

**A STUDY OF THE CAUSES OF TEACHER STRESS AND BURNOUT IN  
BEGINNING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THE CLARKSVILLE-  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM**

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Field Study written by Tonya Stephan Cunningham entitled "A Study of the Causes of Teacher Stress and Burnout in Beginning Elementary School Teachers in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System". I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Education Specialist, with a major in Administration and Supervision.



Major Professor

We have read this Field Study  
and recommend its acceptance.



Minor Professor

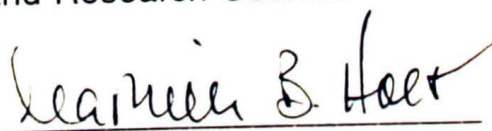
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## ABSTRACT

The problem of this field study was to obtain, organize and present data from an available sample of male and female educators employed to teach in a school system with less than six years teaching experience and to identify the criteria within the school that produce the highest level of teacher stress.

The purpose of this study was to examine the hypotheses expressed in the following objectives:

1. To examine teacher stress and its relationship to burnout.
2. To determine copeability under stress of male and female educators employed to teach in a school system with less than six years teaching experience.
3. To identify most common stressors.
4. To examine the possibility that stressors can be alleviated.
5. To establish the need for support groups, exercise therapy and self-help motivations.

To obtain this information, evaluative questionnaires were given to 80 educators, all of whom were gainfully employed to teach grades K-5 in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System with less than six years teaching experience. Seventy responses were received and the data analyzed. The results are included in this study.

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A Field Study  
Presented to the  
Graduate and Research Council of  
  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Education Specialist

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by  
Tonya Stephan Cunningham  
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Stress and burnout are occupational hazards to which all members of service professions are exposed. Work-related stress affects the actions of individuals on a personal and professional level. With increasing demands on teachers, many are experiencing symptoms of burnout. Productivity and performance of these individuals are affected by their emotional, physical and psychological reactions to these stresses. The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1984) identified a number of problems facing teachers and the teaching profession. This report indicated low salaries, poor working conditions, lack of prestige and limited input into school decisions have caused dissatisfaction and excessive turnover in the teaching profession. These reactions often lead to a physical, emotional and attitudinal exhaustion that begin with a feeling of uneasiness and mount as the joy of teaching begins to gradually slip away.

According to Cetron and Gayle (1991), by the time a teacher has been teaching in the classroom for five years, there is a 50% chance that he or she will leave the profession. If the teacher is employed in an urban area, the likelihood increases to 75%. Further statistics



indicate 15% of beginning teachers leave the profession after the first year of teaching and more than 50% leave within six years. With this in mind, the importance of identifying the causes of stress, working on strategies to alleviate these causes and finding ways to rekindle the passion for teaching becomes evident.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem to be investigated in this study is the perceptions of beginning elementary school teachers on issues contributing to teacher stress and burnout in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System in Clarksville, Tennessee.

### Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate criteria contributing to the causes of teacher stress and/or burnout. Specific questions to be answered include:

1. Is stress compounded by undesirable work conditions?
2. Do teachers' interpersonal relationships within the school induce teacher stress?
3. Do administrators' attitudes toward teachers cause stress?

### Statement of the Hypothesis

For purposes of this study, the research hypotheses to be investigated in this study are:

Ho 1: Stress is compounded by undesirable work conditions.

Ho 2: Teachers' interpersonal relationships within the school can induce teacher stress.

Ho 3: Administrators' attitude toward their teachers may bring about stress.

### Significance of the Study

This study could have a significant affect on the strategies used to reduce or alleviate stress and/or burnout for beginning elementary school teachers. Stressful situations faced by teachers are as varied as the individuals themselves. Research indicated two sources of stress. One is self-imposed stress that comes from unrealistic expectations rather than over-work. The other is situational stress that results from the demands of others and conflicts among people to include the clash of values (Corbin, 1994).

In addition to these stressors, teachers are faced with the daunting challenge of working with students who enter school with a wide spectrum of problems. These may include



drug and alcohol problems, physical and mental abuse, parent and student apathy, dysfunctional families and varied educational reforms. Finding the mental strength to deal with these problems faced in the classroom, along with others educators must face outside the classroom, often becomes a burden too complex to tackle. The everyday responsibilities faced by today's educators, such as meeting the needs of all children, providing a safe and orderly learning environment, keeping up with the daunting piles of paperwork and dealing with parents, are often added to the top of these already existing problems. This creates a situation requiring a person with a high stress tolerance. Identifying ways for teachers to become involved in reducing stress and/or effectively dealing with stress is essential to the successful functioning of a school.

### Limitations of the Study

Prior to this study, permission was sought from the Director of Schools and principals from eighteen elementary schools in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System. The research was limited to elementary school teachers employed to teach grades K-5 having less than six years teaching experience. Five of the eighteen elementary schools asked to participate chose to do so.

### Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided for better understanding of certain terms used in the study:

Stress: mental or emotional pressure

Burnout: physical or emotional exhaustion from long-term stress

Beginning teacher: a teacher having been gainfully employed to teach in a school system with less than six years teaching experience

Elementary School: a school in which grades K-5 are taught

Self-Imposed Stress: unrealistic expectations one puts on one's self

Situational Stress: results from demands of others, conflict among people, or the clash of values

### Assumptions

When conducting a study of this nature some basic assumptions become necessary. The findings of this study are based on the following assumptions without testing:

1. The questionnaire was a valid mean of measuring the objectives.
2. All the respondents were adults and had a clear understanding of all survey questions.



3. The anonymity of the questionnaire allowed respondents to answer questions freely and honestly without threatening repercussions.
4. All respondents had experienced stress sometime during their life.
5. The total sample population selected was represented absolutely by completed interview questionnaires.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### What is Burnout?

Burnout is emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1982). When an individual burns out, there are five stages to his or her symptoms. The individual who burns out is likely to be very enthusiastic when first entering the organization. One cannot become emotionally exhausted unless there is first an emotional commitment. The initial enthusiasm soon gives way to stagnation as the individual realizes they will not be able to solve all the problems the organization faces. This leads to frustration on the part of the individual because important problems are not being resolved. This frustration may eventually lead to apathy towards the organization. Eventually the only way an individual may be able to do something about his or her individual burnout is through outside intervention. This intervention may take the form of counseling or, more likely, leaving the situation that caused the burnout (Edelwich, 1980).

Burnout is job related. It is not caused by problems at home. While the presence of strong family support at home may help to alleviate the development of burnout in an individual, family problems do not cause someone to burn out on a particular job (Glicken & Janka, 1984). The employees most likely to burn out are enthusiastic, young and

idealistic. If an employee is bored with doing the same thing over and over for years, it is tedium, not burnout (Pines & Kafrey, 1978). Burnout is caused by a strong idealistic commitment that runs head on into the realities of a particular position (Bailey, 1983).

According to Caldwell and Dorling (1991), burnout and stress are not the same. They contend an employee will often suffer from temporary stress and feel as if he or she is burned out. Once the stress is dealt with, the burned out feeling is gone. The authors state stress is more likely to be short term and is caused by specific factors. Burnout is the longer term accumulation of stressors and other sources of frustration that eventually lead to emotional exhaustion.

The function of the organization may affect the likelihood of burnout of employees. Burnout is especially common in organizations where there is extensive client contact (Maslach and Jackson, 1981, 1984). Burnout is also likely to happen in organizations where political, economic or administrative realities prevent idealistic employees from realizing their ideals (Cherniss, 1980). The management practices in an organization can also affect the likelihood of burnout. If there are constant stressors with no management practices or programs to relieve the stress,



burnout is more likely. If support networks are lacking in an organization, burnout is more likely. If training programs are lacking or non-existent, burnout is more likely (Caldwell & Ihrke, 1994).

### Causes of Teacher Burnout

There is considerable division of opinion on the causes and symptoms of teacher stress and burnout. Lombardi (1995) suggests the following list of symptoms as warning signs for teacher burnout:

- you are bored with teaching and do not feel there is anything more to learn about your job
- you bristle at suggestions of new ways to teach
- you dream of perfection and judge your professional performance without mercy
- you are plagued by the feeling that you should be doing more at school
- you are withdrawn and feel more comfortable doing paperwork than interacting with students, colleagues and parents
- you cannot remember why you went into teaching or find yourself saying, "If only I had not majored in education"

- teaching is not fun for you anymore and you complain about it incessantly
- you take your frustrations home and cannot get them out of your mind
- you count the days until the next break or summer vacation
- you worry excessively about your students and their problems
- you do not take good care of yourself, eat poorly, do not get enough sleep, lose interest in hobbies and resort to unhealthy outlets for stress such as drugs and/or alcohol.

McGee-Cooper (1990) contends although burnout may be very personal, it is generally attributed to "lack of" symptoms. This list includes:

- lack of energy
- enthusiasm
- motivation
- zest
- ideas
- humor
- joy
- satisfaction

- interest

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- dreams for life
- concentration and self confidence.

It can also be conjectured these "lack of" symptoms can also be classified as "results of" burnout.

Evidence obtained in a literature review presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association by Hewitt (1993) categorized burnout and stress according to the following influencing factors:

- teacher's relationship with students
- teacher's personality
- disruptive student behavior
- extreme workloads
- negative school environment
- unclear expectations
- lack of participation in decision making
- deficient parental support
- shortage of teaching time
- poor university preparations
- low pay
- insufficient mentoring
- teacher's gender
- teacher's marital status
- teacher's educational level.



However, no evidence of one clear-cut causal factor for teacher burnout was identified in the studies reviewed.

A study conducted by Byrne (1992) revealed the potency of role conflict, work overload, classroom climate, decision-making and peer support as the primary organizational determinants of teacher burnout. Her findings also emphasized the key positions held by self-esteem and external locus of control as important mediators of teacher burnout.

Each of these antecedent stressors leads to teacher burnout. Cunningham (1983) noted when a multitude of stressors in the teaching profession continue without relief, the pattern of reactions described by burnout seriously damages the teacher's ability to perform his or her job, feelings become negative, attitudes become cynical, concern for students is lost, frequency of physical illness and use of alcohol frequently increases. Therefore burnout, as the subsequent outcome of continued stress, reflects the cumulative reactions to this stress.

### Stages of Stress and Burnout

In an adaptation of the book The Stress Solution written by Miller and Smith (1994) it is concluded the road to burnout is paved with good intentions. The authors

contend burnout proceeds by stages that blend and merge into one another so smoothly and imperceptibly the victim seldom realizes what happened even after it is over. They classify and define these stages in the following manner:

1. The Honeymoon: During the honeymoon phase, the job is wonderful. The employee has boundless energy and enthusiasm and all things seem possible. The employee loves the job and the job loves the employee. They believe it will satisfy all of their needs and desires and solve all of their problems. The employee is delighted with their job, co-workers and organization.
2. The Awakening: The honeymoon wanes and the awakening stage starts with the realization that the employee's initial expectations were unrealistic. Their job is not working out the way they thought it would. It does not satisfy all of the employee's needs and their co-workers and their organization are less than perfect. Rewards and recognition are scarce. As the employee's disillusionment and disappointment grow, they become confused. They realize something is wrong, but cannot quite put their finger on it. The employee generally works even harder to make their dreams come true, but finds that working harder does not change anything. This increases the tiredness, boredom and

frustration for the employee. They question their competence and ability and begin to lose their self-confidence.

3. Brownout: As brownout begins, early enthusiasm and energy give way to chronic fatigue and irritability. Eating and sleeping patterns change and indulging in escapist behaviors such as sex, drinking, drugs, partying or shopping binges becomes more frequent. Productivity and decisiveness drop, work deteriorates and co-workers and superiors may comment on it.

Unless interrupted, brownout slides into its later stages. Frustration and anger become increased and the blame for these difficulties is projected onto others. Depression, anxiety and physical illness are beset onto those in the brownout stage. Drugs or alcohol are often a problem.

4. Full Scale Burnout: Unless the process is interrupted or someone intervenes, brownout drifts remorselessly into full-scale burnout. Despair is the dominant feature of this final stage. This may take several months, but in most cases it involves three to four years. An overwhelming sense of failure and a devastating loss of self-esteem and self-confidence are experienced. Depression and feelings of loneliness are experienced.



Life seems pointless and there is a paralyzing, "what's the use" pessimism about the future. Talking about "just quitting and getting away" becomes more frequent. Physical and mental breakdowns are likely. Suicide, stroke or heart attack are not unusual as the final stage of what all started with such high hopes, energy, optimism and enthusiasm is completed.

5. The Phoenix Phenomenon: Rest and relaxation can result in an arising, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of burnout, but it takes time. Work should not be taken home because it probably will not get completed anyway, resulting in feelings of guilt.

In coming back from burnout Miller and Smith suggest being realistic in job expectations, aspirations and goals. Talking to someone about feelings and goals is important, but should be done carefully. Readjusted aspirations and goals must be those of the person in recovery and not someone else's. Creating balance in life and investing more time in family and other personal relationships, social activities and hobbies is key. Spreading time so thin there is not time for a job to overpower self-esteem and self-confidence is essential.

### Teachers in a Societal Context

Teachers are part of, and function within, a societal context. A teacher's belief about the importance and value of what he or she does can have a profound effect upon performance and subsequent feelings of competence (Lasley & Galloway, 1983). Education in general, and teachers in particular, have suffered the brunt of severe criticism from the greater society (Smith & Milstein, 1984). Lasley and Galloway (1983) suggest teacher training needs to confront the teachers' beliefs about their profession and to provide opportunity for the development of a clear set of values and ethics to help guide and defend their practice.

Organizational structure can greatly influence the teacher's work environment. An ineffective administrator can disastrously affect the work life of a teacher, just as a carefully designed organizational structure can promote competence and job satisfaction (Stimson & Appelbaum, 1988). Empowering teachers within the school organization takes not only a skilled administrator, but also a teacher skilled in the basics of organizational process (McLaughlin, Talbert, Kahne & Powell, 1990).

Teacher training programs can support the teacher in developing a sense of competence in creative problem solving

within organizations. Problems and performance are often focused on the inadequacies of the individual, when in fact it can often be the system or organization that is ineffective and in need of intervention. Training in formal strategies for conflict resolution would be valuable for a teacher to possess because conflicts in a changing workplace are inevitable (Wrobel, 1993).

### Recognizing Teacher Burnout

Recognizing teacher burnout is not always an easy task. In a study conducted by Stern and Cox (1993), the authors determined through student interviews teachers experiencing various levels of burnout tend to be uninteresting, unapproachable, unimaginative, dull and always seated behind their desk avoiding contact with students. Interviewed students felt being taught by a teacher who exhibited these characteristics damaged their educational career to some degree. The area most affected was the motivation these students possessed for learning. The apathetic attitude displayed by the teacher was readily transferred to the student. Students were able to recognize the problem, but they could not do anything about it. The only person who was able to control the problem, the teacher, did not recognize, or did not want to recognize, a problem existed.



It is, however, the teacher's responsibility to constantly monitor his or her effectiveness in the classroom and to be aware of the total burnout problem.

In the same study, Stern and Cox (1993) stated teachers who were interviewed provided interesting information as they discussed how they felt when they were experiencing burnout. A common feeling mentioned was one of exhaustion and desperation. Work was consuming their entire life and there were not enough hours in the day to accomplish all that needed to be accomplished. This directly resulted in constant fatigue and high stress levels. A common symptom mentioned was waking up each morning to dread the day.

According to Potter (1993), additional common signs of burnout include negative emotions such as frustration, anger, depression, dissatisfaction and anxiousness. Although these feelings are normal, if caught in the burnout cycle, these symptoms are usually experienced more and more often until they eventually become chronic.

Another common sign of burnout is the inability to deal appropriately with interpersonal problems. When feeling emotionally drained, it becomes harder to deal with people at work and at home. Overreaction and emotional outburst or intense hostility become common. This results in difficulty

communicating with co-workers, friends and family members. Some burnout victims are also apt to withdraw socially. The tendency to withdraw is most pronounced among "helping" professionals, who often become aloof and inaccessible to the very people they are expected to help (Potter, 1993).

Potter (1993) also determined as emotional reserves become depleted and the quality of relationships deteriorate, physical resilience declines. Frequent minor ailments such as colds, headaches, insomnia and backaches occur and one generally feels tired and rundown.

Potter (1993) further asserts during the burnout process, becoming tired or bored and losing enthusiasm for projects is common. It is increasingly difficult to concentrate and productivity and quality of work declines.

Dealing with the stress associated with job conflict and declining performance often results in drinking more alcohol, using more drugs, eating more (or less), drinking more coffee and/or smoking more cigarettes. Increased substance abuse further compounds the problem. Potter (1993) suggests this results in more thoughts of "so what" and "why bother?" This is particularly common among burnout victims who were once very enthusiastic and dedicated. Enthusiasm is replaced by cynicism and working seems pointless.

### Findings of Studies on Stress and Burnout

In a study conducted by Corbin (1994), it was concluded although many of the conditions which create stress are beyond the teacher's control, it is possible to cope successfully with both the symptoms and the disease itself. In this study various stressors were reported to cause teacher stress. Ones which were most prominent included: administrative attitude, teacher's interpersonal relationships within the school, parental support and student attitude.

Maslach and Jackson (1981, 1984) determined burnout to not be an inevitable outcome of high stress. They suggest facing the problem, monitoring stress, developing a repertoire of coping strategies and cultivating stress hardiness as key ingredients in a program for controlling stress and avoiding burnout.

In a study conducted by Berg (1994), it was concluded most educators felt they were deriving a sense of accomplishment from their work. However, the "price" of those outcomes for more than two in five participants appeared to be ongoing feelings of being physically and emotionally taxed by the requirements of their jobs.

The perception of being stretched too thin was not significantly related to any demographic variables, but



rather appeared to be a pervasive phenomenon for the suburban educators involved. This project's results showed that individual interventions intended to strengthen an individual's body or spirit to better resist the ravages of stress were not, by themselves, likely to achieve the outcome. One organizational intervention suggested to make jobs less stressful was site-based management. This allows administrators to reduce staff stress and burnout by clarifying educators' role expectations and by providing ready access to peer and administrative support (Berg, 1994).

According to the results of this study conducted by Berg in 1994, roughly seven of every ten educators working in our public schools at the time of the study planned to continue serving in their current professional roles for at least the next five years. An emerging public policy regarding these educators as a vital resource to be appreciated and nurtured is more likely to elicit cooperation and commitment to change than are reform efforts that exclude educators from meaningful participation and do nothing to acknowledge and address educators' increasingly prevalent feelings of being stretched to the limit.

In a study conducted by Friedman (1995), there were five major findings. The first was student behavior had

different effects, in terms of burnout, on teachers functioning within different school settings (secular and religious). Secondly, it was determined that, among the various student behavior patterns, student disrespect (to their peers and to their teachers) was the pattern that best predicted burnout in teachers. Thirdly, teachers possessing different student control ideologies did not differ in their self-reported exposure to different typical student behavior patterns. Following this was the determination that a link existed between teacher ideology and what affects teacher burnout: teachers with a humanistic orientation to pupil control were mainly affected by disrespect, whereas teachers with custodial orientation to student control were affected mainly by inattentiveness. Finally, Friedman (1995) reported the fifth determination reached from this study was male teachers' burnout was significantly affected solely by inattentiveness, whereas female teachers' burnout was significantly affected by disrespect.

In a final study reviewed, Littrell (1994) concluded that principal support is important to teachers' well-being. Principals who are emotionally supportive and provide informational support are more likely to have teachers who are satisfied with their work.

Another important finding was both instrumental and emotional support were significant predictors of school commitment for special and general educators in the study. Additionally, emotional support provides teachers with a sense of belonging that motivates them to high performance and involvement.

It was also concluded teachers who reported more emotional support also reported fewer health problems. It seems that when people are provided with support that promotes their self-esteem (emotional support), physical and psychological symptoms decrease. These results suggest that teachers perceive higher levels of principal support when there is a high degree of camaraderie and optimism in their school and when teachers interact frequently with their principals.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study deals with the perceptions of the entities which produce the highest levels of stress for beginning elementary school teachers. A questionnaire and a statement describing the general purpose of the research were presented to each respondent. The questionnaire consists of closed form questions which permit only certain responses in order that quantification and analysis of the results could be carried out efficiently.

#### Materials and Methods Used

Questionnaires were distributed to a volunteer liaison from each site agreeing to participate. Each volunteer meeting the criteria for a beginning teacher as qualified in the introduction of this study was read the Questionnaire Cover Letter by the acting liaison. A copy of this letter may be found in Appendix B. Respondents were then given a copy of the questionnaire by the liason for completion. Questionnaires were returned to this researcher by the acting liaison from each participating school.

#### Procedures of the Study

This study deals with the perceptions of the entities that produce the highest levels of stress for beginning

elementary school teachers. A questionnaire and a statement describing the general purpose of the research were presented to each respondent by the cooperating liason. This questionnaire consists of closed form questions that permit only certain responses so that quantification and analysis of the results can be carried out efficiently. Respondents were chosen from those persons employed by the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System to teach grades K-5 with less than six years of teaching experience whose acting administrator agreed to participation. These schools included Kenwood Elementary School, Liberty Elementary School, Moore Elementary School, East Montgomery Elementary School and Minglewood Elementary School.

A minimal number of samples were used due to the extensive time involved in administering the questionnaires. The questionnaire was limited to the objectives and the information received was dependent upon the accuracy of the respondents.

Respondents were broken down statistically as to sex, age, number of years teaching experience and grade level taught. Anonymity was maintained.

### Analysis of Respondents

Respondents were chosen from all who volunteered to participate in the study and who were employed by the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System to teach grades K-5 with less than six years of teaching experience. The sample surveyed consisted of 95% female and 5% male. The ages of respondents ranged from 51% aged 20-29, 41% aged 30-39 and 7% aged 40-49. Years teaching experience was distributed in the following manner: Twelve percent had 0 years teaching experience, 35% had 1 year of teaching experience, 24% had 2 years teaching experience, 24% had both 2 and 3 years teaching experience, 41% had 4 years teaching experience and 12% of the total population surveyed had 5 years of teaching experience. Eleven percent of the sample population taught special education and/or special area subjects such as physical education and music in comparison to the 89% who taught regular education classes. Regardless of teaching assignments, all respondents were given the same questionnaire. Questionnaires were completed and compiled with complete anonymity. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. Data were recorded and compiled in descriptive and statistical form.



### Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was a modified version of a questionnaire found in A Study of the Causes of Teacher Stress and Burnout (Corbin, 1994) designed to meet the specific objectives stated in Chapter One. This questionnaire and a statement describing the general purpose of the research were presented to each respondent. This questionnaire consists of closed form questions that permit only certain responses so that quantification and analysis of the results can be carried out efficiently.

A minimal number of samples were used due to the extensive time involved in administering the questionnaires. The questionnaire was limited to the objectives and the information received was dependent on the accuracy of the respondents.

Respondents were broken down statistically as to sex, age, number of years teaching experience and grade level taught. Anonymity was maintained.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF DATA

The purpose of this data was to report findings of the study. The collection and analysis of data included selecting, for the study, subjects willing to complete the questionnaire employed to teach grades K-5 in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System with less than six years of teaching experience and making analyses of data received from the questionnaire. Results of the survey are amassed and summarized on the following pages.

Question #1: Have you thought of quitting your teaching job in the past year? If you circled yes, please explain why.

Yes: 35%

No: 65%

#### Explanations included :

- No handbook or guidelines until it is done wrong
- Too many hours taken away from family
- Extensive amount of time working "off the clock" preparing for class and completing paperwork
- Furthering education
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Unexplained changes made by administration
- Apathetic students, students with bad attitudes

- Stress
- Lack of funds for class, amount of personal funds required to maintain classroom
- Behavior problems in classroom
- Too much paperwork
- Difficulty with administration
- Few opportunities to interact with other adults during the work day
- Time constraints and planning put overdue pressure on teachers
- Unfair evaluation procedures which lack support
- Transfer
- Class size and expectations to meet the needs of every child
- Too great expectations outside of teaching which do not leave enough time to actually teach
- Difficulty with classroom management and the feeling of isolation

Question #2: If you had an opportunity to relive your college years, would you still choose to be a teacher? If you circled no, what other profession(s) would you choose?

Yes: 78%

No: 21%



Alternative professions included:

- Any job that could be left at the workplace
- A job with more pay
- Microbiology or other health related field
- Dentist
- Fitness and wellness
- Librarian
- Interior designer
- Business
- Computer
- School counselor
- Nursing

Question #3: Do you feel your present teaching position makes good use of your preparation, experiences and potential? If you circled no, explain how you could best serve the school system.

Yes: 90%

No: 10%

Reasons cited include:

- Not able to do creative activities due to administrative duties
- Not enough time to be creative

- Personality and strengths are not suited for the school employed in
- Better suited for administrative or supervisory position
- Better suited for a lower grade level
- Trapped by Basal and T.C.A.P. (too much structure)
- Inability to get a job in the area desired
- Extra paperwork and activities restricts teaching

Question #4: Did you have any positive attitudes or hopes when you went into the teaching profession that have not yet been fulfilled? If you circled yes, what were those attitudes and hopes?

Yes: 47%

No: 52%

Attitudes and hopes listed include:

- Not enough time to teach subjects thoroughly or develop classrooms thoroughly due to feeling rushed and handicapped by lack of time
- Inability to model kindness and love for learning due to excessive behavior problems
- Feeling appreciated by students, but not adults (this is reflected in salary, a great deal of work is completed at home and a great deal of personal money is

required to maintain classrooms)

- Feelings of competitiveness among teachers
- Lack of team work among teachers
- Expectations of making a difference in a child's life
- Unrealistic expectations for student behavior, attitude and academics
- Lack of planning time takes family time
- Support from administrators, acceptance of individuality in personality and teaching styles
- The effect of dysfunctional families on school systems
- Lack of planning time
- Expectations to baby-sit and "raise" other people's children
- Expectations for job satisfaction not met

Question #5: Is "Stress and/or Teacher Burnout" a problem (or a potential problem) in your school building?

Yes: 71%

No: 25%

No Response: 2%



Question #6: Is there anything you can do to help alleviate this problem?

Yes: 52%

No: 38%

No Response: 8%

Question #7: Do you feel burned out yourself? If you circled yes, what do you think are the causes of your stress and/or burnout?

Yes: 60%

No: 40%

Causes listed include:

- Competition among teachers
- Lack of time for planning and paperwork due to other expectations
- Pursuing Graduate degree, working and raising a family
- Pressure from new policies from Central Office and other administrators
- Lack of time to teach effectively
- Lack of help in the classroom
- Work overload (everything due at once)
- Pressure from administrators
- Score expectations
- Gaining tenure

- Lack of respect and support from parents
- Lack of organization and spreading self too thin
- Over commitment
- Dislike for being told how and what to teach
- Bombardment with new teaching styles and strategies
- Excessive paperwork
- Change in grade levels
- Difficulty balancing family and career
- Working too many hours
- Too many students behind grade level academically who require more one-on-one teaching
- Too many children with discipline problems
- Lack of parent concern
- Excessive workload
- Scheduling problems
- Peers
- Lack of materials to conduct class
- Working two jobs
- Inability to keep up with tasks assigned by administrators
- Poor classroom management

Question #8: If you should experience burnout symptoms, is there anyone in your school building or school system you can go to for help? If you circled yes, who is that person? (No names please, just say fellow teacher, principal, director of schools, etc.)

Yes: 78%

No: 14%

No Response: 1%

Persons listed included:

- fellow teachers
- principal
- assistant principal
- guidance counselor
- family
- team leader
- friends
- school psychologist

Question #9: Is being a classroom teacher your personal career goal? If you circled no, what would you like to attain in education?

Yes: 70%

No: 30%



Responses from those marking no include:

- University professor
- Secretary of Education for the United States of America
- Teacher of Deaf Children
- Administrator
- Supervisor
- Have a home for troubled children
- Guidance counselor
- Liaison between the community and public schools
- Develop a school for specific population of students
- Title I teacher
- Daycare director to help better prepare students for school and identify learning disabled students at an earlier age

Question #10: What changes would make the profession better for you?

- More classroom funds
- Less administrative paperwork
- Smaller class sizes
- More pay
- More aide time
- More planning time
- More teamwork

- Feeling important to employer
- Reimbursement for all expenditures
- More time to keep up with necessary paperwork (report cards, etc.)
- Increased public awareness concerning what is really going on in education
- More time for teaching
- Administrators willing to learn and understand the curriculums for all grade levels (keeping in touch)
- Fewer extra responsibilities outside of teaching
- Teachers respected as professionals
- Team teaching
- More support from administrators with less emphasis on test scores
- Enforce positive attitudes among administrators and faculty
- Working part time or teaching only one subject
- An open attitude from administrators concerning individual teaching styles
- More personal days
- Less student turnover
- More teaching assistants
- More emphasis on younger ESL students (English as a Second Language)

- Freedom to be self
- Fewer behavior problems
- More parent involvement
- Less repetitive paperwork
- Less bureaucracy
- A written curriculum
- Use of more teachers ideas and input
- Homogenous classes

Question #11: Any additional comments or suggestions to alleviate stress and/or burnout?

- Have fewer students in each classroom
- Work for a great principal
- Work with a good team of teachers
- Take a day to do something for yourself that makes you feel good
- Provide more conference and/or inservices on dealing with stress and burnout
- Implement faculty stress programs
- Keep new teachers more informed
- Exercise
- Maintain a sense of humor
- Maintain good relationships with peers
- Talk to others who understand



- Try not to take work home
- Schedule monthly or quarterly meetings to discuss problems with experienced teachers away from school
- Choose and maintain a hobby
- Do not begin school until 9 A.M.
- Start a walking club
- Take your personal days and do not stay at school late every night
- Provide a teaching assistant for each classroom
- Consider teachers' opinions as important

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the findings, establish conclusions drawn from these findings and provide recommendations for dealing with stress and burnout.

#### Summary

Hypothesis one stated stress is compounded by undesirable work conditions. Data obtained from questionnaire questions number one, three, four, seven and nine do not adequately support this hypothesis. Question number ten does adequately support this hypothesis. A breakdown of each question follows:

Question 1: Have you ever thought of quitting your teaching job in the past year? If you circled yes, please explain why.

Thirty five of the responses were affirmative. Of these affirmative responses, 92% attributed their response to some form of stress imposed by undesirable work conditions. From this data, it can be determined that question one does not adequately support this hypothesis. Although a large percentage of those experiencing burnout did contribute that stress to undesirable work conditions, a

relatively low percentage of respondents had actually considered quitting their job.

Question 3: Do you feel your present teaching position makes good use of your preparation, experiences and potential? If you circled no, explain how you could best serve the school system.

Ten percent of the respondents answered no to this question. Ninety percent of these responses contributed discontentment to undesirable work conditions. From this data it can be determined that question number three does not adequately support this hypothesis due to a low percentage of respondents who actually harbored feelings of discontentment.

Question 4: Did you have any positive attitudes or hopes when you went into the teaching profession that have not yet been fulfilled? If you circled yes, what were these attitudes and hopes?

Of the total responses 47% were affirmative. Of the affirmative responses, 84% were attributed to undesirable work conditions. The 47% affirmative response to unfilled attitudes and hopes is significant enough to be of concern.



However, from this data it can be determined that question number four does not adequately support this hypothesis.

Question 7: Do you feel burned out yourself? If you circled yes, what do you think are the causes of your stress and/or burnout?

Sixty percent of the responses were affirmative. Of these affirmative responses, 37% contributed stress and/or burnout to undesirable work conditions. Although a relatively large percentage of respondents actually did feel burned out, few contributed this burnout to undesirable work conditions. From this information, it can be determined that question number seven does not adequately support this hypothesis.

Question 9: Is being a classroom teacher your personal career goal? If you circled no, what would you like to attain in education?

Thirty percent of the responses to this question were no. Of this 30% response, 72% were contributed to undesirable work conditions. Although a relatively high percentage of the respondents contributed their responses to undesirable work conditions, a considerably low percentage actually did not consider being a classroom teacher their

personal career goal. From this data, it can be determined question number nine does not adequately support this hypothesis.

Question 10: What changes would make the profession better for you?

Ninety percent of the respondents suggested improvements in working conditions would actually make their profession better. From this data, it can be determined that question number ten does adequately support this hypothesis.

From this data it can be concluded that questions number one, three, four, seven and nine do not adequately support this hypothesis. However, question number ten does adequately support this hypothesis.

Hypothesis two stated teachers' interpersonal relationships within the school can induce teacher stress. Data obtained from questions number seven and ten do not adequately support this hypothesis. A breakdown of each question follows:

Question 7: Do you feel burned out yourself? If you circled

yes, what do you think are the causes of your stress and/or burnout?

Sixty percent of the respondents stated they actually did feel burned out. However, of this 60%, only 6% contributed stress and/or burnout to interpersonal relationships within the school. From this data, it can be determined that question number seven does not adequately support this hypothesis.

Question 10: What changes would make the profession better for you?

Twelve percent of the total responses suggested changes related to interpersonal relationships within the school would make the profession better for them. Due to the low percentage of respondents considering stress to be a reflection of interpersonal relationships within the school, it can be determined that question number ten does not adequately support this hypothesis.

Hypothesis three stated administrator's attitude toward their teachers may bring about stress. Data obtained from



questions number seven and ten do not adequately support this hypothesis. A breakdown of each question follows:

Question 7: Do you feel burned out yourself? If you circled yes, what do you think are the causes of your stress and/or burnout?

Sixty percent of the respondents did feel burned out. Of those who were experiencing burnout, 34% contributed burnout to administrators' attitude toward their teachers. Although the data reflects burnout as a significant problem, it can still be determined that question number seven does not adequately support this hypothesis.

Question 10: What changes would make the profession better for you?

Twenty five percent of the respondents considered modifications in administrators' attitudes toward teachers as a way to improve the profession. Although the percentages are considerably higher than the others, it cannot be determined the information obtained from this data adequately supports this hypothesis.

### Conclusions

From the analysis of data it can be determined that stress is a source of concern for beginning elementary school teachers in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System. In addition, it can be determined that stress is not compounded by undesirable work conditions. However, those considering work conditions to be a source of stress cited these circumstances to include overcrowded classrooms, lack of planning time, competitiveness among teachers, pressure from administrators and discipline problems among the children served.

From this study it can also be concluded that teachers' interpersonal relationships within the school do not necessarily induce teacher stress. Although it was determined that competitiveness among teachers is a stressor for some, the underlying consensus of opinion determined it not to be a significant problem.

Finally, from the analysis of data it can be determined that the administrators' attitudes towards teachers does not cause significant stress. Some of the attitudes cited by those considering administrators' attitudes to be a source of stress include unreasonable expectations, unwillingness to accept diversity among teachers and their styles of teaching and unfair evaluation procedures directed by

differences in philosophy.

From this data it can be determined that stress is a source of concern for many beginning elementary school teachers in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System. However, it is important to consider the fact the surveys were administered at the beginning of the school year and data may have been swayed differently if they had been given during a different time of the school year.

It is also important to note that, although valuable data was gathered from questionnaire questions number two, five, six and eight, none of the data was applicable for defense of the hypotheses.

### Recommendations

Numerous recommendations were made concerning methods for improving teachers' ability to cope with stress. Some of those suggested by the respondents in this study include:

- Have fewer students in each classroom
- Work for a great principal
- Work with a good team of teachers
- Take a day to do something for yourself that makes you feel good
- Provide more conferences and/or inservices on dealing with stress and burnout



- Implement faculty stress programs
- Keep new teachers more informed
- Exercise on a regular basis
- Maintain a good sense of humor
- Talk to others who understand
- Try not to take work home
- Schedule monthly or quarterly meetings to discuss problems with experienced teachers away from the school setting
- Choose and maintain a hobby
- Do not begin school until nine o'clock in the morning
- Start a walking club
- Take your personal days and do not stay at school late every night
- Provide a teaching assistant for each classroom
- Administrators and parents should consider teachers' opinions as important.

In another study conducted by Berg (1994), eleven individual burnout interventions were cited. These included the following:

- Engaging in a non-work hobby or interest
- Maintaining a balanced perspective on life
- Getting appropriate amounts of sleep
- Eating a nutritionally balanced diet

- Associating with psychologically healthy colleagues
- Getting away weekends
- Setting realistic goals for students
- Getting away summers
- Structuring the work day to include breaks from direct and continuous student contact
- Exercising regularly
- Developing more effective time-management skills.

In this same study (Berg 1994), organizational burnout interventions were also cited. These included:

- Involving staff in decision making
- Involving staff in program development
- Involving staff in goal setting
- Increase pay
- Providing yearly staff retreats
- Providing workout centers for staff
- Establishing case load ceilings
- Hiring more paraprofessionals
- Providing flextime opportunities
- Offering a class in dealing with difficult people.

Stern and Cox (1993) suggest the following strategies for avoiding burnout:

- Always be prepared and well-organized upon entering a classroom
- Constantly evaluate performance in the classroom, as well as receiving evaluation from other professionals
- Request student evaluations when appropriate
- Continually re-evaluate the direction and focus of professional life
- Maintain a positive self-image
- Find solace in supportive conversations with others in the profession
- Do not overextend yourself
- Sincerely believe in what is being done on a daily basis in order to be successful in the classroom.

It is also recommended that any duplication of this study be carefully analyzed prior to initiation. Questions number two, five, six and eight were not relevant to the hypotheses and should be considered carefully before being used again.



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## APPENDICES

Appendix A  
COMPOSITION OF THE SAMPLE  
Analysis of Respondents

Respondents were chosen from all who volunteered to participate in the study who were employed by the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System to teach grades 1-5 with less than six years of teaching experience.

AGE

20-29: 51% or 36 respondents  
30-39: 41% or 24 respondents  
40-49: 7% or 5 respondents

SEX

Male: 3  
Female: 67

YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE

0 years: 12% or 4 respondents  
1 year: 35% or 16 respondents  
2 years: 24% or 17 respondents  
3 years: 24% or 17 respondents  
4 years: 41% or 12 respondents  
5 years: 12% or 4 respondents



GRADES TAUGHT

Kindergarten: 15 respondents

First Grade: 23 respondents

Second Grade: 11 respondents

Third Grade: 15 respondents

Fourth Grade: 15 respondents

Fifth Grade: 7 respondents

Special Education / Special Area:

10 respondents

APPENDIX B  
QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER

Dear Questionnaire Respondent,

The purpose of this study is to identify the entities which contribute to the highest levels of stress and burnout in beginning teachers employed within the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System to teach grades K-5. For purposes of this study, beginning teachers will be identified at those having less than six years teaching experience. The information gathered will be analyzed for the purpose of presentation to fulfill the requirements for the degree Education Specialist.

Please respond to the statements on the following pages. Questions one through nine require a yes or no response with a further explanation of why on each. Questions ten and eleven are subjective. Your responses will be confidential and at no time will you be identified. Please make sure you respond to each question. Thank you for your time and careful attention.

Tonya Stephan Cunningham

Appendix C  
Questionnaire  
TEACHER STRESS AND/OR BURNOUT

AGE \_\_\_\_\_

SEX \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE \_\_\_\_\_

GRADES TAUGHT (circle those applicable)

K    1    2    3    4    5    SA(special area)

SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle your answers.

YES NO    1. Have you thought of quitting your teaching job  
in the past year? If you circled yes, please explain why:

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YES NO    2. If you had an opportunity to relive your  
college years, would you still choose to be a teacher? If  
you circled no, what other profession(s) would you choose?

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YES NO 3. Do you feel your present teaching position makes good use of your preparation, experiences and potential? If you circled no, explain how you could best serve the school system.

YES NO 4. Did you have any positive attitudes or hopes when you went into the teaching profession that have not yet been fulfilled? If you circled yes, what were these attitudes and hopes?

YES NO 5. Is "Stress and/or Teacher Burnout" a problem (or a potential problem) in your school building?

YES NO 6. Is there anything you can do to help alleviate this problem?



YES NO 7. Do you feel burned out yourself? If you circled yes, what do you think are the causes of your stress and/or burnout?

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YES NO 8. If you should experience burnout symptoms, is there anyone in your school building or school system you can go to for help? If you circled yes, who is that person? (No names please, just say fellow teacher, principal, director of schools, etc.)

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YES NO 9. Is being a classroom teacher your personal career goal? If you circled no, what would you like to attain in education?

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