. However, less research has centered on stress among administrators, and very little information can be found in the literature that specifically deals with job-related stress experienced by middle school principals.

The concept and term “burnout” as related to job stress first appeared in the literature in 1974, and the first use of “burnout” as an Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) descriptor occurred in 1980. Since that time there has been an increase of material concerning burnout, but, as with the topic of stress, little information relates to middle school administrator burnout.

Many educational administrators in Virginia are likely to be experiencing job-related stress and some may be suffering the effects of professional burnout. This literature review revealed only one study conducted at
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University to examine either of these issues among public school administrators in Virginia. Cusack (1982) found that in applying the 35 administrative activities of the Administrative Stress Index, the principals revealed that their jobs were more stressful in every factor except role expectations, compared with their elementary counterparts. Cross (1985) investigated the relationships among perceived administrative stressors, self-reported health status, and coping techniques used in managing stress for four groups of educational administrators (i.e., superintendents, secondary principals, middle school/junior high principals, and elementary principals) in Georgia. Roberson and Matthews (1988) examined the frequencies and levels of intensity of stressors in a sample of 175 Georgia secondary school principals and surveyed these administrators to ascertain the strategies they used in effectively coping with stress.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify factors contributing to administrative stress and determine which factors were most important, as perceived by middle school principals in Virginia.
The Administrative Stress Index (ASI) was used to survey each principal's perception of stress in terms of individual stressors, clusters of stressors, types of stress, and total level of stress experienced on the job.

The researcher sought to identify specific demographic variables that were significantly related to administrative stress. The demographic variables used for the study were age, gender, highest educational degree earned, past experience (years of administrative experience, years as a middle school principal), size of school (total student enrollment), the number of staff supervised, the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch, and the hours worked per week. These variables appear to be among those most often reported as significantly related to administrative stress based on the review of literature.

Work-related stress, according to the literature, appears to be the most significant factor contributing to professional burnout. Therefore, the study was also designed to investigate the relationship between job-related stress factors and the intent to remain a principal until retirement.
Significance of the Study

Public school principals must cope with an increasing number of demands and changes in education. Occupational stress and its negative side effects could become, and may already be, a major problem for today's school principals. It is apparent that more research is needed to understand fully the extent that school principals perceive their jobs as being stressful (Pate, 1988). It is therefore significant to determine the perceived stress levels of school principals, to identify what factors appear to be causing school principals the greatest stress, and to investigate whether specific demographic characteristics have a significant relationship to these factors.

Realistically, school principals are not going to be able to completely eliminate the factors that cause stress in their jobs. They possess a key role in creating an effective school. For this reason it is particularly important to determine levels of stress in school principals and identify factors leading to the burnout that might be alleviated or diminished.

Awareness of stressful conditions may serve to raise principals' levels of consciousness so they can be more aware of stress and actively seek to cope in a more
successful manner as stress occurs. Certain demographic characteristics, such as gender, school size, school type, and geographic location, may be useful in identifying factors that could help indicate potentially high stress school situations as well as low stress school situations. Additionally, the results could indicate whether the degree of occupational stress experienced by the respondents increases or decreases with age and/or number of years of administrative experience.

The information attained regarding specific stress factors will provide future direction for middle school principals in terms of inservice training and staff development needs. Information concerning significant differences in perceived job stress among middle school principals is especially helpful for those at the college and university preparation level where specific skills may be learned as preventive measures for coping successfully with these conditions.

Limitations of the Study

The group examined was limited to public middle school principals in Virginia in the 1998-99 school year. The accuracy of the information obtained was limited to: (1) the
degree to which the respondents answered the questionnaire frankly and truthfully, (2) the degree to which respondents understood question items, (3) the care taken in responding, and (4) the ability to interpret the questions in the desired manner.

Results depended on the willingness of those surveyed to participate in this investigation. The rate and quality of the responses were likely affected by the time constraints of those surveyed.

External validity in the study was limited only to conclusions about the group of principals who voluntarily cooperated by answering and returning the survey.

This study was limited to middle school principals in the state of Virginia. While the results may apply to other middle school principals, the results would have to be verified by replicating the study in a variety of states in other areas of the country.

Although stress changes individuals' lives in numerous environments (eg. family, social), this study was limited to investigating the job-related stress experienced by middle school principals in the state of Virginia.

In a public school, the level of stress varies during different periods of the school calendar. The period of the
school year during which the subjects responded could have affected responses.

**Research Questions**

1. What do Virginia middle school principals perceive as major factors of stress on the job?

2. Is there a relationship between the perceived stress levels of Virginia middle school principals and the following demographic characteristics?
   a. age
   b. gender
   c. highest educational degree earned
   d. years as a middle school principal
   e. number of years in administration
   f. school student enrollment
   g. school type (urban, rural, suburban)
   h. location of school
   i. number of hours worked per week
   j. number of assistant principals per school
   k. number of adults supervised per school
   l. percentage of school students receiving free or reduced lunch
3. Which demographic characteristics are the most important predictors of job-related stress among Virginia middle school principals?

4. Is there a relationship between perceived stress factors of Virginia middle school principals and their intent to remain as principals until retirement?

**Hypotheses**

H01: There is no relationship between the perceived stress levels of Virginia Middle School principals and the following demographics:

a. age
b. gender
c. highest educational degree earned
d. years as a middle school principal
e. number of years in administration
f. school student enrollment
g. school type (urban, rural, suburban)
h. location of school
i. number of hours worked per week
j. number of assistant principals per school
k. number of adults supervised per school
1. percentage of school students receiving free or reduced lunch

Ho2: There is no relationship between perceived stress factors of Virginia Middle School principals and their intent to remain as principals until retirement.

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the relevant terms are defined as follows:

Administrative Constraints: Administrative constraint is the label given to the cluster of stressors identified by the ASI that pertains to stress derived from meetings, frequent interruptions, time restraints, heavy workloads, and compliance with organizational policies and governmental rules and regulations (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Administrative Responsibilities: Administrative responsibility is the name given to the cluster of stressors identified by the ASI that relate to job tasks such as supervision, coordination, evaluation, negotiations, budget preparation, report writing, and public relations (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Administrative Stress: Administrative stress is defined as the dynamic transaction between an administrator and the work environment in which the administrator perceives an inability to adequately respond to the demands of the job.
because of excessive challenge, threat of harm or loss, or an insufficiency of the job in meeting the administrator's needs (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Administrative Stress Index: The Administrative Stress Index (ASI) is an instrument that was developed by Swent and Gmelch (1977) and further refined by Koch, Tung, Gmelch, and Swent (1982).

Boundary-spanning Stress: Boundary-spanning stress is stress that pertains to allocating financial resources; collective bargaining; dealing with official regulations; seeking public support for school funds and administrative tasks related to contracts (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Conflict-mediating Stress: Conflict-mediating stress is stress that occurs from mediating conflicts and resolving issues among teachers, among students, between teachers and students, between parents and the school, dealing with problems of school discipline, and between the school and the community (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Interpersonal Relations: Interpersonal relations is the label assigned to the cluster of stressors identified by the ASI that focuses on communication with staff, handling conflicts, and resolving differences among parents, school staff, students, and superiors (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Intrapersonal Conflicts: Intrapersonal conflicts is the name assigned to the cluster of stressors identified by
the ASI that centers on the discrepancy between an individual's performance and the individual's internal beliefs, attitudes, and expectations pertaining to self-confidence, self-imposed expectations, social expectations, and making decisions that affect the lives of others (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Job-Related Stress: Job related stress is the dynamic transaction between an individual and the work environment, in which characteristics of the job are perceived to be threatening or harmful, overly challenging, or insufficient for meeting the person's needs thus making it difficult for the individual to effectively cope with the demands of the job (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Middle School: For the purpose of this study, middle school is a school with a sixth, seventh, and eighth grade configuration.

Public Middle School Principal: The chief executive or administrator of a public middle school in the state of Virginia.

Role-based Stress: Role-based stress pertains to not having enough information to perform the job satisfactorily; inability to cope with conflicting demands; resolving differences with superiors; lack of authority to perform one's duties; lack of clarity about the nature and responsibilities of one's job; and the lack of knowledge of
one's superior's evaluation of the administrator's performance (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Stress: A discomfort or strain on an individual as a result of some imbalance-producing anxiety. A psychological process involving the following components: emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, and feelings of low accomplishment and depersonalization as they relate to the performance of one's job (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Stressors: The anticipation of one's inability to respond adequately to a perceived demand accompanied by one's anticipation of negative consequences for an inadequate response (Gmelch & Swent, 1984).

Task-based Stress: Task-based stress is stress that originates from time demands related to the administrator's day-to-day administrative tasks including coordination and communication with others (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters:

Chapter 1 includes an introduction, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the hypotheses, the significance of the problem, the limitations, the definitions, and an overview of the study.
Chapter 2 provides a background of the research and literature related to occupational stress. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and procedures used to conduct the study. Chapter 4 contains the analyses, interpretations, and discussions of the findings. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, presents the conclusions of the study, and provides recommendations for subsequent studies.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

High levels of stress in the work place can cause emotional and physical health problems. A certain amount of stress is healthy because it provides the energy to meet the demands in our lives, but people who are stressed cannot manage what becomes an overload for them. Stress ultimately adversely affects the quality of their performance at work and their relationships with co-workers and family.

The review of the literature addresses the following areas as related to this study: descriptions of stress, occupational stress, burnout and stress, and stress and the school principal. Demographic characteristics consist of age, gender, highest educational level, past experience, school student enrollment, hours worked per week, number of adults supervised, the number of assistant principals, and the percentage of the school students receiving free or reduced lunch.
Descriptions of Stress

Gmelch (1991) stated, “Due to multiple uses, references, conceptualizations, and definitions, the exact meaning of stress remains ambiguous” (p. 4). While defining stress is not an easy task, it is important to consider general conceptions of stress and organizational stress experienced by principals.

Lemley (1987) noted that stress results from environmental or internal demands, or both, which have overextended an individual’s adaptive resources. Selye (1984), a recognized pioneer researcher on stress, defined it as a nonspecific response of the body to any type of demand made on it. The term nonspecific means that the response pattern is always biochemically the same, regardless of the nature of the stressor. The same biochemical reaction takes place in the body whether the situation produces positive stress (eustress) or negative stress (distress). Eustress is the kind of stress that motivates one to attain higher levels of performance and achievement, particularly under pressure. Distress is experienced by an individual who fails to achieve (Brimm, 1983).
A definition of human stress is problematic because what is stressful can be destructive to one individual but taken in stride by another. Stress is studied in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, internal medicine, physiology, pharmacology, sociology, and anthropology, and it is a complex phenomenon, subject to a wide range of definitions (Tanner, Schnittzer, & Atkins, 1991).

According to another definition, stress is a state manifested by a specific syndrome of biological events induced nonspecifically. It is the mobilization of the body's defenses that allows human beings to adapt to hostile or threatening events. Stress becomes dangerous when it is prolonged, dealt with frequently, or becomes focused on a particular part of the human body. The resiliency for people to adapt to stressful situations is the primary form of defense from the effects of stress. Individuals react differently, depending upon such conditioning factors as heredity, past experiences, diet, or the environment in which they live. Individuals vary greatly in their abilities to deal with stress throughout their lives (Harrison, 1991).

Stress is an everyday fact of life that cannot be avoided. Selye (1984) advocated that everyone experiences
some degree of stress at all times because any emotion or activity may cause stress. No environment, therefore, is free from stress.

The stress response occurs as a result of an individual's interaction with and reaction to a stressor. The stress response is the generalized, patterned, unconscious mobilization of the body's natural energy resources when confronted with a stressor (Selye, 1984). Selye conducted many studies with both people and animals regarding the predictable nature of responses which he termed the "general adaptation syndrome" (GAS). This syndrome consists of three stages: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance, and the stage of exhaustion.

The alarm response is triggered by an event or situation that requires some type of adaptive response by the individual. It is this stage of the syndrome that is referred to as the "emergency reaction", or what is more commonly known as the "fight or flight" reaction. This alarm reaction is a function for saving oneself in a potentially dangerous situation (i.e. quickly moving away from a speeding car or hurrying to arrive at a destination). This reaction is also credited with improving an
individual’s performance in the workplace when both physical and nonphysical expectations are realized (Selye, 1984).

The second stage of response in this model is resistance or adaptation. In this phase, the person finds a way to adapt or cope with the stressor. The body’s resistance remains at a high level to “fight” the situation. The body is able to go on about its business relatively unconcerned by the fact that it is under stress (Selye, 1984).

When the alarm reaction is too great or extended over a long period of time without a break, the third state of this syndrome becomes apparent. This is the exhaustion point. At this juncture, the stress involved becomes the most damaging to the individual. Serious changes are likely to occur, resulting in self-destructive measures such as marital problems and depression. Also, one’s physical condition is adversely affected so that health problems are likely to occur (Selye, 1984).

The outcomes of stress, as previously indicated, are categorized as healthy and positive, which helps to constructively develop a person, or unhealthy and negative, which result in undesirable consequences for the individual. Stress, therefore, becomes a personal response to a stimulus
Selye, 1984). Selye further indicated that an individual’s reaction to stress occurs unconsciously.

Another source of stress is often associated with the relationship between the individual and the environment. Situations become stressful when the demand upon the individual exceeds the perceived ability to meet those demands (Heibert, 1987). This approach has become more widely used in research studies and has been termed an interactional perception of stress. In an interactional response, stress is seen as a response to a stimulus evidenced by certain physiological, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms (Gmelch & Swent, 1984).

In recent years, the changes in the definition of personal health have included information relative to stress. The changes in the definition of health and disease have had a significant impact on perceptions regarding the importance of stress. Earlier medical research focused only on illness and disease. In a broader sense, researchers have become concerned about the effects of stress on the overall wellness, behavior, and performance of an individual (Buzzelli-White, 1988). Such research has focused attention on tension, anxiety, dissatisfaction, frustration, and
unhappiness, not only as stress variables, but as influences that adversely affect the overall well-being of a person.

Increased attention has been paid to stress management in professional training programs. The effects of stress do not discriminate according to different occupations. However, students who pursue management as a career are often required to take courses in stress and stress management. Organizations can also be stressful, and stress can influence the effectiveness of personnel.

Organizational stress is defined as the general, patterned, unconscious mobilization of the individual’s response when confronted with an organizational work demand (Leiter & Maslach, 1988).

Other models dealing with the stages of stress and reaction to stress by individuals include the research of Gmelch and Swent (1984) who delineated a four-stage stress cycle. The first stage includes a set of demands such as a meeting or a telephone call. Whether the demand produces stress depends on the perception of the person, which is the second stage. If the person involved does not wish to respond to the situation due to time constraints or limited mental or physical resources, the demand is considered to be
a stressor. The same demand may be perceived as a stress related event by one person and not by another. Stage three begins with the individual responding to the stress and beginning the coping process. Biochemical changes such as adrenal secretion, increased heart rate, and increased muscle tension occur in the individual who ignores, flees, combats, or alleviates the stressor. Although biochemical responses are similar, past experiences and available resources influence the behavioral psychological reaction of the individual to the stressor. The fourth stage in the stress cycle is the consequences. The long-range effects of stress, depending upon its duration and intensity, may develop into mental and/or physical illness.

Another area that has been explored is the use of a model to categorize sources of stress. Gmelch (1991) established breakdowns of the sources of stress as they relate to individual characteristics. His model clarifies an understanding of the sources of occupational stress and the symptoms of ill health that lead to coronary heart disease and mental illness. The five categories are: (1) factors that are intrinsic to the job; (2) the individual's role in the organization; (3) opportunities for career development; (4) relationships within the organization, and
(5) organizational structure and climate. When these occupational stressors combine with extra-organizational sources of stress (family problems, life crises, financial difficulties), and certain individual characteristics (level of anxiety, level of neuroticism, tolerance of ambiguity), the result can be ill health.

The stress model researched and developed by Hiebert (1987) conceptualized interactional factors. This model represents the stress resulting from the interaction between personal and environmental factors. Stress, according to Heibert, is a reaction occurring when the demands of a situation exceed a person's self-perceived ability to cope with the stress. Conversely, stressors are demands that result in a stress response. The demand, internal or external, real or imagined, results in a mobilization of the person's resources to meet the demand and minimize the stress levels.

If the stress response persists, a state of chronic stress evolves. Chronic stress results when stressors become overwhelming or when a combination of stress related factors coupled with a low ability to cope are extended over a period of time. The effects of chronic stress are likely
to result in psychological as well as physiological disorders in individuals.

**Occupational Stress**

The work environment is the most significant stressor for most adults, and two distinct sources of stress in the workplace have been identified. These are (a) personal characteristics (e.g., personality variables, personal resources, and abilities for coping, etc.) and (b) work environment characteristics (Torelli & Gmelch, 1993).

Job-related stress has been reported to originate from a condition at work (i.e., a work environment characteristic) interacting with the worker's personal characteristics. Job-related factors interact with the worker to cause change, and the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning. The causal situational factors in the workplace that require the worker to make adjustments or adapt to change are considered to be job stressors (Torelli & Gmelch, 1993).

Any characteristic of the work environment that poses a threat of harm or loss, is overly challenging to the individual, or exceeds the individual's resources for successful functioning on the job is considered a stressor.
This may cause the worker to make changes or adaptations and may be perceived as stressful. Lee and Ashforth (1991) identified two major categories of occupational stressors. These threatening work characteristics include (a) demands that the individual may not be able to meet on the job and (b) insufficient supplies to meet a person's needs on the job (i.e. restricted job characteristics, limited rewards, etc.).

Lee and Ashforth (1991) also found that job stress is directly related to an individual's ability to cope with environmental conditions at work. They theorized that occupational stress occurs when there is a misfit between the worker and job environment. Stress is evidenced by the extent to which the worker's skills and abilities match the demands and requirements of the job and the extent to which the individual's needs are satisfied in the work environment.

Roberson and Matthews (1988) specifically attributed stressors that arise within the work setting to the job environment itself, the content of the job, changes in the work environment, the way the work is structured, interpersonal relations at work, and the individual's role in the organization. Quick and Quick (1984) cited physical
factors (noise, temperature, lighting, and unpleasant or unsafe practices), job factors (tasks, autonomy, feedback, and type of occupation), role factors (expectations and behavioral demands for employees), and interpersonal factors (conflicts with clients, co-workers, or supervisors) as potential sources of on the job stress. Deadlines and time constraints (Roberson & Matthews, 1988), the extent and pace of work (Milstein, Golaszewski, & Duquette, 1984), qualitative and quantitative work overload (Williamson & Campbell, 1987), career development factors (Tipgos, 1987), and one's opportunity for organizational involvement or participation and input into the decision-making process (Roberson & Matthews, 1988) are among the factors most often cited as related to stress in the workplace.

Stress is manifested in the work environment in various ways. Problem behavior both on and off the job that affects an individual's work performance as well as poor physical and mental health have been found to be linked to occupational stress (Monteiro, 1990). Occupational stress is evidenced in physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms that negatively impact on the individual worker and the organization. Physical symptoms of stress include headache, insomnia, backache, appetite change, weight gain
or loss, physical exhaustion, and frequent illness (Smith, Bibeau, Altschuld, & Heit, 1988). High blood pressure, hypertension, coronary heart disease, cancer, ulcers, skin disorders, gastrointestinal disturbances, allergies, and respiratory difficulties are among the physiological problems that have commonly been linked to stress (Huff, 1991). Psychological conditions that may be symptomatic of stress include depression, poor self-concept, confused thinking, cynicism, helplessness and lack of control, paranoia, a loss of caring for others, and emotional exhaustion (Freudenberger, 1980; Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Common behavioral signs of stress include avoidance (e.g. avoiding others, avoiding work, avoiding responsibilities), extremism (e.g. alcoholism, gambling sprees, extravagant spending), administrative problems (e.g. poor appearance, poor personal hygiene, accident-proneness, being late for work), and legal problems (e.g. indebtedness, traffic tickets, and violent impulses) (Smith et al. 1988).

Absenteeism, poor work performance, and high turnover are especially reflective of job-related stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Poor staff relationships and career changes are other behaviors that may be symptomatic of job stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). One of the most commonly cited
consequences of unrelieved occupational stress is job burnout.

**Burnout and Stress**

Freisen & Sarros (1989) suggest that it is difficult to come to a common agreement on what constitutes “burnout”. They emphasize the need to understand the psychological context in which burnout occurs.

Lipovenko (1981) presents an analysis of the burnout syndrome and symptoms. His study states that the term “burnout” does not identify a specific medical condition. It describes extreme reactions to job-related stress. Burnout does not happen overnight. It is the final stage of physical and/or mental depletion that results from excessive demands on an individual’s time and energy. A certain amount of stress is healthy because it provides the energy to meet the demands in our lives, but people who experience burnout cannot manage what becomes an overload for them. Stress ultimately affects the quality of their performance at work and their relationships with co-workers and family. Burnout is often accompanied by a rash of minor medical problems such as sleep disturbances, headaches, backaches, lingering colds, and ulcers. These illnesses aggravate
problems on the job, requiring more effort just to keep pace. Apathy and exhaustion represent the final stage of the downward spiral (Lipovenko, 1981).

Pines and Aronson (1981) and Maslach and Jackson (1986) referred to burnout as a process leading from stress overload to loss of concern for those with whom one is working. It is characterized by physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. The individual loses interest in those around him/her resulting in lowered job performance and decreased morale.

Arthur (1990) defined burnout as a physical and psychological state that results from the cumulative effects of negative stresses. Specifically, physical burnout can be characterized by loss of energy, a feeling of being rundown, and tiring easily. Psychologically, burnout can be characterized by boredom, distrust of and cynicism toward new ideas, and a decline of empathy and compassion for others. In addition, persons suffering from burnout can be aloof, distant, and uncommunicative toward the individuals with whom they need to work effectively. There is a loss of attention to detail and a general loss of sharpness or functioning.
Burnout is also addressed from both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. The attitudinal dimension includes a significant loss of motivation, enthusiasm, and energy. The behavioral dimension is indicated by a marked departure of the individual from previous normal work and non-work patterns (Wiggers, Forney, & Schultzman, 1982).

Pines and Aronson (1988) cite helplessness and lack of control as significant factors in the burnout of social service and educational workers. Garen (1991) noted that professionals need to watch for five common sources of stress in themselves and their fellow workers. These are the same sources mentioned in the "Description of Stress" section. They are:

1. intrinsic job motivation
2. role in organization
3. career development
4. interpersonal relationships
5. organizational climate

According to Garen (1991), when these sources produce high levels of stress, job burnout can result. Symptoms of stress overload that lead to burnout include hypertension, depression, drug abuse, and high cholesterol.
Studies have shown that individuals in the helping professions seem particularly susceptible to burnout. Common symptoms of burnout in the social services professions have been found to include physical and psychological fatigue, exhaustion, helplessness, alienation, and various physical ailments (Carr, 1994). Burnout is generally associated with those situations involving emotional pressure in a person-helping-person type of workplace (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

Clouse and McLean (1991) and Gold (1988) identified some causes of burnout:

1. work overload
2. long hours
3. inadequate wages
4. bureaucratic constraints
5. lack of professional accomplishment

When Cherniss (1980) conducted a review of the literature on symptoms or sources of stress leading to burnout, his list was much longer than Clouse and McLean’s. The 28 sources of stress most commonly associated with burnout identified by Cherniss (1980) are:

1. High resistance to going to work every day
2. A sense of failure
3. Anger and resentment
4. Guilt and blame
5. Discouragement and indifference
6. Negativism
7. Isolation and withdrawal
8. Feeling tired and exhausted all day
9. Frequent clock-watching
10. Great fatigue after work
11. Loss of positive feelings toward clients
12. Postponing client contacts; resisting client phone calls and office visits
13. Stereotyping clients
14. Inability to concentrate or listen to what the client is saying
15. Feeling immobilized
16. Cynicism regarding clients; a blaming attitude
17. Increasingly "going by the book"
18. Sleep disorders
19. Avoiding discussion of work with colleagues
20. Self-preoccupation
21. More approval of behavior-control measures, i.e.
tranquilizers

22. Frequent colds and flu
23. Frequent headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances
24. Rigidity in thinking and resistance to change
25. Suspicion and paranoia
26. Excessive use of drugs
27. Marital and family conflict
28. High absenteeism

(Cherniss, 1980, p.42).

Whatzker (1994) reported that a review of literature indicated that worker characteristics, organizational structure, and management processes contribute to burnout. Worker characteristics include needs, motivations, gender, age, level of education, and experience. Management processes incorporate leadership, communication, innovation, and task orientation. Sources of stress related to organizational structure include span of control, complexity, centralization, and formalization of rules (Czerniakowski, 1995; Whatzker, 1994).

Generally, the amount of stress generated by difficult situations is inversely proportional to the perceived control one has over them. When one sees ways to intervene
and also sees such interventions as feasible, stress levels tend to go down. When one feels "stuck" (in a circumstance where others hold the key to the solution) the stress level goes up (Borg & Riding, 1993).

Work stressors can be both external and internal. External work stress is caused by excessive or tedious polices and procedures, inappropriate or poor working relationships, or a repetitive and physically demanding job. Internal work stress is caused by unrealistic expectations, personal needs not being met, unsatisfactory compensation, lack of recognition, lack of self-respect, or indecisiveness. Some common results of this stress are boredom, apathy, and a negative attitude toward management, co-workers, customers, the organization, and self. The results of stressors within the workplace can produce a work stress syndrome, tiredness, irritability or job dissatisfaction, inability to concentrate, and ultimately burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1991).

**Stress and the School Principal**

The public school is a virtual "hotbed" of stress. By the very nature of their jobs, principals on a daily basis face conflicts and confrontations that require attention
(Williamson & Campbell, 1987). Principals have consistently been identified as the key leaders in bringing together successful schools. Successful school principals demonstrate effective skills and exhibit common attitudes and leader behaviors, such as supportiveness, tolerance, and compassion. They spend time in classrooms and interact frequently with teachers, students and other staff; and have abilities to develop and promote alternatives to challenging situations (Fietler & Tokar, 1986).

Pressures on principals manifest themselves in several ways: demand for high levels of student achievement, demand for maintaining excellent teacher morale, and demand for fostering positive relations with the public. The stress and tension that accompany these pressures often seriously impede the principals’ job performance, in addition to their physical and mental health (Fietler & Tokar, 1986; Williamson & Campbell, 1987).

Research studies have indicated that individuals with jobs involving responsibility for people are significantly more likely to develop coronary heart disease than people with jobs involving responsibility for other things (Cooper, Sieverding, & Muth, 1988). Since numerous schools have become more complex social systems, the job of managing even
larger and more diverse groups of people has created an increased risk of illness and death from job stress. Fallon (1981) reported that the incidence of hypertension and heart disease among school principals is among the highest of any profession. Cooper et al. (1988) also reported that those in a people-related profession appear to be more susceptible to job-related stress than persons in other occupations. Gazda (1991) indicated that school administrators experience more job-related stress because they are charged with the responsibility of weaving the human, educational, and social fabric of the future world.

Researchers (Williamson & Campbell, 1987) have suggested that the school principalship is a highly-stressful job because it is a middle-management position; the principal serves as a liaison between the people at the school and the administrative office in addition to being entrusted by the superintendent to carry out the requests of the board of education. The school administrator often experiences unrealistic deadlines, works to other people's standards, and has needs greater than resources. Whitaker (1992) reported that principals have gradually acquired so many new responsibilities, they often do not realize how
overextended they have become in trying to be all things to all people.

The level of perceived stress felt by an individual is dependent upon that individual’s reaction to a particular situation (Savery & Detiuk 1986). It is the outcome of interaction between an individual and the environment, and it is largely the person’s perception (the individual’s cognitive appraisal) that defines a situation as stressful.

In Bruning’s (1991) research, the amount of time required to fulfill the demands of the principalship has been described as stressful and unreasonable. According to reports from the spouses of principals, male administrators worked an average of 10.3 hours on weekdays, and 3.8 hours on the weekends, while their female counterparts worked an average of 11.5 hours on school days, and 5.7 hours on weekends. Interestingly, the male administrators worked an average of 55.3 hours a week compared to 63.2 hours per week for the females.

Changes in the principal’s role have resulted from various forces that operate to keep the principal at what Friedman (1995) termed the “functionary” level. These forces include societal, organizational, sociological, and psychological factors.
Based on the review of the literature, there appears to be a moderate to high degree of stress experienced by school principals (Bailey, Fillos, & Kelly, 1987; Cooper, et al. 1988; Czerniakowski, 1995; Garwood, 1995; Ogden, 1992; Raith, 1988; Sieverding & Muth, 1988; Williamson & Campbell, 1987).

Gmelch and Swent (1984) examined the effect of stress on school administrators. They had 70 different levels of administrators keep logs of their stressful situations for one week. Thirty-five types of stressful situations were described in these logs. They fell into five general categories: administrative constraints, administrative responsibilities, interpersonal conflicts, intrapersonal conflicts, and role expectations. Administrative constraints were defined as stress derived from time constraints, meetings, workloads, and complying with government and organizational regulations. Administrative responsibilities included supervision, evaluation, negotiations, and public relations. Handling conflicts between parents, the school, the staff, and students were described as interpersonal conflicts. How each administrator rated his/her performance to personal beliefs was the issue in intrapersonal conflicts. The difference
between self-expectations and the expectations of the
principal held by all of the groups he/she served was
defined as role expectations. The subjects of the study
identified their 10 most stressful situations as:

1. Complying with state, federal, and organizational
   rules and policies
2. Meetings taking up too much time
3. Attempting to gain public approval and/or financial
   support for school programs
4. Evaluating staff members' performance
5. Resolving parent/school conflicts
6. Completing reports and paperwork on time
7. Participating in school activities outside normal
   working hours
8. Making decisions affecting the lives of known
   individuals (colleagues, staff members, students)
9. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls
10. Too heavy a workload; one that cannot possibly be
    finished during the normal work day (Gmelch &
    Swent, 1984).

Gmelch and Swent's study was replicated by Brimm
(1983) with over 600 administrators of various grade levels.
Eight of the top 10 stressors identified by Gmelch and Swent
were in the top 10 of Brimm's replication study, though in a slightly different rank order. Complying with state and federal rules and policies was identified as the number one most stressful administrative task by administrators in both studies.

In Brimm's study, junior high school principals ranked their most stressful administrative tasks as:

1. Having to make decisions that affect the lives of people
2. Evaluating staff members' performance
3. Trying to resolve parent/school conflicts
4. Feeling compelled to participate in school activities outside normal working hours
5. Handling student discipline problems
6. Trying to gain public approval for school programs
7. Trying to resolve differences between/among students
8. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls
9. Trying to resolve differences between/among staff members

Gmelch and Swent joined another pair of researchers, Koch and Tung in a study to investigate the relationship
between perceived job-related stress and personal characteristics using the Administrative Stress Index, a questionnaire based on four factors of perceived job-related stress: 1) Role-based stress: beliefs and attitudes about role; 2) Conflict-mediating stress: resolving conflicts; 3) Task-based stress: daily routine administrative tasks; 4) Boundary-spanning stress: activities relating to the external environment (Gmelch, Koch, Swent, & Tung, 1982).

They sought to determine how these types of stress vary with the age and other personal characteristics of the administrators. Their findings suggested that task-based stress lessens with the age of administrators, but that role-based stress remains fairly consistent. Conflict mediating stress remains consistent until age 50 when it drops significantly. Boundary-spanning stress increases with age, probably reflecting growing institutional responsibilities in later career stages (Gmelch et al., 1982).

Results based upon years of administrative experience were similar to those for age. Administrators with 16 or more years of administrative experience seem to be less bothered by conflict-mediating and task-based sources of stress than less experienced administrators. However
boundary-spanning stress increased significantly for each advanced experience group. All principals experienced significantly greater role-based, conflict-mediating stress and task-based stress than administrators in other roles. (Gmelch et al., 1982).

Administrators were asked to identify what percentage of their total life stress resulted from work. More than 60% said that at least 70% of their total life stress resulted from their jobs. In addition, the subjects were asked to indicate the state of their current physical health. Each stress dimension was strongly and significantly associated with reports of poor physical health (all subjects indicated they perceived that job-related stressors were associated with poorer physical health). Although the self report nature of the physical health measure may have inflated the actual magnitude of relationships, nonetheless the authors concluded, "Given the fairly high percentage of total life stress attributed to work, we would expect stress arising from the performance of one's job to have a significant impact on one's physical health" (Gmelch et al., 1982, p. 40).

Recent studies have indicated that the largest portion of the total life stress for school principals comes from
their jobs. Roberson and Matthews (1988) did a study of 212 secondary principals in 48 states and the District of Columbia. They found that the primary stressors of principals were from the task-based category of the Administrative Stress Index. This is supported by 8 of the top 10 stress sources reported to be task-based stressors which have their origin in the day-to-day administrative duties of the principal. Williamson and Campbell (1987) completed a study to determine the most important sources of stress experienced by high school principals by using the Administrative Stress Index (ASI). They found that four major factors contributed to stress among high school principals: management of time, relations with supervisors, relations with subordinates, and matters of finance.

French (1989) compared the stress levels of elementary school principals on traditional and year-round calendars. Her data indicated no significant difference in the burnout levels of the two groups of elementary principals. She added a variety of other variables (gender, age, level of education, ages of children at home, years as a principal, marital status, vacation plans, type of administrative support, type of school setting, and enrollment). She found that these variables made no significant difference in the
stress levels of elementary school principals. The only significant difference she found was among principals with preschool-aged children at home. These principals rated slightly higher statistically in their stress levels than other elementary principals.

Conflicting research indicates that as a group, principals are not a highly stressed occupational group (Heinze, 1987; Milstein & Farkas, 1988). Low levels of stress were reported by Heinze (1987) in a study conducted with Iowa and Illinois high school principals. Dick (1993) also found low levels of stress among Maine elementary principals. Milstein and Farkas (1988) reported there were relatively low levels of perceived stress in a study of elementary and secondary principals from the state of New York. Other researchers (Cooper et al., 1988; Gazda, 1991; Williamson & Campbell, 1987) indicated that the school principalship is a highly stressful job. The effects of stress experienced in the workplace significantly add to the total stress of principals.
Demographic Characteristics

Gender

Gender has been found to be associated with stress. Male educators typically have been found to have negative attitudes and higher levels of depersonalization toward those with whom they work than do females in the educational profession (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984). Anderson (1996) found that female school administrators experienced lower levels of job-related stress than did male administrators. Gender is one personal variable that appears to especially interact with other situational (marital status) and work variables (time constraints and staff relationships). Williamson and Campbell (1987) found that female elementary principals experienced more stress regarding time management issues than did male elementary principals while male principals perceived more stress in their relationships with subordinates than did their female counterparts.

A study done by Anderson (1996) with principals and central office administrators in Colorado revealed that female principals had a higher level of personal accomplishment than female administrators in the central offices. Female administrators experienced greater levels of personal accomplishment while in school-based
administrative positions. Male administrators experienced greater levels of personal accomplishment while in central office positions.

Warner (1980) found that male school administrators perceived more stress than female school administrators from the Administrative Responsibility category and the Interpersonal Relations category. Tung (1979) surveyed 1,855 Oregon administrators to compare the occupational profiles of male and female educational administrators. The results of the study indicated that male administrators perceived higher levels of stress than female administrators in Role-Based Stress, Task-Based Stress, Conflict-Mediating Stress, and Boundary-Spanning Stress.


Age

Although there is not total consensus as to age-related stress, the age of the principals has been found to be a significant characteristic in perceived stress according to a number of research findings (Cusack, 1982; Kirk, 1992;
Leary, 1987; Manderville, 1984). These researchers reported higher stress levels in the age group 31 to 40 years of age. Leary (1987) reported less stress was perceived by older and more-experienced elementary principals in Connecticut. Czerniakowski (1995) found that older principals (above age 55) generally expressed significantly less stress than their younger colleagues. Also Blanks, (1990), Czerniakowski, (1995), and Dick, (1993) reported that as the age of principals increased their level of stress decreased.

Whitaker (1992) reported that an acute awareness of age and a generalized feeling of anxiety is found to be particularly evident among people in their 40s, and the average age of school principals is found to be within that age group. Williamson and Campbell (1987), on the other hand, reported that older principals between ages 50 and 59 experience more stress concerning relations with superiors, particularly when the superiors are younger. Several studies indicate that the administrator's age did not make a significant difference in the amount of stress perceived by principals (Bucuvalas, 1987; Heinze, 1987; Spradley, 1984).
Educational Level

Educational level may be associated with stress and burnout. Presley & Ewing (1988) found that administrators with masters degrees experienced significantly higher job-related stress than did those with doctorates. Those with doctoral degrees may also be less susceptible to stress. Kyte (1994) reported that the higher the educational attainment level of the principal the lower the perceived level of stress.

Sanchez (1997) reported that principals with doctorates reported higher levels of stress in two areas: (1) being frequently interrupted by telephone calls and (2) feeling they have to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours at the expense of their personal time. Green (1992) found no relationship between burnout and the highest educational degree earned.

Kirk (1992) found that principals who had taken a college course in the last 2 to 5 years had higher levels of personal accomplishment than principals who had not taken a college course in 6 to 10 years.
Past Experience

Level of experience has been found to influence a person's susceptibility to stress (Dick, 1993). An administrator's past experience appears to significantly alter the level of subjectively experienced stress and affect reactions to that stress (lower stress levels have been associated with increased experience, those with less experience demonstrate higher stress levels (Koch et al., 1982). Cusack (1982) reported that principals in Virginia with 26 or more years of experience perceived the least amount of stress and principals with 10 or fewer years of experience perceived the highest amount of stress. Sanchez (1997) reported that although the number of years on site made no difference when comparing principal stress, the number of years of experience a principal had in the role did make a difference. Green (1992) found no relationship between stress and the number of years in administrators' current position.

Size of School

Some researchers have found that the larger the school district (in terms of total student enrollment) the greater the likelihood of stress and burnout. Zwick (1992) reported
that both district and school size were significantly associated with job stress experienced by school administrators. Larger student enrollment has also been correlated with higher rates of stress for both elementary and secondary principals (Dick, 1993). However, Green (1992) found no relationship between stress and school size.

**Number of Adults Supervised**

The supervision of a large number of people has been found to be related to stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). They cited size of client load (the number of persons one must deal with) as being highly related to increased stress and burnout. Maslach and Jackson (1986) found that public contact workers with large caseloads (over 40 people served per day) exhibited stress and burnout. Covington (1982) found that principals in Tennessee who supervised large staffs (75 people or more) perceived more job-related stress from role expectations than did other principals.

**Hours Worked Per Week**

The number of hours worked per week has been found to be positively correlated with the amount of administrative stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).
Thompson (1985) reported that principals in North Carolina averaged working between 51 and 55 hours per week. Foster (1987) reported that more than 73% of the principals in Kentucky worked 51 to 55 hours a week, and more than 51% of them worked 56 or more hours per week. Roberson (1986) reported that principals in Georgia worked between 45 and 96 hours a week. According to Pellicer, Anderson, Keef, Kelley, and McLeary (1988), the percentage of principals who work fewer than 50 hours per week has decreased from 25 in 1965, to 17 in 1977, and to 14 in 1987.

Working excessive hours and major time commitment to the job have been associated with negative stress reactions. Roberson (1986) and Iuzzolino (1986) indicated that principals who reported working excessive hours also had higher levels of job-related stress. Savery & Detuik (1986) found that working excessively long hours appeared to create more stress in senior high school principals than in primary school principals.

Cooper et al. (1988) reported that principals with less experience worked longer hours. They also found the average work week of school principals to be 56 hours. In studies conducted by Iuzzolino (1986) and Zwick (1992), a
significant correlation was found between the number of hours worked and administrative constraints.

**Assistant Principals**

Harrison (1991) found that elementary principals in Texas with no assistant principal reported higher stress in fulfilling their administrative responsibilities than principals having assistant principals. Findings, in a study conducted by Gazda (1991), provided support for the view that having administrative assistance could be a factor in reducing the level of stress experienced by principals. In Gazda’s study, he reported that principals with no assistants identified frequent interruptions by others as producing a slightly above average level of stress. This same situation for principals with assistant principals resulted in a below average level of stress. Based on findings by Roberson (1986), principals in Georgia reported increasing staff (assistant principals and secretaries) to be the number one suggestion for reducing stress.

**Geographic Location of School**

The geographic location of the school (urban, suburban, or rural) was found to be a significant variable in
determining the perceived level of job-related stress among
school principals. According to Washington (1982), the
urban principals, more so than the suburban and rural
principals, were hardest pressed in dealing with the
increasing complexity of tasks commonly associated with the
changing school organization. The urban principals
frequently found themselves in conflict situations where
they had to make decisions that affected a variety of groups
with competing needs and interests. Iuzzalino (1986) also
advocated that principals from urban schools perceived more
stress than principals from non-urban schools. In a
nationwide study conducted by Koff, Laffey, Olson, & Cichon
(1991), it was reported that schools in affluent and non-
urban communities were found to be low stress schools.

**Summary**

The review of the literature reveals that public school
administrators suffer the effects of job related stress.
Overall, administrators appear to experience task based
stress and are most stressed by those tasks that cluster
under the administrative constraints category (i.e.,
meetings, paperwork, reports, workload, telephone
interruptions, time restraints, etc.). All school
administrative positions appear to find compliance with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies as especially stressful.

Administrators also appear to experience highest stress in those areas where they have major administrative responsibility. Principals experience high stress in conflict resolution, staff evaluations, and human relations decision making. One group of administrators, secondary principals, appears to be stressed by a heavy workload and an extended school day that often involves activities that take place outside of the normal school hours.

Large student enrollment, long working hours, a large number of personnel to supervise, younger age, and less experience appear to be among those variables that are most consistently related to occupational stress. Results thus far indicate that the majority of the administrators who have participated in these few studies are experiencing low to moderate stress.

Research conducted to investigate job related stress factors in Virginia public school administrators is almost nonexistent. Only one study could be located that surveyed stress and the principalship in Virginia. It was done by
Cusack (1982) at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
CHAPTER 3
DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter contains a description of the methodology and procedures used in this study. The chapter is divided into the following sections: research design, selection of the population, the instrument, procedures followed in collecting the data, data analysis, and a summary. The selection of the appropriate statistical procedures to analyze the data and the rationale for their use are included.

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors of job-related stress as perceived by middle school principals in Virginia. The data collected were used to gain a better understanding of the factors related to job stress among Virginia middle school principals.

Research Design

The design used in this study included components of descriptive research. In addition, the questionnaire method of collecting data was used.
As noted by Borg, Gall, and Gall (1996), descriptive research studies are designed to obtain information concerning the current status of phenomena. The purpose of this type of research is to analyze public opinions, trends, conditions, or relationships. The researcher collects information and then describes the characteristics of persons or an institution or an educational process. Borg et al. (1996) stated that "descriptive studies are primarily concerned with finding out "what is". This study describes the perceived factors of job-related stress in middle school principals in Virginia.

Selection of the Population

The population of this study consisted of all middle school principals currently employed in the Virginia public schools. The geographical area included the entire state of Virginia. A computer printout prepared by the Virginia State Department of Education was used to identify the 1998-1999 population of middle school principals. For the 1998-1999 school year, there were 277 middle school principals in the state of Virginia. A middle school includes grades six, seven, and eight.
Subjects for the study were asked to respond to items contained in a two-part survey. The sections of this survey included demographic data, and the Administrative Stress Index (ASI). A discussion of each of the sections contained in the survey follows.

**Demographic Data**

Part one of the survey found in Appendix B contained the personal and situational variables revealed by the literature review to be potentially associated with occupational stress. These variables comprised the independent variables for this study and included gender, age, highest degree held, past experience (years as a middle school principal), school enrollment (the number of students under direct responsibility of the administrator), the number of staff supervised, the hours worked per week, the school district type, the location of the school and the percentage of the school students on free or reduced lunch. An open-ended question asked the respondents to indicate if they intended to remain a principal until retirement and if not, why.
The Administrative Stress Index (ASI)

Part two of the survey was the Administrative Stress Index (ASI). This instrument was selected because it has been found to provide school principals participating in such studies with a clear, concise, valid, and reliable way to determine stress as related to their jobs. The ASI has been widely used by researchers to study job stress among school administrators (Swent & Gmelch, 1977).

The original instrument, developed by Swent and Gmelch (1977) to measure job related stress as perceived by school administrators uses a 15-item Job Related Stress (JRS) index. This index was supplemented by other information from the literature and from items generated from logs on stress that 40 Oregon school administrators kept for one week. The instrument was field tested with a group of 25 administrators to ensure clarity and relevance of each item which established content validity.

After a revision and a second pilot test involving 20 administrators, the final instrument consisted of 35 items with a 5-point Likert format. Response categories for each item range from Rarely or Never Bothers Me to Frequently Bothers Me (assigned values 1-5). Twelve items were derived
from the Job Related Stress index while 23 of the items were
developed from the administrative stress logs.

The ASI instrument was specifically developed for use
with educational administrators. The 35 stressors are
categorized in a factor analysis procedure indicating five
factors: administrative constraints, administrative
responsibilities, interpersonal relations, intrapersonal
conflicts, and role expectations.

A larger study followed Swent and Gmelch’s pilot tests
to analyze these factors when the ASI was sent to 1,855
school administrators in Oregon, including principals, vice
principals, superintendents; and central office
administrators. The researchers were able to use 1,156
surveys from the 1,207 returned. The average subject was 42
years old with nine years administrative experience, and the
median work hours per subject per week was 55 (Gmelch &
Swent, 1984).

Four factors emerged from an analysis of responses from
the 1,156 surveys which were randomly divided into two
sample groups of 578 subjects. Twenty-five of the 35 items
clustered around these factors: Role-based stress, task-
based stress, boundary-spanning stress, and conflict-
mediating stress. To support the multidimensional structure of the ASI, coefficient alphas and factor correlations were also calculated. The coefficient alphas of each dimension were .70 and higher in both samples, representing maximum values for the off diagonals although they were not "true" reliabilities. However, the average shared variance between factors was less than .1%, and the median item correlations within factors were two and a half times the between factors item correlations (Gmelch & Swent, 1984).

Gmelch and Swent (1984) also found that principals experienced significantly greater role-based and conflict-mediating stress while superintendents had greater boundary-spanning stress.

The Administrative Stress index has five factors with seven items in each factor. Scores for each of the stress factors of the ASI may be obtained by adding the values (1-5) selected for each of the seven items contained within each factor. The range of scores for each of the factors is 1-35. A total stress score for the ASI may be obtained by adding the cumulative values of each of the 35 items of the instrument. The 35 items are:
A. Administrative Constraints
1. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls
9. Having my work frequently interrupted by staff members to talk
12. Writing memos, letters, and other communications
26. Feeling that I have too heavy a workload, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal day
27. Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies
31. Feeling that meetings take up too much time
32. Trying to complete reports and other paper work on time

B. Administrative Responsibilities
2. Supervising and coordinating the tasks of many people
14. Speaking in front of groups
21. Preparing and allocating budget resources
24. Being involved in the collective bargaining process
25. Evaluating staff members’ performance
29. Administering the negotiated contract (grievances, interruptions, etc.)
35. Trying to gain public approval and/or financial support for school programs

C. Interpersonal Relations
3. Feeling staff members don’t understand my goals and expectations
7. Trying to resolve differences between/among students
13. Trying to resolve differences with my superiors
20. Trying to resolve parent/school conflicts
23. Handling students discipline problems
33. Trying to resolve differences between/among staff members
34. Trying to influence my immediate supervisor’s actions and decisions that affect me

D. Intrapersonal Conflicts
4. Feeling that I am not fully qualified to handle my job
5. Knowing that I can’t get information needed to carry out my job properly
10. Imposing excessively high expectations on myself
15. Attempting to meet social expectations (housing, clubs, friends, etc.)
17. Having to make decisions that affect the lives of individual people that I know (colleagues, staff members, students, etc.)
22. Feeling that I have too little authority to carry out responsibilities assigned to me
28. Feeling that the progress on my job is not what it should or could be

E. Role Expectations
6. Thinking that I will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of those who have authority over me
8. Feeling not enough is expected of me by my superiors
11. Feeling pressure for better job performance over and above what I think is reasonable
16. Not knowing what my supervisor thinks of me, or how he/she evaluates my performance
18. Feeling that I have to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours at the expense of my personal time
19. Feeling that I have too much responsibility delegated to me by my superior
30. Being unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of my job are

(Swent & Gmelch, 1977)

These five factors of stressors group administrative stress into categories related to specific administrative tasks that are typical responsibilities of all administrators. The value of total perceived administrative stress can be 1-175.

Factor analysis of the ASI by Koch et. al. (1982) using data from Gmelch and Swent’s (1977) original study of job-related stress among school administrators yielded the following four types of factors of administrative stress:
Factor 1: Role-Based Stress

Item 5. Knowing I can’t get information needed to carry out my job properly

Item 6. Thinking that I will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of those who have authority over me

Item 13. Trying to resolve differences with my superiors

Item 16. Not knowing what my superior thinks of me or how he/she evaluated my performance

Item 22. Feeling that I have too little authority to carry out responsibilities assigned to me

Item 30. Being unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of my job are

Item 34. Trying to influence my immediate supervisor’s actions and decisions that affect me

Factor 2: Task-Based Stress

Item 1. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls

Item 2. Supervising and coordinating the tasks of many people

Item 9. Having my work frequently interrupted by staff members who want to talk

Item 10. Imposing excessively high expectations on myself

Item 12. Writing, memos, letters, and other communications

Item 18. Feeling I have to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours at the expense of my personal time
Item 19. Feeling I have too much responsibility delegated to me by my supervisor

Item 26. Feeling that I have too heavy a workload, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day

Item 31. Feeling that meetings take up too much time

Item 32. Trying to complete reports and other paperwork on time

Factor 3: Boundary-Spanning Stress

Item 21. Preparing and allocating budget resources

Item 24. Being involved in the collective bargaining process

Item 27. Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies

Item 29. Administering the negotiated contract

Item 35. Trying to gain public approval and/or financial support for school programs

Factor 4: Conflict-Mediating Stress

Item 7. Trying to resolve differences between/among students

Item 20. Trying to resolve parent/school conflicts

Item 23. Handling student discipline problems

Use of the ASI in this study allowed for a comparison to be made between the rankings of stressors perceived by middle school principals on those administrative tasks and functions in which it is presumed that all educational administrators are typically engaged.
provision for allowing respondents to note situational stressors other than those contained in the instrument yielded information as to pertinent stressors for middle school principals.

A copy of the Administrative Stress Index can be found in Appendix B. A letter from the authors granting permission to use the ASI in this study is also included in appendix A.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The two-part survey (demographic data, and ASI), a cover letter, and a postage paid pre-addressed envelope were sent to all Virginia middle school principals. The list was provided to the researcher by the Virginia Department of Education.

Participants were instructed to place the completed survey in the postage paid pre-addressed envelope to be returned to the researcher within two weeks. The surveys were numbered for ease of follow-up with non-respondents. No attempt was made to use this numbering to evaluate the survey results individually.
Method of Data Analysis

The independent variables in this study were the demographic variables of gender, age, highest degree held, past experience (years in administration and years as a middle school principal), school enrollment, (number of students under administrative responsibility), number of staff supervised, hours worked per week, school district type (rural, urban, or suburban), the location of the school (north, east, south, west, and central), and the school percentage of students on free or reduced lunch. Dependent variables included stress as measured by the Administrative Stress Index.

Analyses of the data were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program. Individual responses to the demographic variables and items of the Administrative Stress Index (ASI) were coded and entered into the computer. Tabulation tables were formulated to display the demographic data on each of the independent variables for the middle school principals.

Group means were calculated for each of the items (stressors) on the ASI, and stressors were rank ordered from highest to lowest. Descriptive statistics were used as necessary to report the results of the open-ended items on...
the ASI. Group means for the clusters of stressors (administrative constraints, administrative responsibilities, interpersonal relations, intrapersonal conflicts, and role expectations) were calculated for the middle school principals involved in this study.

**Summary**

This chapter described the research methodology used in this study to identify the population, develop the questionnaire, solicit the research data, and analyze the data. The data were analyzed using descriptive and multiple linear regression analysis. The results of the analyses are presented in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis of research data obtained from surveys returned by the middle school principals in Virginia. Data were compiled from responses given by principals from a two-part survey consisting of 48 questions. The data described the demographic characteristics of the principals and the major sources of job-related stress as they perceived them.

The major statistical procedures used in this study were frequency distribution, mean, percentage, and multiple linear regression. Two questions on the survey were open-ended and allowed the respondents an opportunity to list any major stressors not included in the survey. Content analysis was used to report the responses of the open-ended items.

The demographic section on the survey was designed to solicit nominal data from the members of the sample. The second section of the survey was designed to solicit Likert-
scale responses. Data obtained from this section were ordinal.

**Population Characteristics**

This study surveyed all the middle school principals in Virginia. The total population included 277 principals of middle schools with sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

**Population Response**

Surveys were mailed to the 277 middle school principals on January 4, 1999. The mailing included an introductory letter (Appendix C), a demographic sheet, and the Administrative Stress Index (Appendix B).

The first mailing yielded 170 completed surveys. This represented a 61% return of the mailed surveys. Three weeks following the initial mailing of the survey, the researcher telephoned the principals who had not returned a survey. There were 19 completed surveys returned following the telephone call. This represented a total of 189 surveys returned or 68% of the mailed surveys. Middle school principals not responding to the survey may be highly stressed. The collection of data was terminated on January 31, 1999.
Population Description

The composite description of the public middle school principal in Virginia who participated in this study was a 46-55 year-old male with a Masters degree in education, 11-15 years of administrative experience who worked approximately 51-60 hours per week supervising 701-900 students and 76-100 adults in a rural middle school (grades 6,7,8) with one assistant principal.

Table 2 indicates that the ages of the principals ranged from 36 to over 65 years of age. Of the participating principals, the greatest number (64.6%) were between the ages of 46 to 55 years of age. There were no respondents between the ages of 25 to 35 years of age. Forty-three (22.8%) of the principals were between 36 to 45 years old. This was consistent with the research completed by Whitaker (1992) who reported the 40’s to be the average age range of school principals.

Data collected from the 189 respondents indicated that 69.8% (132) of the principals were male and 30.2% (57) of the principals were female.

There was a broad distribution of educational attainment within the sample. The collected data indicated
that the highest percentage of participants in the study, 83.1% (157) had attained a Masters degree in education. Approximately 11.1%, (21) of the participants had attained a Specialist’s degree; and 5.8%, (11) of the participants had attained a Doctor’s degree. There were no respondents with only a bachelor’s degree.

TABLE 2

Age Distribution of Middle School Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>PERCENT OF SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 or less</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 65</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 189 100.0%

The grouping of principals by the number of years in administration is depicted in Table 3. The median number of years in administration for the sample was 11-15. The range of years in administrative experience among the principals was 2 to over 21. The greatest percentage of
principals had 6 to 10 years of experience in administration as represented by 28.6%, (54), of the respondents.

TABLE 3

Administrative Experience of Middle School Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEARS EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>PERCENT OF SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 21 years</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Characterization of principals by number of years as a middle school principal is reported in Table 4. Approximately 37.6%, (71) of the principals indicated 2 to 5 years of experience as a middle school principal. Twenty-four percent, (45) reported 6-10 years as a middle school principal. The median number of years served as a middle school principal was 2-5. Six percent of the respondents reported over 21 years of experience as a middle school principal.
TABLE 4

Experience as a Middle School Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEARS EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>PERCENT OF SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 21 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of assistant principals assigned to help the school principals is depicted in Table 5. The greatest number of principals, approximately 47.1%, (89) had one assistant principal; 32.8%, (62) principals had the services of two assistant principals. The number of assistant principals in the middle schools ranged from none to four.

Table 6 portrays the student enrollment data for the middle schools. According to responses, the smallest school enrollment was 101-300 students, and the largest school enrollment was 901 plus students. The median range of school enrollment was 701-900 students. The largest number of principals, 40.7%, (77) reported having a 901 plus
student enrollment.

### TABLE 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>PERCENT OF SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>189</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT ENROLLMENT</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>PERCENT OF SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-300</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-500</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-700</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>701-900</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 901</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>189</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants in this study were asked to classify the school type. The largest percentage of participants were from rural schools. This represented 47.6% (90) of the respondents. Urban schools had the next highest number with 68 principals, representing 36%. The suburban schools with 31 respondents accounted for 16.4% of the sample.

Table 7 depicts the number of adults supervised by the middle school principals. Twenty-nine percent, (55) reported supervising 51-75 adults. The median range of number of adults supervised was 76-100 with a range of 1 to over 100 adults.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADULTS SUPERVISED</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>PERCENT OF SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-100</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 100</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of hours worked per week by the middle school principals is presented in Table 8. The median range
of hours worked per week by the principals was 51-60. Approximately 48.7% (92) of the principals reported working 51 to 60 hours per week, and 33.3% (63) of the principals indicated they worked 61 to 70 hours per week. Only 5.3%, (10) of the principals reported working 40-50 hours per week. There were no respondents working fewer than 40 hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEKLY HOURS WORKED</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>PERCENT OF SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 70</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were five geographic sections in Virginia identified as north, east, south, west, and central. Approximately 24.3% of the participants were principals in Northern Virginia; 16.9% were principals in Southern Virginia; 32.8% were principals in Eastern Virginia; 17.5%
were principals in Western Virginia, and 8.5% were principals in Central Virginia.

The school percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunches is presented in Table 9. Lunch percentages ranged from 1 to over 80%. Approximately 20.6% (39) of the participants reported a 21-30% free or reduced lunch. The areas of 11-20% and 31-40% each had 18.5%, (35), respondents reporting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL PERCENTAGE</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71-80</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-90</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was an equitable distribution of middle school...
principals within the sample from all areas of the state. Of the respondents, 70% were male and 30% female. The age range for the group was 36 to over 65 with the median age range of 46-55. Administrative experience ranged from 2 to over 21 years, the median range was 11-15 years. The number of hours worked per week ranged from 40 to over 70, with the median range of 51-60 hours. School enrollment varied from 101 to 901 plus with a median student enrollment range of 701-900. Forty-eight percent of the respondents were principals of rural schools. The number of adults supervised per school site ranged from 1 to over 100 adults.

Data Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1

What do Virginia middle school principals perceive as major factors of stress on the job?

This question was measured by having principals respond to the 35 situations listed on the ASI. The levels of stress were determined by totaling the circled responses ranging from 1 ("rarely or never bothers me") to 5 ("frequently bothers me") that indicated the degree to which principals were stressed by the situations on the
ASI. The 35 stressors were classified into five categories on the ASI: Administrative Constraints, Interpersonal Relations, Intrapersonal Conflicts, Role Expectations, and Administrative Responsibilities. Each of these five categories included 7 of the 35 stressors. Mean scores were used to rank the stressors. Table 14 reveals the mean score, rank, and category of the individual stressors appearing on the instrument.

As Table 10 shows, the individual stressors ranged from a high mean of 2.98 on the stressor of "feeling that I have too heavy a work load, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day", to a low mean of 1.51 on the stressor of "feeling that I am not fully qualified to handle my job". The difference in the means ranged approximately one and one-half scale points on a five-point scale. The top 10 stressors of the middle school principals in this study were:

1. Feeling that I have too heavy a work load, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day.

2. Trying to complete reports and other paper work on time.
3. Feeling that meetings take up too much time.
4. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls.
5. Imposing excessively high expectations on myself.
6. Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies.
7. Feeling that I have too little authority to carry out responsibilities assigned to me.
8. Feeling I have to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours at the expense of my personal time.
9. Trying to resolve parent/school conflicts.
10. Feeling staff members don’t understand my goals and expectations.

TABLE 10

Mean Scores and Rank-Ordered Responses of Principals Surveyed in Virginia to Individual Stressors on ASI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>SURVEY NUMBER</th>
<th>STRESSOR</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Feeling that I have too heavy a work load, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day.</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANK</td>
<td>SURVEY NUMBER</td>
<td>STRESSOR</td>
<td>CATEGORY*</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Trying to complete reports and other paper work on time.</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Feeling that meetings take up too much time.</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls.</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Imposing excessively high expectations on myself.</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies.</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Feeling that I have too little authority to carry out responsibilities assigned to me.</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Feeling I have to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours at the expense of my personal time.</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Trying to resolve parent/school conflicts.</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Feeling staff members often don't understand my goals and expectations.</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Having my work frequently interrupted by staff members who want to talk.</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANK</td>
<td>SURVEY NUMBER</td>
<td>STRESSOR</td>
<td>CATEGORY*</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Trying to resolve differences between/among staff members.</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Feeling that the progress on my job is not what it should or could be.</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Feeling pressure for better job performance over and above what I think is reasonable.</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Trying to gain public approval and/or financial support for school programs.</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Having to make decisions that affect the lives of individual people that I know.</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Thinking that I will not be able to satisfy the conflict demands of those who have authority over me.</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Writing memos, letters and other communications.</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Preparing and allocating budget resources.</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Attempting to meet social expectations.</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Handling student discipline problems.</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Supervising and coordinating the tasks of many people.</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANK</td>
<td>SURVEY NUMBER</td>
<td>STRESSOR</td>
<td>CATEGORY*</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Evaluating staff members performance.</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Feeling that I have too much responsibility delegated to me by my supervisor.</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Trying to influence my immediate supervisor's actions and decisions that affect me.</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Not knowing what my supervisor thinks of me, or how he/she evaluates my performance.</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Being unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of my job are.</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Knowing I can’t get information needed to carry out my job properly.</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Trying to resolve differences between/among students.</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Trying to resolve differences with my superiors.</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Administering the negotiated contract.</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Speaking in front of groups.</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Feeling not enough is expected of me by my superiors.</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>SURVEY NUMBER</th>
<th>STRESSOR</th>
<th>CATEGORY*</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Being involved in the collective bargaining process.</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Feeling that I am not fully qualified to handle my job.</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*AC—Administrative Constraints
AR—Administrative Responsibilities
IC—Intrapersonal Conflicts
IR—Interpersonal Relations
RE—Role Expectations

The data indicated that Administrative Constraints was a high stress factor in the principals job environment. This was supported by four of the top five stress items of: "feeling that I have too heavy a work load, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day" (ranked 1st), "trying to complete reports and other paper work on time" (ranked 2nd), "feeling that meetings take up too much time" (ranked 3rd), "being interrupted frequently by telephone calls" (ranked 4th), and "complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies" (ranked 6th). This is comparable to the results in the Swent and
Gmelch (1977) study in Oregon and the Brimm (1983) study in Tennessee. Based on the ranking of these stressors, work overload appeared to be a high stress variable in the principals work environment. Research findings have consistently indicated work overload to be a positive factor in excessive stress (Pines & Aronson, 1981).

Results in Table 10 show that Intrapersonal Conflicts and Interpersonal Relations and Role Expectations were among the top 10 stressors. The stressors “trying to resolve parent/school conflicts” (ranked 9th) and “feeling staff members don’t understand my goals and expectations” (ranked 10th) were perceived as highly stressful by principals.

Two of the top 10 stressors pertained to Intrapersonal Conflicts—conflicts that developed from within the person rather than the environment. “Imposing excessively high expectations on myself” was perceived by principals to be the fifth most stressful item. This finding was among the top five stressors similar to the results of Iuzzolino’s (1986) study. Cherniss (1980) found that unrealistic self expectations were perhaps the greatest source of stress and could be a catalyst to disillusionment and burnout for those in the helping profession. Clark (1980) also
reported that principals who cared the most and set the highest standards for performance may be at the greatest risk for stress or burnout.

The results as illustrated in Table 10 reveal that time is an important stress variable for principals. This was indicated by the top four stressors: “feeling that I have too heavy a work load, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day”, “trying to complete reports and other paper work on time”, “feeling that meetings take up too much time”, “being interrupted frequently by telephone calls”.

Table 11 compares the top five stressors found in the studies conducted by Swent and Gmelch (1977), Brimm (1983), Iuzzolina (1986), Foster (1987), and Czerniakowski (1995) with this research. Although ranked somewhat differently, many of the stressors identified in these research studies were also identified by the principals in this study as creating significant job-related stress.

Table 12 shows the scale score for each of the ASI categories. The mean for the total stress scores was 74.41. An analysis of the stress categories indicated that the Administrative Constraint factor was perceived to be
the most stressful with a mean score of 19.18, followed by Intrapersonal Conflicts with a mean score of 15.82, Interpersonal Relations with a mean score of 14.67, Role Expectations with a mean score of 13.29, and Administrative Responsibilities with a mean score of 11.45.

### TABLE 11

Comparison of Studies Using the ASI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY</th>
<th>TOP FIVE STRESSORS</th>
<th>CATEGORIES*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swent (1978) Elementary principals in Oregon</td>
<td>1. Complying with state and federal rules</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Attending meetings</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Completing reports on time</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Evaluating staff’s performance</td>
<td>AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Gaining public approval</td>
<td>AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Decision making affecting students/staff</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Evaluating staff</td>
<td>AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Resolving parent-school conflicts</td>
<td>IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Being interrupted by telephone calls</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iuzzolino (1986) High school principals in Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1. Imposing high expectations on self</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Having too heavy a workload</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Participating in school activities outside of normal day</td>
<td>RE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Attending meetings</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDY</td>
<td>TOP FIVE STRESSORS</td>
<td>CATEGORIES*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster (1987) High School Principals in Kentucky</td>
<td>1. Participating in school activities outside of normal day</td>
<td>RE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Complying with state and federal rules</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Having too heavy a workload</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Resolving parent/school conflicts</td>
<td>IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. High self-expectations</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Attending meetings</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Complying with state &amp; federal rules</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Completing reports on time</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Resolving parent/school conflicts</td>
<td>IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current study (1999) Middle School Principals in Virginia</td>
<td>1. Having too heavy a work load</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Completing reports on time</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Attending meetings</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Interrupted by telephone calls</td>
<td>AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. High self-expectations</td>
<td>IC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*AC—Administrative Constraints
AR—Administrative Responsibilities
IC—Intrapersonal Conflicts
IR—Interpersonal Relations
RE—Role Expectations
TABLE 12

Scale Test Scores on the ASI
of Middle School Principals in Virginia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>CATEGORY*</th>
<th>RANGE</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>7-35</td>
<td>19.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>IC</td>
<td>7-35</td>
<td>15.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>7-35</td>
<td>14.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>7-35</td>
<td>13.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>7-35</td>
<td>11.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Stress Score 35-175 74.41

*AC—Administrative Constraint
IC—Intrapersonal Conflicts
IR—Interpersonal Relations
RE—Role Expectations
AR—Administrative Responsibilities

The final item on the ASI provided the principals with an opportunity to list other situations about their job that were stressful. In conducting a content analysis of the responses, 19 principals listed stressful job situations not included on the ASI. Several of the respondents cited more than one stressful situation; 39 responses were analyzed. Table 13 lists all the stressors based on the content analysis. Many of the stressors have the same frequency. The top two stressors were incompetent staff and superintendents with unreasonable expectations.
TABLE 13

Content Analysis of Open-ended Responses on the ASI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>STRESSOR</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Incompetent staff</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Superintendents with unreasonable expectations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Test scores and accreditation standards</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental responsibility</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time/resources for staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development and/or conferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of time to perform job</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inadequate facilities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental demands</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental/Community apathy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Special education demands</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor salary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of funding</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School bus discipline</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student responsibility</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misinformed community</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making a difference in children’s lives in only 5 hours per day</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 39

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between the perceived stress levels of Virginia middle school principals and the following demographic characteristics: age, gender,
highest educational degree earned, years as a middle school principal, number of years in administration, school student enrollment, school type (urban, rural, suburban), location of school, number of hours worked per week, number of assistant principals per school, number of adults supervised per school, percentage of school students receiving free or reduced lunch?

This question was addressed by examining the total stress scores on the ASI in relation to specific demographic characteristics. The analysis of multiple linear regression was used to examine the relationships of the independent variables to the total stress scores. This procedure was used to control for the presence of the numerous demographic characteristics being investigated. Gender was coded "0" for female and "1" for male; location of school was coded "0" Northern Virginia, "1" Eastern Virginia, "2" Southern Virginia, "3" Western Virginia, and "4" Central Virginia; school district type was coded "0" urban, "1" rural, and "2" suburban.

Unstandardized slopes (b), standardized slopes (B), t values, significance values and adjusted R² are presented in Table 14. The standardized slopes revealed the
following demographic variables that were related to the total perceived stress levels of public middle schools in Virginia: location of school (B = .704), total number of students supervised at school site (B = -.640), number of adults supervised at school site (B = .547), years as a middle school principal (B = -.416), number of hours worked per week (B = .277), administrative experience (B = -.261), number of assistant principals at school site (B = -.201), age (B = -.191), highest degree earned (B = -.106), percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch (B = -.041). These standardized slopes indicated that:

1. As the number of students supervised increased, the level of stress decreased.

2. The more adults supervised at the school site, the higher was the stress level.

3. As the middle school principals gained more experience, their levels of stress decreased.

4. The more hours middle school principals worked, the more stress they had.

5. The more administrative experience principals had, the less stress they had.

6. The more education principals had, the less stress they had.
7. The more assistant principals a school had, the less stress the principal experienced.

8. As the principals grew older, the less stress they perceived.

After careful examination of the survey responses this study revealed the following inconsistencies:

1. The higher the number of students supervised, the lower the stress level.

2. Schools with higher percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunches exhibit lower stress levels.

Schools with a higher number of students usually have more assistant principals. The extra revenue that is brought in by students receiving free or reduced lunch could be used for paraprofessionals. This would create a smaller ratio of students to adults and fewer discipline problems. Also principals would get help with paperwork, meetings, and other time consuming tasks. This would create a lower stress level for the principal.
Research Question 3

Which demographic characteristics are the most important predictors of job-related stress among Virginia middle school principals?

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine which demographic characteristics best predicted the level of job-related stress in middle school principals. Table 14 indicates that the location of the school ($B = .704$), the number of students supervised ($B = -.640$), the number of adults supervised ($B = .547$), the number of hours worked per week ($B = .277$), years as a middle school principal ($B = -.416$), age ($B = -.191$), number of assistant principals ($B = -.201$), administrative experience ($B = -.261$), the highest degree earned ($B = -.106$), the school district type ($B = -.023$), the gender ($B = .012$), and the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch ($B = -.041$) were the predictors of job-related stress in middle school principals in Virginia.

The data generated for the number of students supervised and the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch were two inconsistencies of this study.
Table 14

Multiple Linear Regression Slopes and t Values for Demographic Characteristics Related to Stress Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristic</th>
<th>Unstandardized Slope (b)</th>
<th>Standardized Slope (B)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location of School</td>
<td>11.642</td>
<td>.704</td>
<td>1.873</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students supervised</td>
<td>-11.103</td>
<td>-.640</td>
<td>1.953</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of adults supervised at school site</td>
<td>10.231</td>
<td>.547</td>
<td>1.664</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of hours worked per week</td>
<td>7.424</td>
<td>.277</td>
<td>.883</td>
<td>.378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as a middle school principal</td>
<td>-6.627</td>
<td>-.416</td>
<td>1.172</td>
<td>.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-6.471</td>
<td>-.191</td>
<td>1.048</td>
<td>.296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of assistant principals</td>
<td>-4.792</td>
<td>-.201</td>
<td>.652</td>
<td>.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative experience</td>
<td>-4.264</td>
<td>-.261</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td>.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree earned</td>
<td>-4.088</td>
<td>-.106</td>
<td>.733</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School District Type</td>
<td>-.677</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students on free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>-.117</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.891</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R²  .323    Adjusted R² .277
Research Question 4

Is there a relationship between perceived stress factors of Virginia middle school principals and their intent to remain as principals until retirement?

A level of overall stress on the Administrative Stress Index was used to answer this question. A total stress score was determined by totaling the circled responses that indicated the degree to which principals were stressed by the 35 situations. The ASI used the following responses: "not applicable" (coded NA), "rarely or never bothers me" (coded 1), "occasionally bothers me" (coded 3), and "frequently bothers me" (coded 5). The range of total points was from 35 (low stress) to 175 (maximum stress). Table 14 shows the mean of the total stress scores on the ASI. All "NA" responses were excluded from the computation of this statistical procedure to ensure a more accurate analysis of the results. Items most often circled with "NA" were "being involved in the collective bargaining process" and "administering the negotiated contract (grievance, interpretation, etc.)." The mean for the total stress score was 74.41. This score was indicative of a low to moderate stress level.
The last question on the demographic portion of the survey gave the participants an opportunity to respond with reasons if they were not going to remain as principals until retirement. A content analysis of these responses revealed a total of 31 principals making comments or listing reasons not to remain as principals. Table 12 shows that the administrative constraints category was the highest stress area for this group of principals. This area consists of heavy work loads, time constraints, interruptions (telephone calls and staff), writing and communication, and complying with state and federal rules.

Table 15 lists the reasons for not remaining as principals. Most of the participants responding to the open-ended question were in the 46-55 age group. They expressed a desire to move to a central office position. The survey indicated that the largest percentage of principals intend to remain principals until retirement. The low-to-moderate perceived stress levels of Virginia middle school principals was not an indication of their intent to remain as principals until retirement.
TABLE 15

Reasons Not to Remain as Principals as Perceived by Virginia Middle School Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>REASON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Want to become director, superintendent or other areas in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Some days it is a joy, other days-I am ready to walk out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stress on job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Move to central office position or advancement beyond principalship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Stress on job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

This chapter has presented the analysis of research data collected in this study. The data described the demographic characteristics of the principals in the sample, the extent principals perceived their jobs as stressful, and the major sources of job-related stress perceived by the principals. A summary of the findings of this study, conclusions, and recommendations for further study are included in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter is presented in four sections and provides a summary of this research. The first section of this chapter describes the problem, purpose, and data collection procedures of this study. The second section discusses the major findings of the study. The conclusions are presented in the third section, and recommendations for future research are included in the final section of this chapter.

Summary

Stress appears to be a prevalent and pervasive part of a school principal's life that could seriously impede job performance. All public middle school principals must cope with increasing numbers of demands and changes in education. Job-related stress and its negative side effects could become and may already be a major problem for middle school principals. There is a lack of current research from which to ascertain the perceived job-related stress levels and
the major sources of job-related stress levels among middle school principals in Virginia.

The purpose of this study was to determine the major sources of job-related stress within the middle school environment.

In reality, middle school principals are not going to be able to totally eliminate the factors that cause stress in their jobs. Effective middle school principals, however, will be adaptable to changing circumstances and will attempt to manage the stress they encounter daily. The data collected in this study can be used to gain a better understanding about middle school principal stress in the Virginia public schools. Understanding stress may serve to raise the principals' levels of consciousness, so they can be more aware of stress and actively seek to cope with the stressors.

A review of relevant literature related to school administrative stress provided a supportive foundation for the study. There was an abundance of materials that addressed the topic of stress. The concept of the term, however, was vague, and a general definition does not exist. Most of the studies on school administrative stress indicated that principals were experiencing moderate to very
high levels of job-related stress. There was a base of knowledge that suggested school principals perceived certain administrative functions as being more stressful than others.

A survey instrument was used to collect data for this research. The instrument contained 48 questions and was designed to solicit ordinal, nominal, and descriptive data from the members of the sample.

The participants in this study were from the state of Virginia and consisted of all the middle school principals (grades 6, 7, 8). The Directory of Virginia Public Schools 1998-1999 was used to identify the middle school principals.

A two-part questionnaire was mailed to the 277 middle school principals in Virginia. The first section of the questionnaire was comprised of 13 statements designed to obtain necessary demographic information. The second section consisted of the Administrative Stress Index. This instrument included 35 job-related situations that principals could encounter in their work. Participants were requested to rate on a one-to-five point Likert scale the degree of stress perceived in each situation. The 35 items were distributed evenly among the five ASI categories.
Three weeks after the initial mailing of the survey, a follow-up telephone call was made in an effort to increase the number of returned surveys. There were 189 principals who chose to complete the survey. The statistical procedures used to analyze the data were frequency distribution, mean, percentage, multiple linear regression, and content analysis.

Major Research Findings

The demographic data collected in this study indicated that the median range of the middle school principals who participated in this study was 46-55 years old, male with a Masters degree in education, possessed 11-15 years of administrative experience, worked approximately 51-60 hours per week, supervised between 701-900 students and 76-100 adults in rural middle schools (grades 6,7,8) with the help of one assistant principal.

Research Question 1

What do Virginia middle school principals perceive as major factors of stress on the job?
Descriptive analysis of the principals’ responses to the 35 stressors on the ASI indicated that the five highest stressors perceived by the principals were:

1. Feeling that I have too heavy a work load, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day.
2. Trying to complete reports and other paper work on time.
3. Feeling that meetings take up too much time.
4. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls.
5. Imposing excessively high expectations on myself.

The findings revealed that principals in Virginia were stressed by heavy work loads, time demands of their jobs, and imposing high expectation on themselves. An analysis of the stress categories indicated that Administrative Constraints was perceived to be the most stressful category with a mean score of 19.18. This category, dealing with stressors relating to time, work load, policies, and meetings, was followed by the Intrapersonal Conflicts category with a mean score of 15.82 and the Interpersonal Relations category with a mean score of 14.67. These categories dealt with self and social expectations, feelings of not being qualified to handle the job, as well as
controlling student discipline and resolving differences between parents, students, or staff members.

The data indicated a need for school systems and institutions of principal preparation to consider offering better instruction in the areas of problem solving, organizational management, and conflict management to help principals cope more effectively with the stress reported in Administrative Constraints and Interpersonal Relations. This outcome supported similar recommendations concerning the need for stress management education made by Gould and Swent (1985) and Washington (1982).

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between the perceived stress levels of Virginia middle school principals and the following demographic characteristics: age, highest educational degree earned, years as a middle school principal, number of years in administration, school student enrollment, number of hours worked per week, number of assistant principals per school, number of adults supervised per school, and percentage of school students receiving free or reduced lunch?
Multiple linear regression analysis of the data revealed there were demographic variables significantly related to the stress levels perceived by the principals. These variables were: the more adults they supervised, the more stress they experienced; the more experience as a middle school principal, the less stress they experienced; the more hours worked per week, the more stress they exhibited; the more administrative experience, the less stress; the higher the age of the principals, the lower the stress; the more education middle school principals have attained, the less stress they experienced; the more students they supervised, the less stress they experienced; the more assistant principals per school, the less stress; the higher the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch, the less stress.

Research Question 3

Which demographic characteristics are the most important predictors of job-related stress among Virginia middle school principals?

Based on the multiple linear regression analysis of the collected data (Table 18), nine demographic characteristics were identified as being the best predictors of job-related
stress in relation to the categories of Administrative Constraints, Interpersonal Relations, Intrapersonal Conflicts, Administrative Responsibilities, and Role Expectations:

1. Location of the school
2. Number of students supervised
3. Number of adults supervised
4. Years as a middle school principal
5. Number of hours worked per week
6. Administrative experience
7. Number of assistant principals
8. Age of the middle school principals
9. Highest degree earned

Research Question 4

Is there a relationship between perceived stress factors of Virginia middle school principals and their intent to remain as principals until retirement?

Based on the statistical analysis of the data collected, principals in the 46-55 age category are low to moderately stressed. The largest percentage of principals (64.6) responding to the survey were in the 46-55 age group. Data indicated that Virginia middle school principals want
to remain as principals until retirement. The open-ended question on the demographic data sheet generated 20 (.10%) responses indicating desires to move to a central office position or advancement beyond principalship. These responses were from the 46-55 age group. The administrative constraints category was the highest stress area for the principals. This area of stress factors included heavy work loads, time constraints, interruptions, and compliance with state and federal regulations.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn after reviewing the findings of this study:

1. Middle school principals in Virginia perceived low to moderate levels of stress in their positions. Based on the review of related literature, school principals perceive an increasing amount of stress as they perform their administrative functions. The literature indicates that the role of the principal has drastically expanded over the past years. A high perception of stress may be an indicator of burnout among some principals.

2. The greatest sources of occupational stress among
the principals are job-demands in the areas of
Administrative Constraints and Interpersonal Relations.
Principals are most bothered by managing the daily operation
of the school and by managing conflicts between parents,
teachers, or students. As revealed in Table 14, this is
supported by the evidence that 7 out of the 10 highest
ranked stressors are associated with Administrative
Constraints and Interpersonal Relations.

Job-related stress, as perceived by principals, is not
a unidimensional factor or concept. It is a
multidimensional factor, a derivative of at least five
specific factors with the greatest amount being attributed
to Administrative Constraints and Interpersonal Relations.

3. The reliability of the ASI is supported by
comparing the results of this investigation with Swent’s
study in Oregon (1978), Brimm’s study in Tennessee (1983),
Iuzzolino’s study in Pennsylvania (1986), Foster’s study in
Kentucky (1987), and Czerniakowski’s study in Pennsylvania
(1995). Table 15 shows a comparison of the five most
stressful job demands of the studies. Although the ranking
of the stressors in the studies are not identical, several
of the rankings are closely related. The individual
stressors vary only nominally from state to state.
4. Demographic characteristics of principals are not statistically significant in predicting the level of occupational stress. The findings reveal that the combined influence of age, gender, educational level, years of administrative experience, years as a middle school principal, students supervised, school location, hours worked per week, number of assistant principals, the number of adults supervised, and the percentage of students on free or reduced lunch contribute approximately 27.7% to the prediction of the principals' level of job-related stress.

**Recommendations**

The findings in this study reveal that stress is a multifaceted problem. The following recommendations include suggestions for administrative staff development programs that should prove useful in managing occupational stress and directions for further research toward understanding the nature of the relationship of stress and the school principalship.

1. Principals must learn to alleviate stress associated with Administrative Constraints, as identified in this study. If principals are provided with workshops in organizational management, they can learn to manage
administrative tasks, to delegate assignments to others, to use organizational techniques such as screening phone calls, and to make effective use of meetings. Courses that incorporate problem-solving techniques such as role-playing and problem related simulations should be made available to principals.

2. The greatest source of stress affecting the majority of principals in this study pertains to resolving conflicts between the school and parents and between/among staff members. Principals must learn to manage conflict effectively. School administrators should receive training on effective approaches to use in resolving conflicts with parents, staff members, and students. There may be existing strategies that principals can learn to help them deal more effectively with daily and long-term conflicts.

3. Superintendents of schools should promote the establishment of voluntary support groups for system administrators. These support groups would provide opportunities for principals of all ages and levels of experience to exchange ideas related to stressful job situations. The support system might help reduce the anxiety levels of some principals and conceivably increase job effectiveness.
4. Inservice training sessions could be conducted for principals to learn how to deal with stress and burnout in the workplace. Instruments similar to those in this study could be used as follow-up to determine if the inservice had been effective.

5. University students preparing for careers in educational administration, especially to become school principals, should receive coursework and training in coping strategies that could help them reduce stressful situations.

6. As demands and expectations increase for middle school principals, especially with state and local mandates, the state should provide resources, education, and support services such as state educational associations to help principals better cope with stress.

7. Supervisors of principals need to be educated to be more sensitive to causes of stress so that they can help principals recognize their own stress symptoms in the early stages. Supervisors should provide opportunities for principals to meet and consult with other principals to share their strategies for coping with stress.

8. Local school superintendents should promote support for less experienced principals who may become stressed more easily than more experienced principals. Younger principals
should have more inservice workshops where they can consult with more experienced administrators regarding how to deal with stress. This type of support system may reduce stress levels, particularly in the area of administrative constraints.

9. All school boards, superintendents, and central office staff should work to decrease the workload placed on principals. In an era of tightening budgets, like many other organizations, school districts are “downsizing”, and this can mean a reduction in central office staff. When that occurs, it is extremely important that the reduction in personnel does not create a shift in task load to the school sites.

Implications for Further Research

As a result of this investigation, the following recommendations for further research are offered:

1. This study could be conducted with a different population to compare the stress of middle school principals in other states with that of middle school principals in Virginia. Further inquiry may determine if administrative constraints are perceived as significant problem areas for principals at other middle schools.
2. A longitudinal study should be done that follows administrators in the below 40 age group for several years to determine where or when there is an increase or decrease in stress and the age when this increase or decrease occurs.

3. There is a need to continue development of the Administrative Stress Index to include the items that are present in education today (i.e. school violence).

This study has assessed the perceived job-related stress levels, and the major sources of job-related stress of middle school principals in Virginia. It is hoped that the findings in this study will contribute to a better understanding of the job-related stress experienced by middle school principals in Virginia.
REFERENCES


theory and reality. *NASSP Bulletin*, 74 (526), 80-85


April 23, 1998

Mr. Walter Gmelch
Washington State University
Department of Educational Administration and Supervision
Pullman, Washington 99164-2136

Dear Mr. Gmelch:

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee. The topic of my dissertation is "Factors of job-related stress that lead to burnout as perceived by middle school principals in Virginia".

I am writing for permission to use the Administrative Stress Index as part of my survey instrument. I will also be using the Maslach Burnout Inventory along with a demographic page.

If possible, I would also like a copy of the Administrative Stress Index and some statistical data about how the instrument was tested and validated for reliability and validity.

Thank you for your expedient reply to this request.

Yours truly,

Teresa Snyder
Special Education Teacher and Doctoral Student

Address:
252 V. I. Ranch Road
Bristol, TN 37620

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APPENDIX B

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS
### DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. **School District Type**
   - 0. Urban
   - 1. Rural
   - 2. Suburban

2. **Age**
   - 0. 25 or less
   - 1. 26-35
   - 2. 36-45
   - 3. 46-55
   - 4. 56-65
   - 5. Over 65

3. **Gender**
   - 0. Female
   - 1. Male

4. **Percentage of school receiving free or reduced lunch**

5. **How many years have you been a middle school principal?**
   - 0. First year
   - 1. 2-5 years
   - 2. 6-10 years
   - 3. 11-15 years
   - 4. 16-20 years
   - 5. Over 21 years

6. **How many years have you been in administration?**
   - 0. First year
   - 1. 2-5 years
   - 2. 6-10 years
   - 3. 11-15 years
   - 4. 16-20 years
   - 5. Over 21 years

7. **Highest degree earned:**
   - 0. B.A./B.S.
   - 1. M.A./M.S.
   - 2. Ed.S.
   - 3. Ed.D./Ph.D.

8. **Total number of students under your supervision.**
   - 0. Less than 100
   - 1. 101-300
   - 2. 301-500
   - 3. 501-700
   - 4. 701-900
   - 5. 901 plus

9. **Number of assistant principals at school site:**
   - 0. None
   - 1. One
   - 2. Two
   - 3. Three
   - 4. Four

10. **Number of adults supervised at school site:**
    - 0. 1-25
    - 1. 26-50
    - 2. 51-75
    - 3. 76-100
    - 4. Over 100

11. **Approximate number of hours worked per week (including all meetings and functions):**
    - 0. Less than 40
    - 1. 40-50
    - 2. 51-60
    - 3. 61-70
    - 4. Over 70

12. **Location of school**
    - 0. Northern Virginia
    - 1. Eastern Virginia
    - 2. Southern Virginia
    - 3. Western Virginia
    - 4. Central Virginia

13. **Do you intend to remain a principal until retirement?**
    - Yes
    - No
    - If no, briefly tell why.
ADMINISTRATIVE STRESS INDEX

School administrators have identified the following 35 work related situations as sources of concern. It's possible that some of these situations bother you more than others. How much are you bothered by each of the situations listed below? Please circle the appropriate response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely or Never Bothers Me</th>
<th>Occasionally Bothers Me</th>
<th>Frequently Bothers Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Supervising and coordinating the tasks of many people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Feeling staff members don't understand my goals and expectations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Feeling that I am not fully qualified to handle my job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Knowing I can't get information needed to carry out my job properly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Thinking that I will not be able to satisfy the conflict-demands of those who have authority over me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Trying to resolve differences between/among superiors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Feeling not enough is expected of me by my superiors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Having my work frequently interrupted by staff members who want to talk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Imposing excessively high expectations on myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Feeling pressure for better job performance over and above what I think is reasonable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Writing memos, letters and other communications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Trying to resolve differences with my superiors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Speaking in front of groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Attempting to meet social expectations (housing, clubs, friends, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Not knowing what my supervisor thinks of me, or how he/she evaluates my performance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Having to make decisions that affect the lives of individual people that I know (colleagues, staff members, students, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Feeling I have to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours at the expense of my personal time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Feeling that I have too much responsibility delegated to me by my supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Trying to resolve parent/school conflicts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Preparing and allocating budget resources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Feeling that I have too little authority to carry out responsibilities assigned to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Handling student discipline problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Being involved in the collective bargaining process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely or Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Evaluating staff members' performance</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Feeling that I have too heavy a work load, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Feeling that the progress on my job is not what it should or could be</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Administering the negotiated contract (grievances, interpretation, etc.)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Being unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of my job are</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Feeling that meetings take up too much time</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Trying to complete reports and other paper work on time</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Trying to resolve differences between/among staff members</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Trying to influence my immediate supervisor's actions and decisions that affect me</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Trying to gain public approval and/or financial support for school programs</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other situations about your job that bother you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Used with permission
January 4, 1999

Dear Administrator:

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee University in Johnson City, TN. For my dissertation, I am doing a study aimed at identifying job related stress factors among middle school principals in Virginia. This letter is to request your participation in the study. Your job grows more complex and challenging each year. Therefore more research is needed in this area.

Please take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete the enclosed survey. Your participation in this study will add to the literature in this area and perhaps highlight specific common needs where support services could be requested and provided in the future.

Your participation is voluntary, and returning the questionnaire implies consent to participate in this research project. Anonymity will be assured in that no names are requested on the survey form. Therefore, please feel free to respond with frankness and candor so that the most accurate data can be obtained.

Please return your completed survey in the enclosed postage paid envelope. Timely completion of the survey will be very much appreciated. If you have questions about this doctoral study, please call me at (423) 878-4552.

Yours truly,

Teresa Snyder
Doctoral Student
and Teacher of Special Needs Children

Enclosures

/ts
VITA

TERESA HARPER SNYDER

Personal Data:
Date of Birth: April 1, 1948
Place of Birth: Kingsport, Tennessee
Marital Status: Married

Education:
Public Schools, Blountville, Tennessee
Speedwriting & Secretarial College, Bristol, Tennessee, 1966
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; B.S., 1990
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; M.Ed., 1993
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee; Ed. D., 1999

Professional Experience:
Accountant/Bookkeeper, 1967-1992

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