

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

City College of New York

1994

Working conditions and psychological distress in first-year women teachers: Qualitative findings

Irvin Sam Schonfeld
CUNY Graduate Center

Elizabeth A. Santiago
CUNY City College

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_pubs/289

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

Working Conditions and Psychological Distress in First-Year Women Teachers:
Qualitative Findings

By

Irvin Sam Schonfeld and Elizabeth Ann Santiago

Schonfeld, I.S., & Santiago, E.A. (1994). Working conditions and psychological distress in first-year women teachers: Qualitative findings. In L.C. Blackman (Ed.), *What works? Synthesizing effective biomedical and psychosocial strategies for healthy families in the 21st century* (pp. 114-121). Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press.

RUNNING HEAD: Teachers

Author Notes

Irvin Schonfeld holds faculty appointments at the City College of the City University of New York and in the Dept. of Psychiatry of Columbia University. Elizabeth Santiago is a recent graduate of City College and is currently a kindergarten teacher.

Preparation of this chapter was supported by NIOSH/CDC grants R01 OH02571-01 to -06 and PSC-CUNY Award Program grants nos. 667401, 668419, 669416, and 663396.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of the teachers who participated in the study. We thank Linda Goodloe for her help with computing. We also thank Edwin Farrell for his critical comments on an earlier draft of the chapter. A special note of appreciation is extended to George Schonfeld. All correspondence concerning the chapter should be sent to Irvin Schonfeld, City College of New York, New York, NY 10031; (tel) 212-650-7164; (fax) 212-650-6970.

Working Conditions and Psychological Distress in First-Year Women Teachers: Qualitative Findings

With few exceptions (e.g., Blase, 1986), most of the research on the effects of teachers' working conditions has been quantitative in design. Quantitative research is not necessarily superior research. For example, most quantitative research of teachers' working conditions and their putative effects has been hampered by a number of problems. These problems include an overdependency on cross-sectional designs and circularity in the definitions of basic concepts like "stress" and "burnout" (see Kasl, 1981; Schonfeld, 1992a; Schonfeld, Rhee, and Xia, in press).

The power of qualitative research inheres in its struggle to get under the teacher's skin and see the world as the teacher sees it. Of course, qualitative studies on teachers and their working conditions are not without shortcomings. Such studies are, by definition, interpretative (Erickson, 1986; Farrell, Pegero, Lindsey, & White, 1988) and, thus, are subject to a host of biases on the part of the interpreters. Moreover, qualitative studies that identify school-related difficulties and the psychological distress the teachers are experiencing cannot clearly ascertain whether working in the most chaotic classrooms provokes distress in teachers or if some teachers with preexisting high levels of psychological distress create many classroom difficulties. The epidemiologic literature clearly alerts researchers that selection is frequently a plausible explanation for the relation between exposures and health (e.g., Kleinbaum, Kupper, & Morgenstern, 1982; MacMahon & Pugh, 1970).

The study described in this paper examines the writings of newly appointed teachers who, as part of a quantitative study, were asked to write anything they wanted about their jobs. Many teachers elected not to write anything. The teachers, however, were not directed to write in either a positive or negative vein. In addition, how much the teachers could write was up to them.

In some respects this qualitative study of teachers' writings avoids shortcomings inherent in other qualitative research. Although interpretation is a necessary part of qualitative research, subjective bias in the interpretation can be controlled. The interpretative categories into which new teachers'

writings were classified were developed in such a way as to ensure satisfactory reliability (Cohen, 1960; Fleiss, 1981).

Another strength of the study is that it was executed collaterally with an innovative quantitative study (Schonfeld, 1992a, 1992b). The quantitative study, in contrast to many studies of "stress" and "burnout," employed measures that minimize circularity. The study was also longitudinal in design. It followed newly appointed women teachers through the beginning of their careers but began during a preemployment period in which baseline data on the various outcomes (e.g., depressive symptoms) were collected. The study thus controlled for the potential problem of selection described earlier.

Giving Voice. The teachers' comments animate the quantitative findings in a way not previously found in quantitative research. One of the sturdiest findings of the quantitative study is that adversity in working conditions (e.g., student fighting, disrespect, etc.) during the fall term is linked to depressive symptoms in the spring term, controlling for preemployment symptoms. The qualitative findings help depict school settings that give rise to distress in teachers. Furthermore, there is evidence that "objective" official data on teachers' working conditions, particularly in the form of student violence, underestimate the levels of adversity teachers ordinarily confront (Dillon, 1994). The unreliability of official data amplifies the need to hear from the teachers themselves.

The qualitative findings give voice to the travails as well as the successes of new teachers. The first year of teaching is commonly regarded as the most difficult time in the teacher's career, and is a proving ground for many. Often, recent college graduates find themselves caught up in new and labyrinthine procedures and confronted by physical and emotional situations for which their college training does not prepare them. Teachers' responses to these situations vary. Some quit and move on to new and, presumably, less stressful occupations; others remain on the job but become demoralized; yet others adapt, learning to work around, and with, the stressors.

Sample. The sample of newly appointed teachers was recruited between 1987 and 1990 mainly from senior-year education classes at leading New York City undergraduate institutions. The undergraduate institutions were selected on the basis of their having a record of supplying teachers to local school districts. More detail on sample selection is found in Schonfeld (1992a; 1994a; 1994b).

The sample included 206 women and 17 men who were full-time teachers in both the fall, following May-June graduation ceremonies, and the spring (regardless of whether they transferred or otherwise changed schools). Another 51 women and 7 men were full-time teachers in the fall but taught part-time, had other (or no) jobs, or were not available in the spring; 57 women and 5 men were located who were full-time teachers in the spring. Eleven women who had prior teaching experiences that were judged to be continuous with their experience in the fall--they were recruited because they were enrolled in the senior-year education classes targeted for subject recruitment efforts--were not included in this paper. The focal interest of the study is newly appointed, full-time women teachers. For this chapter, we excluded work-related comments pertaining to part-time teaching. Although our concern is with women, the voices of two full-time male teachers are presented because those voices add to what the women have to say. One limitation of this study, however, is that although we collected data over the course of three years of work experience, the data presented in this chapter are largely restricted to the teachers' first year.

Procedure The teachers in the quantitative study completed surveys in the fall and the spring of their first year on the job. The surveys contained a variety of standard scales that provide data on working conditions, psychological health, and stressors occurring outside the workplace; these are not relevant to this study and are described elsewhere (Schonfeld, 1992a, 1992b). The surveys also contained a section in which the teachers could, optionally, write anything they wanted about their work experience. All writing in the optional section was transcribed by a typist who was blind to the teachers' identities. No names were used. Only an identification number and the time of year were attached to each teacher's transcribed comments.

Next an initial sample of typescripts of the written comments was reviewed by the authors who came up with a provisional set of categories into which to classify the teachers' comments. The teachers' comments for any one time period ranged from one or two sentences to up to several pages. A teacher's writing could therefore be assigned to one or more categories.

Comments from the entire three-year period were divided into subsets, each subset consisting of about 50 to 100 comments. Using the initial set of categories, the authors blindly classified the first subset of comments. When there were disagreements, the authors revised their classification scheme, and then proceeded to the next subset of comments. The procedure was repeated with the next subset. Through cycles of blind classification and review for level of agreement (Cohen, 1960), the classification scheme was incrementally refined. Interrater agreement on the final set categories was satisfactory, with the coefficient kappa for each category exceeding .79. Once the final set of categories was established, the second author reviewed all of the comments and reclassified them using the final 28-category scheme.

Findings

Although all the teachers' comments were sorted into the 28-category scheme, only 14 categories had sufficient numbers of comments to warrant an examination.

Due to space considerations, we confine this report to four categories: (a) being happy with one's job, (b) interpersonal tensions and lack of support among colleagues/supervisors, (c) classroom management problems, and (d) violence and other security problems. These categories were selected because they subsumed large numbers of comments, reflecting their importance to understanding the experience of new teachers. When comments belong to two or more categories, such comments, to reduce duplication, are presented in the context of only one of the category sections below. The other categories of teacher observations (e.g., substitute/cluster teacher; graduate student who is also teaching) will not be described in this paper. Although we do not present all the teachers' comments that found their way into the four categories, we selected a cross-section of commentary in order to represent the observations of teachers who taught across

the span of grade levels.

Happy with job. We begin with this category because we first want to demonstrate that some new teachers are pleased with their jobs. The comments show that being a novice teacher is not inevitably marked by overwhelming problems. Later commentary will amply describe many of the distressing aspects of the job.

A kindergarten teacher in a Catholic school wrote, "We have three full-day kindergartens in our school. I find it very helpful that our curriculum and planning is done all together. In working cooperatively, there is less stress and problems." In a similar vein, a woman who worked in a private prekindergarten reported, "The teachers work together as one big family. All of them are readily available to help one another out. They are wonderful to work with. They are very supportive and I feel that's extremely important."

A woman who taught sixth grade in a Yeshiva contrasted her new job with her work as a substitute teacher in a public school: "I found the condition of the school, students, supplies and all-around environment of the Yeshiva to be far superior to those of District xxx. Learning and respect seem to mean a lot more to private school children. These factors have helped me to love what I do to a greater extent than if I was just a substitute teacher at this point in my life."

A fourth grade Catholic school teacher wrote, "Where I work the teachers are very close. They help each other when help is needed. There is only one teacher who is also teaching for the first time and we are close. We usually talk about school and our own personal life but we don't do any recreation together. There is a lot of discipline at my school and my principal is a nun. My class is fairly good except for a few talkative and annoying children. I love my job and I wouldn't consider doing anything else but teaching." She did however complain about her relative lack pay and benefits in comparison to public school teachers.

A first grade public school teacher wrote, "My school situation is a special one. Teachers, administrators, and other staff members are totally supportive. It is a warm loving environment." Another first grade public school teacher wrote, "My school has always been a warm supportive one. As a [paraprofessional]

I was not included as I am today. I find teaching to be a totally rewarding experience." A sixth grade public school teacher wrote, "I have a special group of individuals at my job who seem to think that I am doing an excellent job. My students are a wonderful group and I look forward to going to school each morning because I found companionship, friends, and financial security at this school."

A public high school teacher reported, "I am extremely fortunate in having three other first-year teachers at my school. They have backgrounds similar to mine and great senses of humor. We all feel that without each other to complain, laugh, and relax with, we would be experiencing damaging stress. The concept of being a solitary fledgling is horrifying." Another public high school teacher wrote, "I feel I have a unique position. As I am working towards my master's degree in mathematics education, I opted for a job as a permanent substitute. My superior and colleagues are extremely helpful and considerate. I am treated as a member of the faculty. I even have my own desk."

Because it was difficult to find women in the sample who obtained jobs in Catholic high schools, we report the comments of a man who obtained such a job, "As a new teacher, I feel I am lucky to have landed a job in the school where I work. The main reason is that my supervisor (and mentor teacher) is very reliable and very, very cooperative and encouraging with me." A public high school teacher wrote, "One of the very few things that I was right about, when I was imagining how I would like teaching, was that I would enjoy my colleagues--and respect them. One of the most significant things I was wrong about was how I would like my students. I enjoy them much more than I thought I would--even though I want to strangle them fairly often." Another public high school teacher wrote, "XXX is an exceptional high school. The students are highly motivated and 'good' kids. I love teaching!"

What emerges from these comments is the idea that collegiality among teachers and supervisors is critically important to morale. Considerateness on the part of supervisors may also be viewed as part of collegiality. The comments suggest that good collegial relations can help teachers better manage their classes. Next in importance was student motivation and respect. Interestingly,

parochial school teachers are more frequently represented in this section than they are in the next three sections.

Problems with administration/colleagues/lack of support/feedback. A large number of comments was assigned to this category. They depict difficulties in relationships with colleagues and administrators.

A public school prekindergarten teacher complained about her colleagues, "The school I work in is a Title 1 school. Children can be difficult, days endless. Colleagues do not pull together but rather hope to see you fail as they have failed. [There is] no effective system of helping a new teacher." In contrast, a prekindergarten teacher in a private school complained about her supervisor, "The supervisor in my school has never praised me. She also has as little to do with me as possible. Being a new teacher, I am full of new ideas. The supervisor...and other head teachers frown upon" the regular teachers. A public kindergarten teacher wrote, "The first few weeks of school were very stressful for me because I had a classroom without furniture and supplies. It's my first year teaching and I was very upset. I waited two weeks before my supervisor took some action."

A third grade public school teacher wrote, "I haven't the foggiest idea of what the principal or assistant principal think of me and I feel very insecure about my position." A fourth grade public school teacher reported, "The principal is at war with every incompetent [assistant principal]. As a result she has turned a deaf ear to all of the teachers' problems. If our problems are brought to her attention, she 'solves' the problem by putting the problem back at the teachers." Another fourth grade public school teacher wrote, "The teachers in the school...are divided into factions and there is a great deal of friction between the groups."

A second grade public school teacher also commented on the lack of collegiality in her school. She wrote, "One major problem is the lack of support from most of my colleagues. They tend to alienate new teachers. The older and more 'experienced' teachers tend to act as if they own the school. They walk (or attempt to walk) over the new teachers. They talk behind your back." A sixth

grade public school teacher wrote about the lack of collegial relations with her supervisor, "I feel my supervisor spends too much time doing paperwork. On occasion when I brought a disruptive child to her, she would not help because she was too busy with paperwork. This week the monitors came to our school to audit the Special Ed department. It seems like the only thing my supervisor is interested in is keeping these monitors happy."

A junior high public school teacher wrote, "I have three friends in school--three male 'outcasts' whom the faculty, in their personality and clique wars have not accepted into any group." Another junior high public school teacher wrote, "I think support and guidance of new teachers is vitally important this first year on the job. The 'sink-or-swim' situation I experienced should not be the norm. Although there are friendly people to ask for help, they are often busy themselves. While friendly and generally willing to assist, they do not see 'new teacher training' as their job....My supervisor has been totally nonexistent in my career to date. She has observed me twice since September [it is now March]--each time no longer than five minutes! She really has no idea what I'm doing (or not doing) except for the weekly set of plans I give her. No curriculum guidance, no support, no advice. I think it's shameful that I am allowed to have virtual carte blanche in my classroom especially since I am a first-year teacher." A public high school teacher wrote, "I met my 'mentor' once! Although he is supposed to be there for professional support, there hasn't been any!"

The lack of collegiality, the presence of interpersonal tensions among administrators and faculty members, or just the lack of contact among teachers and administrators is a source of distress for many new teachers. The comments in this section are consistent with an idea that emerged in the comments of the teachers who found a degree of happiness in their jobs, namely, good collegial relations with other teachers and supervisors contribute to high levels of morale and effective instruction.

Classroom management. Like the category of problematic collegial relations, a large number of comments was assigned to the category on classroom management.

The comments suggest that the problems teachers encounter in managing a classroom are not limited to older students who might overpower teachers.

A first grade public school teacher reported, "My students have very short attention spans. They just will not behave. They will be quiet and well behaved for five minutes and then they are off again. In everything we do from reading to going down the stairs it takes us at least ten minutes to quiet down. I try rewarding and praising good behavior but that doesn't mean anything. Sometimes when I'm standing trying very hard to teach a lesson, no one pays attention. I feel frustrated at least twice a day for the entire school week. I sometimes just want to quit...." Another first grade public school teacher wrote, "The children in my class have had behavior problems. Since I began to work, I have become sick with my nerves and have lost a lot of weight. I think that I would be happier if I were to quit my job at this point."

A prekindergarten teacher wrote, "When I was first interviewed for this job my principal said the children were slow. I told him that I could deal with slow but not too many discipline problems. He assured me there were no discipline problems. However, I soon found out that 10 out of the 20 children in my class belong in special education for emotional problems as well as severe learning disabilities. They have removed the top seven children in my class so they can be in a more positive learning environment and are doing well. The [remaining children include] a child whose mother and two sisters died of AIDS, two self-destructive children, a child who sings whenever he feels like it, a child who likes to roll on the floor, and quiet but resistant others who refuse to work....I feel more like a baby-sitter than a teacher and get little support past the removal of my high functioning students." Another prekindergarten teacher wrote, "Presently a number of children have been transferred to my class. All of them have problem behaviors. Fighting, name calling, swearing, and the inability to literally sit still for short periods of time remain problems for them. Furthermore, it is unclear how much the children who have been in the class before these 'new' children" arrived have been influenced by the new arrivals."

The phrasing of the comments of a second grade public school teacher

suggests racial tensions, "As a beginner teacher, I was overjoyed by the job I got. A perfect school, near my home, decent salary and wonderful supervisors. What I wasn't prepared for were the bussed-in children who gave me (and still give me) nothing but grief. One of them becomes very violent if he wants. I resent this. Children with a potential for violence should not be allowed to be in a 'normal' classroom environment." A fourth grade public school teacher wrote, "There is a great deal of stress teaching children who come from a low socioeconomic background. All of my children are black and there is a lot of prejudice that goes on within themselves. Name calling (nigger, black cootie, knaphead, etc.), it is a daily ritual. Also, I teach a Gates class. These children are hold-overs from last year. Some are 11 and 12 years old. Their attitude stinks. They do not want to work. Many are listless, lethargic, emotionally hot. By that I mean it does not take much to set them off....I have been verbally harassed every day by students who get reprimanded for breaking the class rules. Out of 18 children, I honestly hope for only three or four. Homework is unheard of. Hardly anyone does it. They are not afraid of anyone!"

The comments of another fourth grade public school teacher reflect the confluence of home- and work-related difficulties, "Some [female] teachers [head] one-parent families and have to do other jobs to have enough money to support their children. This adds more stress to a teacher already working. Many children are from problem homes and they bring their moodiness and unhappiness to the classroom. This also adds more stress to the teacher."

A first grade public school teacher suggested that with experience and help from colleagues, classroom management can become less problematic. She wrote, "I was surprised at how the public schools 'really are' when you are the teacher and not just a 'student teacher' there temporarily. Some of the children are hard to handle and it is difficult to maintain control sometimes with such large classes. My education courses didn't really prepare me for what it is really like in the school. The other teachers (in my school) are very supportive and that helps a great deal! I think that after the initial shock (the first few weeks), things seem to come together." In a similar vein, a third grade public school teacher

wrote, "Discipline (classroom management) is of the utmost importance in order to have a good learning environment (including control and good communication skills among teacher and classmates). It is not exactly what I expected. I had a difficult time in the beginning (with discipline, lessons and paper work). Now, I am just beginning to enjoy teaching and the students."

A different first grade public school teacher suggested some ways to manage classrooms effectively, "Job stress, for the new teacher, is mainly due to the inability to have organized some kind of classroom management routines. Once organized routines have been established and consequences for misbehavior have been discussed and the teacher's consistency in what she has said started, the whole--the class, the routines, the behavior, etc. will become easier and this part of job stress will be lightened."

A public junior high school teacher wrote, "My health has been greatly affected by the stress from my job. I teach seven classes; 4 Spanish, 1 French, 2 reading. My Spanish classes I see once a week for a double period. These are the worst behaved students in the school." To demonstrate that problems in classroom management are not limited to women teachers, consider the comments of a male public junior high school teacher, "My greatest problem is gaining and maintaining control of my students. Students are constantly out of their seats, calling out to each other and throwing paper in class. I admit I have lost control but I also believe that most students have very little respect for anyone. I feel that I am being left on my own to resolve my problems. When I did not follow the recommendations of a superior, I was told in effect that it's my responsibility to discipline my class not theirs. I feel almost isolated and on most days I get home emotionally and physically drained."

A public high school teacher wrote, "Since I am a new teacher, I've been trying to motivate students in class and to [get them to] do their homework. I've found out that most of the students do not do their homework if I don't threaten them with calling their parents. There is also a group of students who always misbehave in class (keep talking all the time) and I cannot keep them from talking. Another public high school teacher wrote, "I work in one of the

unhealthiest environments! The school is falling apart, there are not enough teacher resources, very little teacher support, and the students are generally nasty, impolite, and totally non-cooperative. The result is that I feel that my health is suffering tremendously. It was a very big step when I decided to choose the career of teaching. Now, I often feel so confused and depressed. I pray that all high schools are not this bad. I truly long to be an effective teacher."

Finally, we turn to a public junior high school teacher, "All my life, I dreamed of being a teacher. No one was ever able to steer me away from this. Now I am totally unhappy with my career. My students have no motivation to learn and hate coming to school. Seventy-five percent are major behavior problems. Each day I become more and more frustrated. All I do is preach discipline and respect. I want to teach English literature! I do not want to be a zoo keeper or a warden in a prison anymore! Therefore, I am in the process of changing careers. What a shame--this is the biggest disappointment in my life.

The problem that is paramount to the teachers is successfully managing their classrooms. Many teachers expressed frustration and bitterness at not being able to run an effective classroom. Two teachers reported becoming ill in response to classroom difficulties. Three teachers reported on their progress in learning to run a classroom well; one of them suggested that collegial support was helpful in successfully managing her class. The negative comments, however, were much more numerous than the positive ones.

Violence/Lack of security/Crime. A major concern of the teachers has been the problem of school violence. This section provides a cross-section of examples of teachers' encounters with violence.

A third grade public school teacher wrote, "The students in my school are physically violent. It seems that fighting is the only solution to their problems. I was previously working in this school as a substitute teacher. It is discouraging and depressing to me to see that even first graders are fighting.

There seems to be no love, friendship, or caring going on among the students. The teachers in this school are good and they try very hard to encourage love and

friendship. Several of the parents seem concerned and aware of this problem but most of the other parents don't care. Many of these children are bright and talented. But something is not right!" A fifth grade public school teacher had this to report, "One of my students' brothers got his head shot off last week."

Another public school teacher wrote, "One of the worst classes I have is a fourth grade Gates class in which the children are around age 13. They are very rough children and I have to break up fights regularly. Last week as I was getting the children ready to be dismissed, an object which looked like a gun fell out of a child's pocket. I was in a panic until the boy picked it up turned it over and it was red and purple. In this class I would not have been surprised if it were a real gun. Weapons are constantly being taken away from children in this class. Also lately there has been a big security problem in the building. Several times intruders have entered the building. Last week children reported being threatened by a man with a knife and a gun. Since I have been teaching my health has declined. I am constantly sick with whatever the kids have and I have developed an ulcer-like condition. Last year I was perfectly healthy. I have decided that since I have the grades, in two years I will start law school."

A public high school teacher commented, "Although all jobs have their share of stress, in my mind the most stressful aspect of being a teacher is the sometimes uncontrollable violence that occurs in many urban schools. Knowing that students are walking around with weapons and/or drugs provides a teacher with great ambivalence as any student can explode at any given moment. As an educator, I would like to see more done to deter such happenings."

A public junior high school teacher wrote about a different kind of violence, "Especially in the junior and senior high schools there is a high rate of sexual harassment towards the new teachers. A new teacher comes in and she gets inundated with proposals from male teachers; married and single with no concern over her marital status." Another public junior high school teacher wrote about the end of her first year, "I was attacked by a student last June--a 16-year-old seventh grader--and very disgusted that the principal did not have her apologize to me. Also, I was amazed that I had enough self-discipline not to

slug this student back, as she was pummeling me. I was afraid to use my full strength to pull her off me--I didn't want to touch her for fear of losing my license."

Even prekindergarten teachers are not insulated from violence, "My supervisor was not helpful. She was daily informed of an insubordinate assistant teacher in my classroom. I was attacked by this person who is almost 100 pounds more than me and ten inches taller than I am. The school is not standing behind me even though they told me this person is being put on probation due to insubordinate behavior in the classroom.

This fourth grade teacher reported her reasons for leaving teaching after her first year, "Since the last time I completed this questionnaire I have given up the teaching profession because I was physically assaulted by one of my students. If I was in a better neighborhood I would have (probably) loved my job but as it stands now, I doubt I will ever teach again."

The teachers' observations of violence indicate that it can occur at any grade level. Violence destroys the teacher's morale and is a source of great distress. Interestingly, the teachers did not write about classroom management in terms of violence prevention. The teachers had little to report on classroom coping strategies that reduce the level of violence. Sometimes violence springs from the students within schools, sometimes it comes in the form of intruders, sometimes it comes as sexual harassment, and sometimes it comes in the form of sudden loss as in the murder of a student's loved one.

General Comments

The teachers' observations underline three generalizations, two of which relate to findings from the quantitative literature. First, the teachers emphasized that helpful, collegial relations and considerateness on the part of supervisors contribute to successful classroom management. They also indicated that helpful, collegial relations contribute to teachers' sense of happiness with their jobs. Furthermore teachers who worked in schools characterized by interpersonal tensions among the faculty and among administrators or between administrators and faculty reported poor morale.

Although the research literature on teacher stress is weak, comprising largely cross-sectional studies that are subject to methodological problems, prospective research in the general stress literature suggests that social support, at least from friends and relatives, is generally related to reduced levels of psychological distress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Kessler, Price, & Wortman, 1985). In fact, there is mounting evidence from prospective studies that social support is linked to improved health (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988).

Unfortunately the mechanisms by which social support affects psychological distress (Schonfeld, 1991) and health are unclear. Moreover, there have been few prospective studies on the impact of support from co-workers. The teachers' reports on the helpfulness of collegiality suggest a line of research for teacher-stress investigators. We hope that future researchers do more than reproduce the ever popular cross-sectional study, this time on supportive behaviors among faculty and supervisors. We hope to see rigorously implemented action studies that set out to improve teacher-to-teacher and teacher-to-administrator communication and cooperation.

A second generalization is that learning the basic classroom management skills should contribute to teacher success. Research in educational psychology has given rise to a reliable, cumulative knowledge base regarding an array of classroom practices that can improve student achievement (Brophy, 1986). Presumably some of the practices in this knowledge base were taught to the teachers when they attended college education courses.

Nonetheless, many of the teachers seemed lost in the classroom, especially when faced with defiant, troublesome youngsters. One teacher wrote that her college education courses did not adequately prepare her for her first year of teaching. At least three teachers recognized that they were on the path to improving their classroom management skills. There are times, however, when the disturbances created by some of the children described by the teachers would challenge even the most skilled teachers.

A third generalization is the problem of violence in the schools. No amount of personal coping behaviors is sufficient to prevent it. Violence, as well as

collateral problems like endemic disrespectful behavior, is probably best addressed from an organizational standpoint. The problem is larger than any one teacher. The adverse effects of violence on the health and morale of teachers and students cry out for interventions.

One may argue that it is premature to examine the morale and problems of first-year teachers. After all, they are novices and it is only a matter of time before they will get better, or quit to make way for more capable teachers. This argument is fallacious for a number of reasons. First, any time a worker is a victim of violence there is cause for concern. Second, when new teachers are subject to disrespectful behavior from children and report feeling isolated from their colleagues as well as the school leadership, there is added cause for concern. These problems reflect on the quality of many of our schools. Third, a study of veteran teachers (Schonfeld, 1990) revealed remarkably high levels of depressive symptoms compared to general population samples. Similarly, the study found that veteran teachers displayed lower levels of job satisfaction than representative samples of average American workers. Schonfeld (1992b) found startlingly high levels of psychological distress in other veteran-teacher samples (Finlay-Jones, 1986; Hammen, & deMayo, 1982).

A fourth problem with the "novice" argument is that a review of what the teachers were reporting in their second and third years and beyond did not vary much from what they reported in their first year. For example, a high school teacher, who was part of a special cohort that was followed into a fourth year, wrote, "This questionnaire is late getting to you because I didn't want to fill it out while I was feeling depressed about the job. I kept waiting for it to pass. It usually does, but this has been a longer termed thing. I think this fourth-year, 37-year-old teacher is trying to accept that some things are probably not going to get easier anymore. It was so tough as a new teacher that [I thought] things could only get better."

References

- Blase, J.J. (1986). A qualitative analysis of sources of teacher stress: Consequences for performance. American Educational Research Journal, 23, 13-40.
- Brophy, J. (1986). Teacher influences on student achievement. American Psychologist, 41, 1069-1077.
- Cohen, J. (1960). A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 20, 37-46.
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T.A. (1985) Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. Psychological Bulletin, 98, 310-357.
- Dillon, S. (1994, July 7). Report finds more violence in the schools: Board says principals covered up incidents. New York Times, pp. B1, B7.
- Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M.C. Whitrock (Ed.), Handbook on research in teaching (3rd ed.), pp. 119-161. New York: Macmillan.
- Farrell, E., Pegero, G., Lindsey, R., & White, R. (1988). Giving voice to high school students: Pressure and boredom, ya know what I'm sayin'? American Educational Research Journal, 25, 489-502.
- Finlay-Jones, R. (1986). Factors in the teaching environment associated with severe psychological distress among school teachers. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 20, 304-313.
- Fleiss, J. (1981). Statistical methods for rates and proportions. New York: Wiley.
- Hammen, C., & deMayo, R. (1982) Cognitive correlates of teacher stress and depressive symptoms: Implications for attributional models of depression. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 91, 96-101.
- House, J.S., Landis, K.R., & Umberson, D. (1988). Social relationships and health. Science, 241, 540-545.
- Kessler, R.C., Price, R.H., & Wortman, C.B. (1985). Social factors in psychopathology: Stress, social support, and coping processes. Annual Review of Psychology, 36, 531-572.

- Kleinbaum, D.G., Kupper, L.L., & Morgenstern, H. (1982). Epidemiologic Research. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- MacMahon, B., & Pugh, T.F. (1970). Epidemiology. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Schonfeld, I.S. (1991). Dimensions of functional social support and psychological symptoms. Psychological Medicine, 21, 1051-1060.
- Schonfeld, I.S. (1992a). A longitudinal study of occupational stressors and depressive symptoms in first-year teachers. Teaching and Teacher Education, 8, 151-158.
- Schonfeld, I.S. (1992b). Assessing stress in teachers: Depressive symptoms scales and neutral self-reports on the work environment. In J. Quick, L., Murphy, and J. Hurrell, Jr. (eds.), Work and well-being: Assessments and instruments for occupational mental health (pp.270-285). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Schonfeld, I.S. (1994a, May). The impact of working conditions on depressive symptoms: The case of newly appointed woman teachers. International Conference on Social Stress Research, Honolulu,
- Schonfeld, I.S. (1994b). The relation of negative affectivity to self-reports of job stressors and psychological distress. Submitted for publication.