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## PRINCIPALS' SCHOOL MANAGEMENT OF STRESS IN THE NEGEV

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**Abstract:** *Recently, the job requirements of school principals have become very tiresome, and they have to work under unprecedented intense pressure. This qualitative study investigates the several pressures faced by principals of Bedouin schools in the Negev and the coping mechanisms they use to reduce their stress in their daily work. The results show that the work-life balance, workload, and relationship with teachers and parents affect their own wellbeing and the work of the principals. However, the mechanisms used to cope with stress at the organizational and individual levels, they indicated, are very difficult without decentralizing work to the teaching staff. The qualitative research results show that they also used alternative activities outside of work to deal with stress at work.*

**Key words:** *Keywords: Bedouin, Israel, stress management, principal's stress, coping mechanisms.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION INTO THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The issue of pressure in the work of school principals has received special attention around the world, which has clear repercussions on the performance of school principals. [1] Lazarus defined stress as a special kind of relationship between man and the environment that he sees as burdening his resources and endangering his well-being.

Others defined stress at work as an employee's state of mind that provokes excessive and deviant demands [2]. Various stressors have been identified in the work of school principals, such as the imbalance between personal and work lives [3, 4] and work overload [5, [6].

The relationship between the principal and the teaching staff [7, 8] and stress from parents [9]. All the above is consistent with studies indicating a worrying trend: stress leads to burnout [10-12]. In addition, studies indicated that stress management was needed to deal with principals' stress [9, 13].

Therefore, this article presents an Image of the stress and workload in the work of principals in the Bedouin sector in Israel and the

possibilities of stress reduction through stress management in their work.

### 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE BEDOUIN COMMUNITY IN THE NEGEV REGION OF ISRAEL

The Bedouin population today is a minority in the State of Israel, and most of them live in southern Israel [14]. The Bedouin areas in southern Israel are defined as the weakest areas in the State of Israel compared to the Jewish sector [15].

The education system in the Bedouin sector has complex and unique characteristics, as the Bedouin society is a traditional society [16].

The schools in the Bedouin education system were established close to their clans or lands. As a result, the names of the schools were given after the clans. On the one hand, the schools belong to their clans, and the school principal will be from within the tribe that will choose its own candidate. Since the establishment of the state, the lifestyle of half of the Bedouins has ended, and some have moved to cities and settled in the labor market [17].

One of the most difficult problems facing the Bedouin education system in Israel is the lack of proper teaching and learning and poor physical

infrastructure in the existing educational buildings [18].

The achievements of students in Bedouin education are regularly lower than the achievements of students in other sectors, stages of education, and fields. Data collected from Ministry of Education sources in recent years show that there has been an improvement in students' achievement in Bedouin education in the Negev, but it is still significantly lower than students' achievement in other sectors [15, 18].

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Principals are expected to lead the teaching field to improve student learning and prepare them for the 21st century. The ability of successful school principals to succeed and eventually impact young people in their schools is frequently utilized for evaluating their success [19]. Successful leadership improves learning and teaching indirectly and powerfully through its impact on motivating teachers, their commitment, and working conditions [20].

School Principals are expected to be instructional leaders seeking continuous improvement of educational programs that are involved in the employees' development, with the aim of improving classroom environments that will enhance student learning [21, 22].

In addition, school principals are required to handle the time constraints and workload related to the management of the school, which make it hard for them to effectively complete their assigned tasks [5, 9, 23], causing them mental and physical fatigue [6, 7].

Recent studies affirm the effect of stress on school principals' work. Much of this stress relates mainly to raising student achievement and creating an optimal climate [24]. When principals and teachers are under pressure at work, the quality of work will be low, which negatively affects students and learning in general [25].

On the other hand, cordial relationships between principals and teachers have positively contributed to the effective management of teachers in their classrooms [26].

As a result, the pressure exerted on school principals affects them daily. Work-related stress levels have negative consequences when

they negatively affect people's health and well-being [27]. Similarly, overloading at work affects school principals' satisfaction and organizational performance, so that their desire to retire from the school principals' role arises [28]. Providing evidence that in Israel there is an early retirement of managers from the Jewish sector [29, 28].

Research literature indicates the importance of stress management in the school principal's work and the causes of stress, with the principal's role changing dramatically over the years and the stress and responsibilities of managing requirements, student achievement, reforms, and parents [9, 30]. The research literature indicates that it is imperative that they develop strategies for coping with stressful situations. Effective coping strategies help managers avoid emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reducing personal achievement. That is, it will also reduce wear and maintain professionalism in the organization.

### 4. DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY. METHODS AND TOOLS

This study aims to explore the principal's school management of stress in the Bedouin sector in Israel. Hence, two main questions drove our research:

1. *What is the source of the stress for the school principals in Negev?*
2. *How did the principals manage the stress in their work?*

Based on the objectives of the research, a qualitative methodology is used through interviews, which was the main data collection method for this study. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit the participants' perceptions of their stress and the mechanisms used to cope with stress at the organizational and individual levels. These interviews aim to provide clarity and a comprehensive analysis of the research problem [31].

While investigating things in their natural settings and trying to understand or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them [32].

Qualitative data was obtained through a series of open-ended questions with eight items, which were written by the researcher and reviewed by professors from the university. The open-ended questions related to school management were related to principals' stress, feelings, and work difficulties; factors that affect your work as a principal; communication with the teachers; balance between work and life; the school principals' coping strategies; help that principals need for school management; and the Bedouin education system situation.

Part of the interviews were scheduled and conducted at the participant's principal's home, and part at a convenient location for the participant.

## **5. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH**

The interview included six principals who were selected from different settlements in the south of Israel. The reason is due to the need to understand the phenomenon of stress among school principals and strategies to confront it in various regions of the country.

A total of six interviews were conducted with two elementary school principals, two junior high school principals, and two secondary school principals. All participants were male because school principals in Bedouin area are male. The age range of the school principals was 40–56 years old.

The range of years of experience in management was 8 to 22 years and all 6 participants reported that schools in the area under their management are in the lowest socioeconomic cluster.

Each interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours. The researcher uses letters and numbers instead of their real personal and school names. The interviews were done during May 2022. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed by the interviewer and validated by each respondent.

The final validated content was used as the basis for the later analysis. The characteristics of

the participants are listed in the following Table 1.

The leadership of principals is also key to organizational success. Research literature has supported the idea that principals operate under pressure and need strategies to manage stress effectively to improve student learning. This section presents the main findings arising from this study regarding two aspects: the sources of stress in the work of school principals and the strategies they use to manage stress at work.

School principals in the Bedouin sector indicated that interacting with the teacher staff, resisting changes, and a lack of belonging to the school had been discovered to be stress factors that affected their work as principals.

The participants mentioned that workload such as paperwork, internal and external meetings, dealing with student discipline, and focusing on teaching and learning affected their work as principals and was a major cause of stress.

Other school principals stated that the main issue they face is the students' low socioeconomic status, which leads to dropouts. A large proportion of secondary school students, particularly boys, go to work to provide for their families. Most see the level as low. Few of them see that the level improves only for students of middle socioeconomic status.

Most of the school principals stated that they were unable to balance their personal and professional lives. They said that they tried to find a balance to keep a regular job in front of their personal lives after work, but they failed due to the workload and the stress that stayed with them even after the workday.

Other principals told me that the most difficult aspect of dealing with imbalances was a lack of time. This affected the work-life balance; the more time you spend at work, the less time you expect to spend on family and personal life.

Table 1

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants

Names	Gender	School type	Management Experience (years)	Interview duration (hours/ minutes)
A1	Male	High school	22	85/53
A2	Male	High school	10	80/41
A3	Male	Junior High school	12	75/22
A4	Male	Junior High school	8	79/30
A5	Male	Primary school	11	83/20
A6	Male	Primary school	12	78/20

School principals in the Bedouin sector were asked how to deal with and manage stress at work. The school principals told teachers to distribute work among them to reduce stress. The participants said the situation is very difficult without decentralization of work to the teaching staff.

Other principals said they get assistance by asking questions to colleagues' principals and receiving support and positive feedback regarding situations and how to deal with and resolve them. In addition, principals said that they used alternative activities outside of work to deal with stress at work. For example, meetings with teachers in nature and other activities with teachers. the participants also talked about their weekend trips with their families.

Principals talked about how they need help from school management in pedagogical guidance to reduce gaps and boost achievement among slow learners. The school principals said it's very important to have pedagogical guidance for teachers. The participants mentioned that the level of education in the Bedouin sector was lower than in other sectors in Israel. The student achievement rate is the lowest in Israel.

Most of the school principals said that parental involvement is very important to improve the level of education in schools. Improving student achievement in schools in the Bedouin sector is often related to understanding the parental involvement that occurs in the school environment. Also, they mentioned that a lack of parental involvement will lead to low motivation and achievement. In addition, parental involvement in schools in the Bedouin sector is very low.

The school principals suggested ways and solutions to improve the level of education and

learning in the Bedouin education system. One of the ways that school principals suggested was parents' involvement and follow-up of their children's achievements in school, which contributes to raising their motivation and their cooperation with their teachers. Also, the school principals suggested that increasing the teaching workforce is another way to improve the educational situation. A large part of the teachers come from the north, and they move daily from the north to the south of the country, which has implications for the level of education in the south. Teachers arrive tired, and it's difficult for them. Therefore, fostering the local teachers in a professional way can help the Bedouin education system improve its achievements. The local teachers know the population and how to deal with it.

## 6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

When analyzing the voices of principals, it appears that the main workload is expressed in several different job tasks. Teachers' stress, lack of time, socioeconomic status of parents and students, pedagogical performance in school, and stress management

The interviews with the principals revealed that they have difficulties with teachers, such as not belonging to the school and resistance to changes. Teachers are a valuable human resource in schools. While bad interpersonal relationships can lead to stress, stress can also cause a bad relationship and a loss of productivity, which will affect student learning and school achievement. This could indicate that teachers' staffs are less stressed than school principals. This finding is in line with the studies of [9, 33] which indicated that relationships with

teachers were the most common source of stress for school principals.

In the interviews with the participants, it was mentioned that workload was a major cause of stress at work. The interviews with the principals show that workloads such as paperwork, internal and external meetings, dealing with student discipline, and focusing on teaching and learning affected their work as principals and were a major cause of stress in their work. This finding is consistent with previous research [7, 9, 34] that found principals to be stressed by their workload [7].

The results of the principal's interview show that their feelings during the interview were caused by parental stress, which can be a major source of stress at work. The principals said that there were difficulties working with parents on issues related to meetings with teachers and student achievement, as well as student discipline and interfering and non-involved parents. Lack of communication between parents and the school is a major stress factor among school principals. According to [35, p. 7], principals have reported feeling stressed when they must set up communication with "complicated" parents. This finding reinforces the idea that principals are not only focused on improving the climate within the school. They need to maintain communication with stakeholders, such as parents. Another explanation for the lack of parental involvement, which is a source of stress for school principals, is related to parents with low socioeconomic status. Parental involvement in schools is very low, possibly because of the parents' socioeconomic status. According to [36], all recognized Bedouin areas are included in the lowest socioeconomic cluster.

The interviews with the participants show that they are unable to balance their personal and professional lives due to the workload, teachers' lack of skills, the time factor, and stress. The imbalance mentioned by the school principals is probably the result of multiple tasks related to lack of time, workload, fatigue, the amount of stress from the teachers, and the difficulty of performing tasks at the same time. This finding is consistent with previous research in which principals reported that they were unable to

balance work and personal lives due to work stress [30].

In the interviews with the participants, it was mentioned that they used coping strategies to manage their stress at work. Intra-school coping strategies are a significant cause of stress among school principals. Therefore, they talked about how to delegate authority and train middle managers to reduce their stress at work.

According to the study presented in [37], to deal with the workload, the principals must adopt shared leadership in the school and delegate authority to the middle principals as well as to the teaching staff. Delegating authority and responsibility to employees is one of the mechanisms within the school that researchers attach importance to.

According to [5], school principals often do not use coping strategies that can help reduce their workload or control their work time. Sharing responsibility for employees, for example, is sometimes just a way to meet job demands rather than workload demands.

During the interview, the principals talked about coping strategies on an individual level and how they reduced their stress levels. Principals found that their stress was relieved through exercise and being active with their family and children. This finding is like that of [38] and [39] who found that exercises like meditation, yoga, gardening, and jogging helped school principals feel less stressed. In addition, they preferred exercise as a stress management intervention.

The study found that the school principals needed pedagogical guidance along with teachers to reduce gaps and improve student achievement. This finding is in line with the studies of [40, 41]. Because there is a significant relationship between achievement and performance, headmasters must develop and implement instructional leadership practices.

The participants told me that the level of education and learning in the Bedouin education system is lower than in other sectors in Israel. The student achievement rate is the lowest in Israel. According to [18], Student achievement is not similar between Jewish and Arab students in Israel; the gap remained large. The participants suggested ways and solutions to

improve the level of education and learning in the Bedouin schools. One of the ways was parents' involvement and follow-up of their children's achievements in school, which contributed to raising their motivation and their cooperation with their teachers. According to [42] Mantovani & Gasperoni (2018), students' achievements are closely related to the degree of parental participation in school-associated activities. In addition, other ways that the participants told us to foster the local teachers in a professional way can help the Bedouin education system improve its achievements.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The present study revealed the stressors faced by school principals in the Bedouin sector in their daily work and the stress management techniques they use to reduce work stress. It is very important for school principals to delegate authority to teacher's staff and increase the number of management staff to achieve school goals and raise the low level of achievement of students.

In addition, in school principal preparation programs, emphasis should be given to the importance of teacher and staff empowerment as a means of helping school principals cope with the workload. In the training program for school principals, stress management should be emphasized in the work of school principals and how to reduce risks through management techniques and reduce the phenomenon of burnout due to work pressure, which has health effects on school principals.

Parents are an important resource in determining the quality of the education system. Principals, together with the teaching staff, should develop a long-term plan to involve parents in the educational process and help them integrate students into the academy.

In future research, new approaches will be considered based on intellectual capital concept [14, 15] and safety responsibility [17].

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### Managementul stresului directorilor de școală din Negev

Recent, cerințele locului de muncă ale directorilor de școli au devenit foarte obositoare și ei trebuie să lucreze sub opresiune intensă fără precedent. Acest studiu calitativ investighează multiplele presiuni cu care se confruntă directorii școlilor beduine din Negev și mecanismele de a le face față pe care le folosesc aceștia pentru a reduce stresul lor în munca lor zilnică. Rezultatele arată că echilibrul serviciu-viață privată, volumul de muncă și relația cu profesorii și părinții afectează propria bunăstare și activitatea directorilor. Cu toate acestea, mecanismele utilizate pentru a face față stresului la nivel organizațional și individual, indicate de aceștia, sunt foarte dificile fără a descentraliza munca către personalul didactic. Rezultatele cercetării calitative arată că aceștia au folosit, de asemenea, activități alternative în afara muncii pentru a face față stresului la locul de muncă.

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