CHAPTER I

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Every year, U.S. schools hire more than 200,000 new teachers for that first day of class; by the end of the school year, at least 22,000 have quit (Graziano, 2005). According to Graziano (2005), even those who make it beyond the demanding first year are not likely to stay long: “About 30% of new teachers flee the profession after just three years, and more than 45% leave after five years” (p. 40). It costs districts nearly $11,000 to replace teachers when they leave the profession (Graziano). This does not include the indirect cost related to investments the school district makes into its teachers: (a) professional development, (b) curriculum, and (c) school-specific knowledge. The U.S. Department of Education confirms that teacher turnover is highest in public schools where half or more of the students receive free or reduced lunches (Graziano, p. 40).

According to research, stress, which in turn leads to burnout, is a cause of teacher attrition (Borg & Falzon, 1989; Capel, 1992). Half of the current teaching force is projected to retire between 2000 and 2010 (Southworth, 2000). As more teachers retire it is believed that they will be replaced by more inexperienced first-year teachers who, in turn, are not equipped to handle the stress that comes along with teaching (Archer, 1999). The magnitude of negative stress associated with teaching has been reported as a primary reason for teacher attrition and burnout (Bowden, 2000; Farber, 2000; Marshall & Marshall, 2003; Osborne, 1992; Terry, 1997). Teachers, namely new teachers, are faced with a growing emphasis on standards, accountability, diverse populations and lack of teacher and administrative support.
Since 2000, educational policymakers and practitioners have been guided by a common goal—substantially increasing student learning in all schools. Every state must adopt standards for student performance. As a result, accountability measures include public reports of school-by-school results on standardized tests. An increasing effort is being made to provide each student with a skilled and committed teacher, as well as providing supports to aid teachers on the job. This effort presents an enormous challenge. According to Graziano (2005), “Unrealistic Expectations,” as it relates to stress and burnout, are the reasons teachers leave the profession (p. 38).

In special education, the main reasons for attrition are job conditions, occupational stress, and increased caseload. According to Piotrowski & Plash (2006):

It is projected that in the year 2010, there will be a need for 611,550 special education teachers in the U.S. Yet, every year about 13.2% of special education teachers leave their positions. Six percent leave the field altogether while 7.2% of the special education teachers transfer to general education positions. Within the first 3 years of teaching, 29% of beginning teachers are projected to leave the profession; by the end of the 5th year, 39% leave teaching. (p.1)

Both general education and special education teachers frequently start their careers at hard-to-staff schools where their resources may be scarce and where they are working with the neediest and often the most challenging students (Wood & McCarthy, 2002). Unfortunately, teachers are expected to assume a full schedule of classes, create their own lesson plans, and develop teaching techniques and classroom management strategies in relative isolation. As stated by Graziano (2005), “This is a recipe for early burnout” (p. 41). Educators must find a way to cope with this stress. Coping mechanisms used to inhibit burnout and enhance morale (Schickedanz, 1992).
1.1 Background of the Study

Teaching in today’s society is very demanding and stressful. Work-related stress can result in teacher burnout. This, in turn, may affect the health and happiness of the teachers (Wood & McCarthy 2002). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), as cited by Wood & McCarthy, the definition of stress is “when a potentially threatening event is encountered, a reflexive, cognitive balancing act ensues, weighing the perceived demands of the event against one’s perceived ability to deal with them” (p. 2). Events perceived as potential threats trigger the stress response; a series of physiological and psychological changes that occur when coping capacities are seriously challenged. The most typical trigger to the stress response is the perception that one’s coping resources are inadequate for handling life’s demands. If demands are viewed as exceeding an individual’s resources, they become stressors and trigger the stress response” (Wood & McCarthy, p. 2).

When individuals feel an inability to control or reduce stress to a manageable level, they may become emotionally drained. According to Maslach and Jackson (1993), teachers, as coping resources are expended, experience emotional exhaustion and develops a cynical attitude toward teaching and students (depersonalization). Feelings of exhaustion and ineffectiveness continue as mental and physical resources are depleted in the pursuit of unreachable and sometimes unrealistic goals (Maslach, Schaefeli & Leiter, 2001). The teacher then experiences a reduction in accomplishments, leaving him or her with a loss of self-esteem and dissatisfaction with these job accomplishments. This chain of events ultimately interferes with the burnout teacher’s ability to continue to meet teaching demands. Thus, the three dimensions of the burnout syndrome: emotional
exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, begins (Maslach & Jackson, 1993; Wood & McCarthy, 2002).

Burnout takes place gradually. Over a period of time if workplace demands supersede an individual’s resources to adequately deal with them, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishments may occur (Maslach & Jackson, 1993). If an individual continue to experience work-related stress, eventually their ability to cope with that stress is depleted, resulting in burnout (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In examining the syndrome of burnout, it is imperative to take into account the concept of stress. Although stress and burnout are analogous, they are not one in the same. It is important to note that stress may lead to burnout, but burnout may not be the result of stress alone; however, burnout is the result of unmediated stress, a stressful situation when an individual believes there is no “out,” no buffers, no support system, no adequate rewards (Farber, 1984).

It is also important to note that there is a difference between stress and burnout. Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996) noted that burnout is limited to the type of work that entails intense interaction with other people. Burnout integrates feelings of exhaustion; a perception on the part of the professionals’ involvement in their work that their efforts to help others have been ineffective, the task never ceases to end, and the personal rewards for their work have not been imminent (Farber, 2000). Therefore, burnout is a more specific and convoluted phenomenon than occupational stress.

Overall, burnout has grave consequences that can result in impaired health, headaches, and sleep disturbances (Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996; Kahill, 1988; Leiter, 1992). Consequences of teacher burnout can lead to feelings of hopelessness, absenteeism, increased turnover, and decreased job performance (Farber, 2000; Friedman, 2000; Lowenstein, 1991; Terry, 1997). A teacher’s commitment to remain in
teaching is subjective to the collective effects of burnout over a period of time. Although stress may be an inevitable part of life, burnout is not. Since literature confirms the negative effect burnout has on teaching (Cherniss, 1980; Farber, 1984; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997), it is, therefore, imperative that researchers examine interventions that might prevent burnout. Specific types of humor have been regarded by some theorists as the highest adaptive mechanism of coping (Freud, 1928; Byrne, 1956).

One phenomenon that needs to be examined is what causes some teachers to continue in the profession under stressful working conditions while others leave the profession. Some types of coping mechanisms need to be in place to address high levels of stress. Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused, in fact, may be two ways to decrease teacher burnout caused by unmediated stress (Abel, 2002; Bolinger, 2001; Decker & Rotondo, 1999; Kuiper & Martin, 1998; Pilkey, 2004; Wycoffe, 1999).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

“Occupational Stress, Job Burnout, Coping Mechanisms and Psychological Health among Teachers”

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine to what extent a difference exists among teacher occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms, and psychological health among primary and high schools. In particular, this study sought to determine if a difference existed among the four variables by examining if occupational stress, teacher
burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health among those teachers that are working in government school to those teachers who are working in private school.

1.4 Rationale

The research related to stress, burnout, coping, and psychological health is diverse. There are numerous studies that discuss teacher occupational stress, burnout, coping mechanisms as individual factors related to teacher psychological health (Osborne, 1992; Smith & Milstein, 1984; Terry, 1997). Much of the research refers to occupational stress factors contributing to burnout ranging from the work environment to family issues. However, few studies have been conducted on the differences among the four variables with primary and high school teachers. This study examined differences between occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health among primary and high school teachers.

1.5 Research hypotheses

The following five hypotheses guide this study:

1. There is no significant relationship between occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health among school teachers.

2. There is no significant difference between male and female high school teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.
3. There is no significant difference between male and female primary school teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.

4. There is no significant difference between high school and primary school teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.

5. There is no significant difference between male and female government high school teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.

6. There is no significant difference between male and female government primary school teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.

7. There is no significant difference between male and female private high school teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.

8. There is no significant difference between male and female private primary school teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.

9. There is no significant difference between private and government high school teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.

10. There is no significant difference between private and government primary school teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.
There is no significant difference between different length of teaching experience of teachers with reference to occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological health.

1.6 Significance of the Study

In educational organizations, as in any other organization, each new member hopes to face with a good climate at his/her first occupational contact with the working environment to be able to meet his/her economic, social and mental requirements, ideally. School teachers are among these social statuses whose mental health needs to be thought of. Teachers play a crucial and essential role in the development of any country and in train and education of its future-makers. To construct the ideal cultural conditions in which the possibility of thought and research is provided and the process of teaching and learning is desirable accomplished, the teachers need to enjoy cheerful and strong spirits, and face with the least problems and hardship in their professional and social lives. Teachers meet a variety of stresses. These stresses cause job burnout among them which is undesirable and affects the organization, family, social and individual life. The foremost ones are: the employee’s absenteeism, continuous delay, different psychosomatic complaints, conflicts and contradiction in the work place, change of teaching job with another professions and finally, desertion. Job burnout brings about increasingly loss of realism, loss of energy while doing useful activities, loss of life ultimate philosophy lack of sympathy, and mental, physical disorders. In order to overcome such problems, it is necessary to withstand the mental stresses and burnout.

There is a gap in the research literature regarding to what extent a difference exists among occupational stress, teacher burnout, coping mechanisms and psychological
health among primary and high school teachers. One phenomenon that needed to be examined is what factor allows for some teachers to continue in the profession under stressful working conditions while others leave the profession, especially at the primary and high school level. Research studies on teacher stress have consistently reported that teaching is a stressful occupation. One of the reasons that teachers leave the profession is their experience with negative stress. Many educators who have experienced stress have experienced teacher burnout. Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused has been shown to counteract stress. Although current literature addresses the causes of occupational stress and burnout, few attempts have been made to inspect strategies used to cope with job stressors. As a result, little is known about the relationship among teacher burnout, occupational stress, coping mechanisms and psychological health among primary and high school teachers.

The present study compares different aspects of occupational stress, job burnout, coping mechanisms, and psychological health, among school teachers who belonging to government and private schools. Therefore, applying the results of this research allows the educational planning, universities and high educational institutes and teaching training centers to define the job burnout for those who want to be a teacher in the future, to suggest them how to cope with these problems, and to provide them with the better mental health conditions.

1.7 Definition of Terms

The following terms were used operationally in this study.

*Occupational Stress.* Occupational stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the
capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury (Bandura, 1986).

Teacher Stress. Occupational stress specific to educators, Kyriacou (1987) defined this as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression, resulting from aspects of work as a teacher” (p. 147).

Job Burnout. In this study, job burnout refers to a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity (Maslach, 1993; 1998).

Emotional Exhaustion. In this study, emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one’s emotional resources (Maslach, 1993).

Depersonalization. In this study, depersonalization refers to a negative, callous or excessively detached response to other people who are usually the recipients of one’s service or care (Maslach, 1993).

Personal Accomplishment. In this study, personal accomplishments refer to a decline in one’s feelings of competence and self-efficacy (Maslach, 1993).

Coping Mechanism. In this study the term “Coping” refers to ‘constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing’ (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Coping strategies are organized into two categories: Problem-focused: Problem-focused strategies are mainly directed towards the management or alteration of a stressor. Emotion-focused: Emotion-focused strategies are aimed at regulating emotional responses to the problem (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).
**Psychological Health.** In this study the term “psychological health” refers to “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2013).

**School Teachers.** In this study the term school teachers’ represents, government and private, primary and high school teachers of North and South Mysore, Karnataka State, India.

**Primary School Teachers.** For the purpose of this study, a primary school teacher is referred to as any individual certified to teach Grades 1 through 7.

**High School Teachers.** For the purpose of this study, a high school teacher is referred to as any individual certified to teach Grades 8 through 10.

**Teaching Experience.** The number of years taught; 5 years or more of classroom experience.