

ABSTRACT

Principals play a pivotal role in performance of students in secondary schools. In many instances this calls for high professional and societal demands; and expectations. As a result, principals experience stress. Studies worldwide have revealed that moderate stress among principals enhances performance while low and excessive stress reduces performance measured by students' performance in national examinations. In Rachuonyo North (RN) and Homa Bay (HB) Sub Counties more female principals left principalship due to stress compared to other factors that is, 11(24.4%) and 15(28.3%) respectively due to stress and 4(8.9%) and 9(17%) due to other factors such as joining spouses. The mean scores for schools headed by female principals from 2010 to 2014 were 3.77 and 4.20 respectively lower compared to those headed by male principals whose mean scores were 5.05 and 5.67 for the same period. The purpose of this study was to establish factors and strategies influencing female principals' stress and its effect on students' academic performance in RN and HB sub counties, Kenya. The objectives of the study were to; determine stress levels among public secondary school female principals, determine factors influencing stress among public secondary school female principals, establish influence of coping strategies on female principals stress and determine the effect of stress among female principals on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in RN and HB Sub counties. A conceptual framework was used to focus on the variables of the study. Descriptive survey and correlational research designs were adopted. The study population was 211 consisting of 39 female Principals, 39 Deputy Principals, 72 Heads of Department, 39 Board of Management chairpersons and 2 Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers. Saturated sampling technique was used to select 191 respondents as 20 had been used in the pilot study. Questionnaire, interview schedules and document analysis guide were used to collect data. Face and content validity of the instruments was determined by experts in Educational Administration whose input was incorporated. Reliability coefficient of female principals' questionnaire was .8 at set p-value of .05. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, means, percentages; and regression analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed for content in emergent themes and sub-themes. The study established that female principals were moderately stressed with a stress index of 3. There was a strong positive relationship between stressors and stress levels ($r=.728$, $N=39$, $p<.05$). This means that stress levels were attributed largely to these factors. Stressors explained 51.6% of stress level among female principals. The other 49.4% was due to other factors that were not part of the study. Coping strategies strongly influenced female principals' stress level ($r=.674$, $N=39$, $P<.05$). The coping strategies were significant predictors ($F(1, 37)=29.888$, $P<.05$). Coping strategies accounted for 43.8% of the stress level of female principals, the other 56.2% could be explained by other factors. High stress level accounted for 78.3% of variation in students' academic performance as signified by $R^2 .783$. The study concluded that female principals were moderately stressed and the coping strategies were effective in moderating principals' stress levels. High stress levels among female principals highly influenced students' performance. The study recommended that female principals be sensitized on impact of stress on student performance, and personal health for better functioning. The findings of the study are significant to education stakeholders in addressing issues concerning female principals' stress.