

AN ANALYSIS OF THE STRESS, STRAIN AND COPING LEVELS  
OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS OF  
SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED STUDENTS

by

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to assess the stress, strain and coping levels of public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students. A secondary purpose was to determine if relationships existed between dependent variables stress, strain and coping and teacher experience and teaching assignment variables. The sample consisted of five hundred teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students in the southeast region of the United States. The useable return rate was 62% with N = 295.

Respondents completed a demographic information survey which provided data for variables sex, year of birth, highest degree earned, degree area, experience in education, community size and present special education teaching setting. The Occupational Environment Scales, Personal Strain Questionnaire and Personal Resources Questionnaire developed by Samuel Osipow and Arnold Spokane (1981) were used to collect data on stress, strain and coping levels. Frequencies, means, standard deviations, medians and modes were computed for all variables. Pearson correlations and t-tests were calculated for teacher experience variables and

stress, strain and coping. Chi-square and ANOVA procedures were completed for teacher assignment variables and the dependent variables.

The major finding of the study was that the majority of public school teachers of the seriously emotionally disturbed had low to average stress and strain levels, and above average coping skills. The sample of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students who participated in this study do not appear to be as stressed and strained as samples reviewed in other recent studies. This may be due to the nature of the sample.

Older teachers were found slightly less stressed, less strained and possessing slightly higher coping skill levels than younger teachers. There were no significant relationships found between teaching experience variables and dependent variables of stress, strain and coping.

No significant relationship between stress and teaching assignment variables, community size and teaching setting resulted. A relationship was found between strain levels and community size and teaching setting. There was evidence of a relationship between coping skills and community size (urban, suburban, rural), but no relationship was found between coping skill levels and special education teaching setting (resource, self-contained, center, center with therapy).

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Dick was my husband, confidant, my love and best friend. He listened, discussed, questioned and encouraged me to explore each interest to its fullest, just as he did. His pride in me was evident and motivational. His intense curiosity and love of life permeated our marriage. He is sorely missed.

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## DEDICATION

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT . . . . .	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	iv
DEDICATION . . . . .	vii
LIST OF TABLES . . . . .	xi
LIST OF FIGURES . . . . .	xii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Significance of the Study . . . . .	8
Problem Statement . . . . .	10
Purpose of the Study . . . . .	11
Limitations . . . . .	12
Definition of Terms . . . . .	13
Organization of the Study . . . . .	14
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE . . . . .	15
Stress and Burnout Differentiated . . . . .	15
Concerns of Public School Teachers . . . . .	17
Societal Contributions to Teacher Stress . . . . .	17
Institutional Contributions to Teacher Stress . . . . .	18
Personal Contributions to Teacher Stress . . . . .	19
Stress Among Special Educators . . . . .	20
Stressors in the Occupational Environment . . . . .	24
Professional Relationships at Work . . . . .	24
Impact of Teacher Stress on Students . . . . .	27
Strain and Its Symptoms . . . . .	29
Coping Strategies . . . . .	31
Support System Development . . . . .	33
Stress Management Programs . . . . .	34
Nutritional and Health Awareness . . . . .	36
Summary . . . . .	38
III. METHODOLOGY . . . . .	39
Introduction . . . . .	39
Research Questions . . . . .	39
The Population and Sample . . . . .	40



	<u>Page</u>
III. METHODOLOGY (Continued)	
Instrumentation . . . . .	41
The Occupational Environment Scales . . . . .	43
The Personal Strain Questionnaire . . . . .	44
The Personal Resources Questionnaire . . . . .	44
The Demographic Information Survey . . . . .	45
Data Collection Procedures . . . . .	45
Data Analysis . . . . .	46
Descriptive Information . . . . .	46
Relational Information . . . . .	47
Assessment of Non-Response Bias . . . . .	48
Summary . . . . .	49
IV. RESULTS . . . . .	50
Descriptive Information . . . . .	50
Assessment of Potential Non-Response Bias . . . . .	51
Demographic Information . . . . .	53
Intercorrelations Among Demographic Variables . . . . .	55
Description of Dependent Measures . . . . .	58
Stress Level Results . . . . .	58
Strain Level Results . . . . .	60
Coping Level Results . . . . .	60
Intercorrelations Among Dependent Variables . . . . .	61
Relational Information . . . . .	63
Relationships Between Demographic and Dependent Variables . . . . .	63
Relationships Between Teaching Assignment and Dependent Variables . . . . .	64
Summary of Findings . . . . .	66
V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	68
Summary of Findings . . . . .	69
Discussion of Results . . . . .	70
Conclusions . . . . .	70
Recommendations . . . . .	78
Confusion in the Field . . . . .	79
Organizational Interventions . . . . .	81
Individual Interventions . . . . .	87
Summary . . . . .	88
REFERENCES . . . . .	90

	<u>Page</u>
APPENDICES . . . . .	98
A. Independent Variables Crossed With Wave Response . . . . .	99
B. t-Test Results of Selected Variables With Independent Variable Wave Response . . . . .	100
C. Correlations Between Demographic and Dependent Variables . . . . .	102
D. t-Test Comparison of Males and Females for Dependent Variables . . . . .	103
E. Community Size Crossed With Teaching Setting . . . . .	104
F. Means for Dependent Variables Broken Down by Community Size and Teaching Settings . . . . .	105
G. ANOVA of Stress Scores on Community Size by Teaching Setting . . . . .	106
H. ANOVA of Strain Scores on Community Size by Teaching Setting . . . . .	107
I. ANOVA of Coping Scores on Community Size by Teaching Setting . . . . .	108
J. Initial Survey Cover Letter . . . . .	109
K. Demographic Information Survey . . . . .	110
L. OES Sample Questions . . . . .	111
M. PSQ Sample Questions . . . . .	112
N. PRQ Sample Questions . . . . .	113
O. Second Request Letter . . . . .	114
VITA . . . . .	115

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>Page</u>
4.1	Demographic Characteristics of the Sample . .	54
4.2	Demographic Characteristics . . . . .	56
4.3	Summary Statistics for Stress, Strain and Coping Levels . . . . .	59
4.4	Quartile and Percent Results for Dependent Variables . . . . .	59
4.5	Correlations for Stress, Strain and Coping Variables . . . . .	62

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page</u>
4.1	Interaction Between Community Size and Teaching Setting on Strain Variable . . . . .	65

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Stress is a facet of everyday life, yet the scientific study of stress and human experience has a relatively brief history. The systematic study of stress in the work place is even more recent. Authorities (Baum, Singer and Baum, 1984; Dworkin, 1987; Holland, 1982 and Jaremko, 1984) generally agree that Hans Selye is the father of most of the theoretical bases and methods now used to study and understand how stress affects behavior. Selye's (1956) assumption is that human beings generally strive to maintain homeostasis in their lives and in their experiences. He defines stress as the disruption of homeostasis. Most often people strive to restore stability, or homeostasis, once it has been disrupted. These efforts to restore stability are considered the coping behaviors that individuals display. It is reasonable then to say that the degree to which stress impairs behavior is related to the intensity and pervasiveness of the disruption combined with the adequacy of the behaviors the individual can bring to bear to restore stability.

Selye (1956) has been concerned with the topic of

stress for the past sixty years. He has confirmed that, in general, individuals differ in their abilities to cope with stress producing situations. What appears to differentiate the most successful person from those less successful is an awareness of the situation's stress potential. This awareness includes the individual's sensitivity to personal reactions and personal capacity for alternative responses. Successful coping seems to be a skill in which there is some potential for learning and development on the part of the individual. An understanding of the responses which people use to cope with stress is an area where research work remains to be done.

Stress is not necessarily an undesirable experience. Stress can cause depletion of a portion of emotional and physical resources, but stress can also be a motivator that will enhance performance under the proper conditions. Coping responses, when they exist in proper proportions, allow individuals not only to deal with stress, but also to increase their adaptive capacities. Stress might provide motivation for increased productivity, for the development of new responses, and for increasing the power of previously effective responses to stress. Although stress is reflected in each of us as

the rate of wear and tear caused by life's events, stress may have positive or negative outcomes.

Stress has been found to affect mental health, social behavior and human performance. Cohen (1980) and Maslach (1978) reported that a wide range of unpredictable and uncontrollable stressors will produce undesirable aftereffects including reduced sensitivity to other people. McLean (1979) found that dependency increased as a result of stress and House (1981) found that an increased need for social support was associated with stress. Levi (1968) reported the extent to which stress is associated with a variety of mental disorders, including alcohol and substance abuse. It now seems clear that social stress occurs in the workplace with effects similar to those of stress outside the workplace (Fisher and Gitelson, 1983; Sharit and Salvendy, 1982). Work and nonwork (i.e. family) stress probably interact to a large extent.

The association between occupational responsibilities, stress, and coping responses has been of increasing concern to professionals in the field of special education. Research reported by Bensky, Shaw, Grouse, Bates, Dixon and Beave (1980) highlighted the impact of professional demands imposed by Public Law 94-142 (The

Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) on the mental health of educators. Findings were:

- a) Special classroom teachers are frequently under more stress than regular classroom teachers.
- b) Changing occupational responsibilities precipitated by legislation are associated with stress among special and regular educators.
- c) Class size, instructional preparation, and implementation procedures are associated with high amounts of stress among special education resource room and regular classroom teachers.

A number of authors have discussed the effects of working with students in need of emotional support (Freudenberger, 1977; Mattingly, 1977; Pines and Kafrey, 1978). Weiskopf (1980) has argued that field experiments should be conducted to identify ways to reduce stress among professionals in special education. Frequent interactions with adolescents in crisis situations and the ongoing responsibility of directing social learning activities for potentially volatile students are stressors. Teaching disturbed students highlights intense feelings emerging from two sources:

- a) The emotionally provocative behavior of the student
- b) The personal needs of the teacher

Maslach (1978) discussed the concept of burnout, which



she defined as "emotional exhaustion resulting from the stress of interpersonal contact" in members of the helping professions. Her research findings indicated that a person who is unable to cope with continued emotional stress loses all concern and emotional feelings for the individuals that person is trying to help. Gradually the helper increases the distance between the self and the clients, becoming less emotionally involved and less concerned about the clients' social, physical and emotional needs. There is almost a callous response to the client.

In a recent survey, four out of ten special education teachers indicated that they do not plan to remain in teaching until retirement and the number of teachers with twenty or more years of experience has dropped by nearly fifty percent within the past fifteen years. Over seventy-five percent of the teachers surveyed stated that their absences from school were frequently stress or tension related (Zabel, Dettmer and Zabel, 1984).

Many teacher trainers and school administrators believe that special education teachers suffer more than the average amount of teacher stress. Zabel and Zabel (1982) indicated that special education teachers may be well versed in characteristics of exceptional students and

methods of dealing with the problems of these students, but are unequipped to deal with the personal strains they themselves experience as special education teachers.

In the 1984 study conducted by Zabel, Dettmer and Zabel, the Maslach Burnout Inventory was sent to a random sample of special education teachers identified by category of handicapped student taught. Results indicated that teachers of emotionally disturbed students reported higher levels of exhaustion and depersonalization and a lower sense of personal accomplishment than teachers of all other exceptionalities. Teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students ranked highest of all categories in levels of occupational distress.

It cannot be denied that individual personalities and experiential factors not directly related to conditions on the job are critical factors in stress tolerance of special education teachers. With the high rate of present teacher attrition and little prospect for improvement in the near future, administrators must take a proactive role to protect both the students and the teachers. School organizations can initiate attempts to identify causes of stress in the occupational environment and to modify them, but intervention success for every teacher is an impossible expectation. Although the ultimate burden of

successful coping rests with the teacher, the organization can initiate stress management training programs with the goal of providing the individual employee with additional coping skills and strategies to address those innate occupational stress factors which cannot be removed.

### Background Summary

Stress is a daily by-product of life events. Developing improved and additional coping skills should be a personal and progressive goal of each individual in order to minimize the negative effects of stress.

Documentation previously cited indicates that people employed in helping professions, such as teaching, are exposed to high levels of occupational stress. Research results indicate that special education teachers and, more specifically, teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students, report the highest levels of occupational distress.

Therefore, in order to support teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students to continue to be effective teachers sensitive to the needs of their clients, a more acute awareness of the specific facets of their teaching environments is necessary. Knowledge and understanding of innate occupational stressors, resultant strain responses

and the abilities of these teachers to successfully cope with stress and strain are essential elements of problem analysis.

### Significance of the Study

The systematic study of stress in the working environment attempts to understand how stress affects productivity and employee satisfaction. In his 1979 article, Osipow argued for better understanding of the mental health aspects of the workplace. He reported that stress is often programmed into the workplace without a thought to employees' coping mechanisms. This is often done deliberately on the misguided assumption that increased productivity will result. Overlooked are the undesirable side effects of diminished satisfaction and comfort which may lead to excessive employee mobility and ultimately to low productivity. Matarazzo (1980, 1982) supports the theory that the workplace is an important facility for the study of behavioral health. He believes that identifying and supporting behaviorally healthy events on the job may increase productivity and individual well-being.

A study by Colligan, Smith and Hurrell (1977) found that admission rates to community mental health centers

differed by occupational category. They stated that it has never been clearly demonstrated in a study that occupational stress did not have a strong generic component. That is, it is likely that every occupation can act as a major stressor for workers.

Many studies have shown that people differ in the effects of stress on their mental and physical health. McLean (1974) and Sergiovanni (1984) discussed how the Type A personality interacted with the workplace to result in a highly stressed employee. Levi (1981) and Katz and Kahn (1978) have written extensively on the potential role of person-environment fit in either exacerbating or minimizing stress. Billings and Moos (1982) and Osipow and Spokane (1983) have indicated how coping abilities are likely to serve as a buffer between the individual and a stressful environment. Wiener et al. (1981) noted that work-related attitudes held by people contributed more to their mental health than did the situational or personality variables.

This study may be of importance in helping to identify and define levels and patterns of stress and strain and the coping skills possessed by teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students. No studies of this nature have been completed in reference to this specific group of

teachers.

The study may be significant in making available to public school systems information which could increase their understanding and awareness of the possible support systems, professional development improvement activities and employee assistance programs needed by teachers of the emotionally disturbed. Study results could give individual teachers a higher level of self-awareness of the potential stressors in their teaching assignments.

In the current atmosphere of the educational reform movement where school inadequacies often fall as blame on the shoulders of all teachers, additional stress is placed on teachers to document improvements. Better qualified teachers are sought to address the high rate of teacher mobility to fill the ranks of those leaving the profession as well as to prepare for forthcoming projected increases in the size of the student population. This study could be instrumental in illustrating a need to assess teaching environments to ensure both students' and teachers' growth.

### Problem Statement

Occupational stress has been documented at high levels for people serving in helping professions. Teaching falls into this high stress category. Several studies have

shown that special education teachers in general and, specifically, teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students, experience the highest levels of occupational distress. The problem was to analyze the current stress, strain and coping levels of public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students.

#### Purposes of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the occupational stress levels of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students. Levels of strain and coping skills of these educators were also measured. The study investigated the following research questions:

- 1) What are the stress, strain and coping levels of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students?
- 2) Are there relationships between teacher demographic variables (sex, age and experience) and levels of stress, strain and coping?
- 3) Are there relationships between teaching assignment variables (community size and special education setting of teaching assignment) and teacher stress, strain and coping levels?

Limitations

- 1) Subjects were a random sample generated by the Council for Exceptional Children from their membership list of their Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders Division. The subjects were public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students in the southeastern region of the United States (Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida). The list did not represent the total accessible population, only that portion of the accessible population which chose to join this professional organization and the particular division which addresses concerns of the behaviorally disordered.
- 2) The sample did not include private school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students.
- 3) Generalization is limited to environments which duplicate the parameters set for this study.



Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used for the purposes of this study:

Stress - the nonspecific response of the body to any demand; the disruption of homeostasis (Selye, 1956)

Coping - efforts individuals display to restore stability to their lives; attempts to ameliorate or tolerate the stressful events (Selye, 1956)

Strain - the consequent effect of stress on the human well-being (Selye, 1956)

Seriously Emotionally Disturbed is defined in regulations implementing the Education of the Handicapped Act (34 C.F.R. 300.5 (8)).

"(I) The term means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance:

(A) An inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors;

(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships

- with peers and teachers;
- (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
  - (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
  - (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
- (II) The term includes children who are schizophrenic. The term does not include children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they are seriously emotionally disturbed."

### Organization of the Study

The study is presented in five chapters. Background information and an introduction are provided in chapter one. A review of relevant literature is presented in chapter two. Methodologies and procedures used to conduct the study are described in chapter three, with corresponding results presented in chapter four. Chapter five contains a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

Initially a generalized review differentiates stress from burnout. Following are characteristics and concerns of regular and special education teachers. Information on occupational stress, personal strain and coping strategies is next detailed.

The section regarding facets of stress focuses on the components of occupational stress and how they impact upon special education teachers. Strain and its effects on the employee and the organization are then presented. Symptoms of strain are highlighted.

The final review section includes relevant literature pertinent to individual and organizational coping strategies. Stress management programs, support system development and nutrition awareness programs are briefly outlined.

#### Stress and Burnout Differentiated

Much of the research on burnout has been based on untested assumptions. The literature bearing on the problem of teacher burnout is anecdotal and often equates burnout and stress (Gold, 1984). These two concepts are

similar yet not identical.

As previously defined, stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand (Selye, 1956). Stress will occur when there is an imbalance between the demands of the environment and the individual's response capacities.

Edelwick and Brodsky (1980) define burnout as "a progressive loss of idealism, energy, purpose and concern as a result of conditions of work" (p. 325). Burnout is a physical condition and is most often the result of unremediated stress - of being stressed and having no relief, no buffers, no support system and no adequate rewards. Burnout is regarded by many experts as the final step in a progression of unsuccessful attempts to cope with a variety of negative stress conditions (Holland, 1982; Selye, 1956; Gold, 1984; Farber, 1984b).

Stress is unique because it affects people in a personalized manner. An event which causes great stress for one person may be just another happening to another. A person's perceptions and attitudes toward stressors determine the physical and emotional responses the body exhibits as a result of the stress. Research indicates that a person's perceptions of a situation provide the basis for how one responds to a predicament (Eskridge and Coker, 1985).

### Concerns of Public School Teachers

A review of literature on teacher stress and dissatisfaction includes the following concern areas: lack of public and parent support and respect; lack of job security; lack of job mobility; other career options; poor working conditions; inadequate salary and benefits; excessive paperwork; poor relationships with others in the work setting; lack of personal recognition and loss of control over what happens within one's classroom.

Wangberg (1984) says that the problem of teacher stress and dissatisfaction has three major components:

- 1) Societal
- 2) Institutional
- 3) Personal

### Societal Contributions to Teacher Stress

- low levels of status and respect cause frustration
- lack of competitive salaries is stress producing
- cutbacks have reduced program offerings, diminished support services and prompted unwanted job changes
- the changing female role in today's society

- has increased career options for women
- approximately sixty percent of all teachers and eighty percent of elementary teachers are female
  - teaching is not only failing to attract the most capable students, but is attracting a disproportionate share of the least capable. Average SAT verbal scores of education majors have dropped seventy-nine points in eight years (Siev, 1982). Vance and Schelchty (1982) found that "fully one-third of those who intend to teach to age thirty were drawn from the lowest twenty percent of scores on verbal subtests of the SAT" (p. 25).

#### Institutional Contributions to Teacher Stress

- low public esteem for teachers has resulted in accountability demands
- personnel are transferred with little concern for areas of specialization or their desires. This undermines the teacher's sense of self-esteem, control, affiliation and commitment.

### Personal Contributions to Teacher Stress

- many teachers set unrealistic standards and feel a need to be "super teachers"
- teachers have caretaker personalities and do not plan activities for their own stress reduction

Cook (1982), Levitor (1982), and Wangberg and Metzger (1984) reported that teachers experienced a significantly lower quality of worklife than did the typical American worker, including the nonprofessional worker.

Feitler (1980), Greer and Wethered (1984), Olson and Malusky (1982), Dworkin (1987), Wangberg (1984), and Milstein and Golaszewski (1985) found that the most universal reason teachers feel pressure is related to student misbehavior and an inability to maintain effective discipline in the classroom. Feitler also found that secondary teachers experience stress more frequently than do elementary teachers. The fewer years of professional preparation one has as a teacher increase the likelihood of stress. More females than males suffer from stress. Teachers in the thirty-one to forty-four age range reported higher stress levels than teachers under thirty or over forty-five years of age. Finally, suburban teachers are more stressed.

### Stress Among Special Educators

Scant literature exists to highlight stress among special education teachers. Dixon et. al. (1980) cite three indicators of stress among special educators:

- 1) The increasing amount of time administrators are spending recruiting, hiring and providing orientation for new staff members, primarily due to the high turnover rate
- 2) The growing role confusion, resentments and interpersonal problems between regular classroom teachers, special educators and administrators
- 3) The increasingly open resentment to federal, state and local bureaucratic regulations and procedures related to the education of handicapped children

In comparing educable mentally retarded, learning disabled and seriously emotionally disturbed students, Gajar (1979) stated that the seriously emotionally disturbed subjects in the study set the lowest achievement scores in arithmetic. Murray and Whittenberger (1983), in describing social and cognitive factors of aggressive disturbed students, stated that aggressive children tend



to receive three times as much negative feedback from their social environments than do nonproblem children. Groups of children with antisocial behavior show specific reading retardation to a much greater degree than the general population.

As a rule, the disturbed adolescent is in a poor psychological state. Hostility, insecurity, and irritability are accurate descriptors. Aichorn (1964) says, "The disturbed youth feels superior and pretends still greater superiority; often he is not interested in what we can offer him and rarely does he expect that the hours with us will serve a useful purpose" (p. 23).

As authority figures, teachers often find themselves the targets of much of this turmoil and frequently find themselves involved in battles for control with behaviorally disturbed students. Bloom (1983) says that resolving these control and independence conflicts is complicated by the fact that the struggle for control and independence is often the primary focus of the disturbed behavior.

Lawrenson and McKinnon (1982) conducted a study of thirty-three classroom teachers of the emotionally disturbed to obtain information to help in teacher recruitment and to learn about teacher attrition and

burnout. Major findings of the study were:

- 1) An attrition rate of 48% over a three year period appeared high, but was comparable with rates found in other studies.
- 2) The major reason cited for leaving the job was the same as the major dissatisfier - hassles with the administration.
- 3) The major satisfiers of the teachers were relationships with students
- 4) Factors differentiating teachers who remain at their jobs from those who resigned were a higher number of B.A. degrees and full certification, along with certain job satisfiers including a greater amount of administrative support, staff support, and recognition for a job well done. In contrast, a higher percentage of teachers with M.A. degrees had resigned from their positions teaching seriously emotionally disturbed students.

Johnson, Gold and Vickers (1982) investigated which factors related to the professional roles of teachers of the learning disabled, emotionally disturbed and educable mentally retarded were most stressful. Teachers of

emotionally disturbed youth revealed that they were fearful of verbal and physical attacks from their students. Teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students felt that their overall teacher responsibilities were significantly more stressful than those responsibilities of teachers of learning disabled or educable mentally retarded students. They were significantly more fearful of the potential for harm in their particular work environment.

Ruhl and Hughes (1985) conducted a study to determine teacher perceptions regarding the nature and extent of aggression in settings where emotionally disturbed students were served. Results verified that a variety of student verbal and physical aggressive behaviors are commonly manifested in settings where emotionally disturbed students are served.

- over half (56%) of respondents reported incidents of extreme student physical aggression toward others (i.e. choking, hitting) occurred at least once a month; 29% reported weekly occurrences
- mild physical aggression toward others (i.e. biting, scratching) once a month was reported by 74%; one to three times a month

- by 40%; and weekly by 40%
- physical aggression toward self was reported by 37% of respondents to occur three times per month to once a year; 34% said this type of aggression occurred weekly
  - destructive physical aggression was reported twice a month by 70% and once weekly by 47%
  - verbal aggression was reported at 92% for weekly occurrences and at 68% for daily occurrences

### Stressors in the Occupational Environment

Milstein and Golaszewski (1985) defined the following categories of occupational based stressors:

- relationships at work
- organizational structure and climate
- intrinsic job factors - i.e. pace and characteristics of work
- role in the organization - role ambiguity, role conflict, responsibility for others, role insufficiencies.

### Professional Relationships at Work

Zabel, Boomer, Lyman and King (1984) state that

because of the professional role demands of teachers of behaviorally disturbed students, they are frequently isolated from interaction with colleagues. Bradfield and Fones (1985) found that teachers of seriously disturbed students identified relations with the parents of their students as their greatest stress factor. Evidence of a cause-effect relationship between teacher behavior and the support from others is not yet clearly established in the literature. It does appear, however, that measures of stress do correlate with teachers' perceptions of support from peers and, particularly, their administrators (Zabel and Zabel, 1982; Fimian, 1986). Seaward's (1984) study showed that problems with school administrators were the greatest source of stress to teachers. Sixty-two percent said they never or rarely had a rewarding, supportive contact with their principals (p. 263).

Lortie (1975) examined extrinsic, ancillary and intrinsic rewards as job satisfiers. Teachers identified intrinsic rewards as the major source of professional satisfaction.

Achieving satisfactory results with students (Lortie, 1975), student achievement (Wickstrom, 1973), or reaching students instructionally and interacting with them individually (Holdaway, 1978) appear to be the most

frequently cited sources of job satisfaction. Conversely, the perception of ineffectiveness with students would be expected to result in nonrewarding experiences for the teacher of the emotionally disturbed student.

By definition, these children present a wide range of behavioral excesses and deficits. Their behavior tends to arouse strong emotional reactions in others. Teachers of the emotionally disturbed work intensely with children who need constant care, support and supervision. According to Pickhardt (1978), teachers have three primary interpersonal adequacy needs - to be liked, to be effective and to be in control. If teachers of emotionally disturbed students experience some of these same needs, and there is no reason to believe they don't, this group must be labeled at high stress risk.

Because behavioral deviance is the primary reason for placement in classes for the seriously emotionally disturbed, improvements in student behaviors are most likely viewed by teachers as the criteria for success. The Lawrence and McKinnon (1982) study suggests this to be the case. One of the most frequently cited reasons for teachers of the disturbed for leaving their profession was the perception of inability to have a long term effect on students' behavior.

These findings may also reflect a lack of congruence between expectation and experience. Emotionally disturbed students often appear as "normal" and may elicit different expectations for achievement than those handicapped students who appear handicapped.

Morse (1981) says, "We must forego the normal expectations if we are to work with the disturbed. It is normal to want to be liked, to want to be helpful and even to actually be helpful. One has to get one's satisfaction from knowing we are doing the right thing to help, though the change may be too delayed to give us the desired feedback" (p. 9).

In spite of the difficulties cited among professional relationships with peers, supervisors and students, teachers of emotionally disturbed students list relationships with their students as one of the job satisfiers of their positions.

#### Impact of Teacher Stress on Students

Maslach (1978) found that stress produces loss of positive feelings, sympathy and respect for clients. This depersonalization can crystalize into cynical and dehumanizing attitudes toward clients. Zabel, Boomer, et. al. (1984) make an assumption that the feelings of the

teacher of the seriously emotionally disturbed will be evident in the teacher's behavior. Epanchin and Paul (1982) believe that emotionally disturbed children are more adversely affected by a teacher's negative behavior than nondisturbed children.

When anxiety occurs in teachers, Youngs (1979) says it is usually associated with a variety of personal, social and physical events from interpersonal experiences in the school setting. She says, "High anxiety on the part of teachers may have an undesirable effect on their students and can also have negative effects on students' performances" (p. 79).

Fuller (1969), from clinical observations, concluded that in situations where teachers are under stress, their concerns increase and take precedence over direct teaching activities. When under stress, teachers in the study viewed their needs in the following order:

- 1) Survival training
- 2) Survival and performance skills
- 3) Methods on how to make an impact on students
- 4) Concerns regarding increasing what pupils learn

Blase (1984b) also found that stressful work



conditions were linked to substantial displacement of teacher time and energy - from a focus on primary role responsibilities (instructional) toward extraneous problems in the work setting. Koon (1971) found that high anxiety teachers use significantly less task-oriented behavior with students and they tend to administer fewer positive reinforcements. Students of high anxiety teachers tend to be more disruptive than students of low anxiety teachers.

### Strain and Its Symptoms

Lazarus (1976) has said, "It is increasingly apparent that stress is important as a factor in illness in general and in chronic illness in particular. Many present day illnesses cannot be explained in terms of a single 'cause'. Research suggests that a significant portion of the population seeking medical cures is suffering from stress based illness" (p. 247).

The stress response is triggered by any disruption to one's equilibrium or homeostasis. The chain of events leading to the reestablishment of equilibrium involves the autonomic nervous system and the endocrine system. These systems combine to speed up cardiovascular functions and slow down gastrointestinal functions, thus preparing a

person to "fight or take flight." The triggering of this response often over prolonged time periods causes wear and tear on one's system, including the risk of physical illness or emotional dysfunction. Heredity, personality, habits and past accidents or illnesses are factors which make the response different for each person. Some stress is needed to be alert and productive, but we each have a unique point at which more stress becomes destructive and becomes strain (Selye, 1956).

Dworkin (1987) conducted a study for the Houston Federation of Teachers to determine levels of stress-induced illness behavior associated with the teaching role. Specific results follow:

<u>Condition</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1) Sometimes ill from stress, but never needed medical attention	25.4%
2) Sometimes ill from stress and sometimes needed medical attention	55.6%
3) Sometimes ill from stress and often needed medical attention	6.3%
4) Often ill, needed no medical attention	1.0%
5) Often ill, sometimes needed medical attention	1.0%
6) Often ill, often needed medical attention	10.7%

In Chicago, Walsh (1979) conducted a teacher union strain survey and found that 56.6% of 5500 respondents,

representing a 25% response rate, claimed physical and/or mental illness as a direct result of their jobs (p. 253).

Fimian and Santoro (1983), in survey results, found that 49.3% of full-time special education teachers regularly took mental health days due to job related stress and strain. Eight percent reported receiving professional assistance for stress induced problems (p. 541). Eskridge and Coker (1985) identify reduced efficiency, tardiness, absenteeism, staff turnover, loss of concern and detachment exhibited for peers and students as obvious signs of stress induced strain.

No studies have been completed specifically assessing levels of strain in teachers of the seriously emotionally disturbed. There is every reason to believe that the results of the preceding studies concerning regular and special education teachers would be applicable to the population of teachers of the emotionally disturbed.

### Coping Strategies

In his book Stress, Selye (1976) lists the five best techniques for coping with job tensions (p. 27):

- 1) Build resistance by regular sleep, exercise and good health habits.
- 2) Compartmentalize work and non-work life.

- 3) Engage in physical exercise.
- 4) Talk problems through with peers at work.
- 5) Withdraw physically from stressful situations.

The most effective mechanism, building physical resistance, is highly significant in designing an action plan for coping with stress. It reflects an awareness of the demands of the job, a sensitivity to one's own limited physical resources and a readiness to deal with tension as it arises.

Lazarus (1976) reiterates several of the preceding strategies for coping and adds that a person must be able to maintain a sense of personal worth despite defeats in life and to foster continuing rewarding interpersonal relationships. Moe (1979) says that learning to say "no", developing a hobby, being good to yourself, traveling, continuing to learn and setting realistic and flexible goals are her prescription for stress reduction and successful coping.

In reviewing literature on the topic of coping, most strategies fall into three categories: 1) support system development; 2) structured stress management programs, and 3) nutrition and health awareness.

### Support System Development

Roberts (1983), Blase (1984, 1986) and Dworkin (1987) have drawn relationships between the leadership styles of principals and their impact on teachers' perception of teacher stress, job satisfaction and classroom performance. Data generated indicated that a school principal's leadership style characterized by a high level of structure and consideration was related to lowest levels of perceived teacher stress and higher satisfaction. This style of leadership was also perceived as helping teacher performance in the classroom. It was demonstrated further that initiation of structure had a more positive impact on teacher performance than did consideration. In terms of the effective use of human resources, the school principal has been considered the most important administrator in the hierarchy of a school (Castetter, 1976).

Fimian (1986) described a study which investigated the presence or absence of peer and administrative support in terms of frequency and strength of stress reported by three groups of special education teachers. A majority of the group comparisons indicated stronger and more frequent stress levels for non-recipients of supervisory support than for recipients of peer support.

Fimian et. al. (1986) reported results of another study which identified and compared the strongest and most frequently occurring sources of stress in teachers of the learning disabled as compared to teachers of non-learning disabled handicapped students (emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded, blind and deaf). The study showed that during times of stress, peers played a much larger role in supporting teachers under stress than did their administrators or supervisory personnel. Fimian and Santoro (1983) reported that 82% of full-time special educators in another sample gave and received peer support on a regular basis. Youngs (1979) charges principals with the tasks of assessing staff relationships and building group support among staff within the school setting. Dworkin (1987) reports significantly lower levels of isolation of teachers whose principals are supportive. He says, "A supportive principal not only reduces the level of stress and the desire to quit teaching, but also effectively breaks the link between stress and its negative consequences" (p. 95).

#### Stress Management Program

Lazarus (1976) details the steps included in Anxiety Management Training, a six to eight week program. It

focuses on: 1) coping with stress and maladaptive, anxious responding and 2) systematically educating participants in the use of overt behavioral and cognitive self-control strategies for managing stress and anxiety.

Many stress management conferences and courses are offered for selection. Components often include intrapersonal, time management and psycho-social wellness and cognitive restructuring issues. The One Minute Manager (Blanchard and Johnson, 1985) maintained a ranking in the top ten for books sold in the country the year it was published. Lakein (1973) with How To Get Control of Your Time and Your Life has been a long time advocate of time management habits to reduce daily stress. Reed (1979) points out that poor organization and structure in many schools lead to supervisory burnout which in turn sets the wheels in motion for increased teacher stress.

Because no one coping strategy will work at all times, stress management presenters encourage the development of a broad range of coping skills. Participants are taught to take a noncatastrophic perspective when faced with stress, viewing it as a problem to be solved rather than as a personal threat. They are taught to develop cognitive strategies centering on preparing for a stressor, confronting it, coping with intense moments and

evaluating their own performance. Replacement of unproductive thoughts and images with successful coping strategies is the set of skills to be learned. Relaxation therapy has its basis in cognitive restructuring. Jaremko (1984) explains a stress inoculation program which shares the same base concepts. A person is exposed to increasingly larger doses of stressful events while defensive processes in the form of coping skills are taught. King (1980) advocates the use of a multifaceted approach to stress management that focuses on cognitive control and behavior change procedures in addition to relaxation training which can include reading, gardening, needlework or meditation.

### Nutritional and Health Awareness

Never have health, recreation, nutrition awareness issues and fitness enjoyed such broad coverage and respect as they do today. Therapeutic exercise, which can take the form of structured aerobics programs and weight training to jogging, is commonly observed in most parts of the country.

In spite of the media barrage which continually identifies the nutritional ingredients and value in certain consumer products, Bradfield and Fones (1984)



found that twenty percent of teachers fell below the recommended daily allowance in their intake of vitamins while one-third fell below these levels in mineral intake.

Self-awareness and evaluation of physical and emotional needs may lead to false conclusions regarding our well-being however. Dixon et. al. (1980) focused on the need of administrators to effectively deal with the problem of teacher stress as it relates to Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Their investigation cited that fewer than fifty percent of the methods used to cope with job stress were directed at the underlying problems causing the stress. The remaining methods used by teachers were characterized as avoidance behavior. Avoidance behavior, they said, is not characteristic of mentally healthy personalities functioning in professional roles.

Humphrey and Humphrey (1981) in their survey asked what teachers were doing to cope with stress. One disturbing statistic revealed that 49% of respondents indicated that they were more or less at a loss on how to deal with stress. A common response was to "grin and bear it." Others just "tried to forget."

### Summary

The literature regarding stress, strain and coping is often inconclusive, contradictory and ambiguous. Many studies have been conducted with many groups of teachers. Few studies have been replicated, therefore, few researchers have built upon the widely-scattered base results.

The voluminous amount of literature does ingrain in the reader, however, the fact that the effects of these three variables are highly individualized. The field of research in stress, strain and coping is open to new investigations and discoveries even though so much has been written to date.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assess stress levels in the occupational environments of public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students. The levels of strain and coping skills of these educators were also assessed.

#### Research Questions

The following questions were investigated in the study:

- 1) What are the stress, strain and coping levels of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students?
- 2) Are there relationships between teacher demographic variables (sex, age and experience) and levels of stress, strain and coping?
- 3) Are there relationships between teaching assignment variables (community size and special education setting of teaching assignment) and teacher stress, strain and coping levels?

## Procedures

A mail survey was conducted in the southeastern region of the United States. Respondents were asked to complete a demographic information sheet and three standardized scales.

### The Population and the Sample

A random sample of five hundred public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students was generated by the Council for Exceptional Children from the membership list of their Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders Division. The southeastern region of the United States, including Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, was the geographical setting of the survey respondents.

Shelton Braaten, current President of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders, in a phone interview on March 9, 1987, indicated that the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders was initially established in 1962 with five stated goals:

- 1) To support the development of adequate services for behaviorally disordered students
- 2) To establish communications among local,

- state, and university programs
- 3) To promote teacher recruiting and training programs
  - 4) To promote educational research
  - 5) To support legislation for services for the behaviorally disordered

A sixth goal was later added:

- 6) To share an exchange of ideas among professionals concerned with behaviorally disordered children through seminars, workshops and conferences.

It is reasonable to infer that the random sample which participated in this study is representative of the population of public school teachers who are highly involved in professional activities, interested in current educational developments and in the improvement of education for behaviorally disordered students.

### Instrumentation

Three Likert-type questionnaire scales developed by Samuel H. Osipow of Ohio State University and Arnold R. Spokane of the University of Maryland (1981) were used to collect data on stress, strain and coping levels for the study. A demographic information sheet was designed for

this study by the researcher to collect teacher background, experience and teaching assignment data. The three standardized scales are:

Occupational Environment Scales, Form E-2

Personal Strain Questionnaire, Form E-2

Personal Resources Questionnaire, Form E-2

Osipow (1983) says, "Of the instruments that have been developed to measure stress in work, most have ignored the work context dimension. Studies of occupational stress have examined those stressors inherent in certain occupations without giving substantial recognition to the stress involved in specific job roles which cut across both occupational fields and levels" (p. 6). He further explains that the scales were developed with the view that occupational stress, strain and coping are generic and are best measured in a generic fashion rather than in an occupationally specific way. This approach makes a single set of measures applicable to a wide range of occupations and, therefore, allows for more generalizability across occupations.

The original scales (Form E-1) were subjected to pilot studies by Osipow and Spokane (1981) and were then edited and revised into Form E-2. The set of three scales, which consist of several subscales each, required approximately

fifteen to twenty minutes to complete (See Appendices L, M, and N for sample questions).

Each of the subscales contains ten items and is scored by adding the item totals in the subscales. Several items on the subscales are reverse scored to discourage response sets.

The Occupational Environment Scales (OES). This is a sixty item, five position Likert scale inventory with six subscales of ten items each:

- 1) Role Overload
- 2) Role Insufficiency
- 3) Role Ambiguity
- 4) Role Boundary
- 5) Responsibility
- 6) Physical Environment

These scales measure stress levels in the occupational environment and total scores can range from a high stress level of 300 to a low stress level of 60 points. Stress symptoms of high scoring respondents include: increasingly overburdened by work load; feeling unsupported by needed resources; perceiving limited potential for job advancement; experiencing poor work relationships; and feeling personal isolation.

A reliability of .89 for Form E-2 of the OES was

established by the authors using an N of 549. OES reliability for the present study with an N of 294 is .90.

The Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ). This is a forty item Likert scale inventory with four subscales of ten items each:

- 1) Vocational Strain
- 2) Psychological Strain
- 3) Interpersonal Strain
- 4) Physical Strain

These scales measure strain levels in the occupational environment and the total score can range from a high strain level of 200 to a low strain level of 40 points. Strain symptoms of high scoring respondents include: poor work attitudes, concentration problems, absenteeism, depression and irritability.

A reliability of .94 with an N of 549 was established by Osipow and Spokane (1981) for Form E-2 of the PSQ. For the present study with an N of 268 the reliability was .95.

The Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ). This is also a forty item Likert inventory with four subscales of ten items each:

- 1) Recreation
- 2) Self-Care
- 3) Social Support
- 4) Rational/Cognitive Coping



These scales measure coping levels in the occupational environment and the total score can range from a high coping level of 200 to a low coping level of 40 points. Coping symptoms of high scoring respondents include: regular exercise, ample rest, proper diet, use of systematic problem solving methods and feeling in control of their lives.

A reliability of .99 was established by the authors for Form E-2 of the PRQ using an N of 549. For the present study with an N of 295, the reliability was .91.

The Demographic Information Survey. This survey sheet was developed for this study by the researcher and consists of seventeen items of a demographic nature. These items are categorized into respondent's background information, experience in education data, and present teaching assignment questions (See Appendix K).

#### Data Collection Procedures

Five hundred survey packets, each consisting of a cover letter, one copy of each scale and the demographic information sheet, were distributed to the random sample by mail on January 5, 1987. A postage-paid envelope to return responses was included with each packet. Each respondent was assigned a code number for cross

referencing and follow-up purposes and assured confidentiality of responses. The respondent was asked to return the packet by January 28, 1987, a date which was three weeks following distribution. Nonrespondents were sent a second request letter on February 4, 1987 if their packets had not been received by the January 28th deadline.

### Data Analysis

Data gathered from the survey instruments were coded and programmed into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-X, 1983). The descriptive and relational statistical procedures are presented, followed by a discussion of non-response assessment.

### Descriptive Information

Frequencies were determined for all items addressed in the Demographic Information Survey. This included variables age, sex, highest degree earned, year degree earned, specialization area of highest degree, five items relating to respondent's experience in education, three items regarding present teaching assignment, and the four items relating to special education setting in which respondent taught at the time of survey completion.

Statistics computed included percentages, means, standard deviations, medians and modes, as appropriate for the type of data. This provided a detailed description of the sample with respect to relevant demographic information.

To further describe specific characteristics of the sample and interrelationships among various demographic variables, several correlations and Chi-square analyses were used.

Summary statistics were also calculated for the total scores on the OES, PSQ, PRQ scales, thereby answering the first research question aimed at assessing the stress, strain and coping levels of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students

#### Relational Information

To answer research question two and determine the relationship between teacher demographic variables (age and experience) and levels of stress, strain and coping, Pearson correlations were calculated. For the demographic variable of sex, t-tests were calculated to compare males and females on stress, strain and coping levels.

To answer research question three regarding the relationship between teaching assignment variables and levels of stress, strain and coping, three two-way

analyses of variance (ANOVA) were used with community size and special education setting as the independent variables, and stress, strain and coping as dependent variables, respectively.

#### Assessment of Non-Response Bias

To determine if a response bias existed between respondents' and nonrespondents' returns, on March 9, 1987, a phone interview was conducted with a sample of ten nonrespondents in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area (Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia). The sample included the total number of nonrespondents who resided within the metropolitan Washington local calling area and who had listed phone numbers. The goals of the survey were to:

- 1) Determine the reason the survey was not returned
- 2) Obtain information necessary to complete all items contained on the Demographic Information Sheet.

To further explore this issue, the responses on first wave survey returns and second wave survey returns were compared using t-test and Chi-square analyses on each of the items contained on the Demographic Information Survey and on the OES, PSQ, and PRQ scales, as appropriate.

### Summary

A mail survey of five hundred public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students was conducted in the southeastern region of the United States. Each respondent completed an Occupational Environment Scale, Personal Strain Questionnaire and Personal Resources Questionnaire along with a Demographic Information Survey. Reliability was established for the present study and a response wave analysis compared first and second wave responses. Specific statistical procedures were defined to gather data in order to answer each of the three research questions established for this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

In this chapter the findings from the analyses of the data for the study are presented. Descriptive information includes procedures used to assess nonresponse bias and a demographic profile of respondents. Computed stress, strain and coping analyses are detailed. Relational information includes results of the Pearson correlations and t-tests for teaching experience variables and dependent variables stress, strain and coping. ANOVA and Chi-square analyses are then given for teaching assignment variables and stress, strain and coping.

#### Descriptive Information

From a mailing of 500 survey packets, 318 were returned (64%). Of these, twenty-three were not used in the analyses because:

- present position title of eighteen respondents was not compatible with the study sample
- three respondents were on leave
- one person chose not to participate because anonymity was not promised
- one person was deceased

Hence, the total sample consisted of 295 teachers representing a 62% useable response rate.

#### Assessment of Potential Non-Response Bias

It should be noted that during the initial survey distribution and final response collection, three major snow storms on January 22nd, 25th and 26th, and February 23rd, severely impacted normal daily functioning in certain areas of the southeast included in the survey. On January 26, 1987, all Federal offices were closed resulting in no postal delivery. Numerous respondents commented that the survey packets reached them close to the deadline dates established and, in some cases, after the deadline dates had passed. It is reasonable to believe that of the 118 nonrespondents, many may have chosen not to complete and return the survey packet because they felt they would not meet the deadlines stated in the cover letters.

On March 9, 1987, a phone interview was conducted with a sample of ten nonrespondents in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The sample included the total number of nonrespondents who resided within the metropolitan Washington local calling area who had listed phone numbers. The survey goals were: (1) to determine the

reason the survey was not returned and (2) to obtain information necessary to complete all items on the Demographic Information Survey. Eight sample members reported no longer teaching seriously emotionally disturbed students. One person was in a student teaching phase of preparation and the tenth person had not responded because of time constraints.

Based on demographic information recorded, nonrespondent characteristics for variables sex, highest degree earned, degree area and experience in five teaching situations appear to correspond on a level and frequency with those in the sample who did respond. There is no documentation to indicate that a response/nonresponse bias existed.

To determine if a response bias existed between the responses on the first wave and second wave of the survey returns, t-test and Chi-square analyses were computed for each of the independent and dependent variables as appropriate.

Chi-square analyses calculated for sex, degree, degree area, community size and teaching setting suggested no difference in those variables between the first and second wave respondents. (See Appendix, Table A)

The t-tests for selected independent variables age,



teacher experience and assignment and the dependent variables of stress, strain and coping were compared for response wave one and response wave two (See Appendix, Table B). No difference was found at the .05 significance level between the first and second wave respondents, except for independent variable age where a p value of .003 indicated a significant difference between mean ages for the two wave groups. The respondents in wave two were 4.6 years older on the average than respondents in wave one. However, this result was probably due to chance, given the number of t-tests calculated.

Wave one consisted of 261 cases and wave two contained only 34 cases. Since no significant differences were found between the means for waves one and two for any of the other independent or dependent variables measured, the age difference apparently had little impact.

#### Demographic Information

A demographic profile of sample respondents emerged from computed statistics (means, standard deviations, medians, and modes) for age, teaching experience, range of grades and of student ages taught (See Table 4.1). The average teacher was thirty-seven years old and had been

Table 4.1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

<u>Teacher Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mode</u>
Age	37.1	8.5	36.0	36.0
Ranges of Grades Taught	5.1	3.2	4.0	3.0
Range of Student Ages Taught	4.6	2.7	4.0	4.0
Experience				
Total Years Teaching	9.8	5.7	10.0	3.0
Years Regular Education	1.8	3.4	.0	.0
Years Special Education	8.1	4.7	8.0	3.0
Years Emotionally				
Disturbed	6.1	4.1	5.0	3.0
Years Present Position	3.7	2.9	3.0	3.0

teaching for almost ten years. Of that total, almost two years were in regular education assignments. The remaining eight years were in special education, and about six of these were years teaching emotionally disturbed students. Present positions had been held for almost four years. The average respondent taught across a range of five grades and five student ages.

The demographic profile was expanded when the number and percent of sample respondents in the various categories of sex, educational level and teaching assignment variables were calculated (See Table 4.2). The sample consisted of 263 (89%) females and only 32 males (11%). Almost 75% of respondents had an earned Masters degree. Eighty percent had training in special education or in teaching the emotionally disturbed. Half the sample were teachers in suburban settings and the majority (44.4%) taught self-contained classes of emotionally disturbed students.

Intercorrelations Among Demographic Variables. The Pearson correlations calculated for age and the dependent variables indicated no significant correlations (See Appendix, Table C). The t-test analyses produced no significant differences between males and females participating in the study (See Appendix, Table D).

Table 4.2

Demographic Characteristics

<u>Teacher Variable</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Sex	Male	32	10.8
	Female	263	89.2
Highest Degree	BA	67	22.7
	MA	219	74.2
	Ph.D./Ed.D.	9	3.1
Degree Area	Special Education	125	42.3
	Emotionally Disturbed	112	38.0
	Other	58	19.7
Community Size	Urban	93	31.5
	Suburban	148	50.2
	Rural	54	18.3
Teaching Setting	Resource	79	26.8
	Self-Contained	131	44.4
	Center	48	16.3
	Center-Therapy	37	12.5

Although not pertinent in addressing the second research question, additional demographic patterns emerged from the data. Findings are presented for informational purposes only to provide supplemental characteristics of the sample.

The Pearson correlations computed between pairs of experience variables and demographic variables showed no relationships between:

- 1) total years of teaching regular education and total years of teaching special education
- 2) total years teaching regular education and total years teaching seriously emotionally disturbed students
- 3) total years teaching regular education and years in present position

These results are not unexpected since sixty-one percent of respondents had no regular education teaching experience and an additional twenty-one percent had only one to three years of regular education experience (See Table 4.1).

A high correlation ( $r = .81$ ) existed between total years of teaching and total years of teaching in special education. Another relatively strong correlation ( $r = .74$ ) existed between total years of teaching in special education and total years teaching the seriously

emotionally disturbed. These results suggest that when these teachers entered the teaching field, they went into special education and they usually remained within that teaching specialization area.

A Chi-square analysis indicated that a relationship existed between community size and teaching setting ( $\chi^2=13.0134$ ,  $p = .04$ ). The majority of teachers in the sample taught in suburban self-contained classroom settings (See Appendix, Table E).

#### Description of Dependent Measures

Total scores from the three instruments used in this study were calculated and summarized to determine the stress, strain and coping levels of public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students, thereby answering the first research question (See Table 4.3).

In order to explicate these results further, the potential range of scores for each scale was divided into quartiles, with the percentage of teachers falling into each quartile given in Table 4.4. The results from both the summary statistics and the percentages of teachers in each quartile of stress, strain and coping will be discussed separately.

#### Stress Level Results. The Occupational Environment

Table 4.3

Summary Statistics for Stress, Strain and Coping Levels

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Range</u>
Stress	141.6	27.0	140.0	177.0	91-207
Strain	82.5	24.7	78.0	101.0	40-160
Coping	129.1	22.9	132.0	98.0	68-183

Table 4.4

Quartile and Percent Results for Dependent Variables

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Quartile</u>			
	<u>First</u>	<u>Second</u>	<u>Third</u>	<u>Fourth</u>
Stress	26%	65%	9%	0%
Strain	53%	38%	9%	0%
Coping	3%	28%	63%	6%

Note: Percentages based on N = 295 respondents

The quartiles represent score ranges in the following categories: first = very low, second = moderately low, third = moderately high, fourth = very high levels of the corresponding variable.

Scales, which measure stress, can range from a high stress level of 300 to a low stress level of 60 points, with a midpoint score of 180. For this sample of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students, the average stress score was 142 indicating below average stress levels. The majority of the respondents (65%) were in the second quartile, with 91% scoring within the first two quartiles. Only 26 teachers (9%) scored in the third quartile, and none scored in the highest stress quartile. Together these results suggest that respondents feel low to moderate stress related to their jobs.

Strain Level Results. The Personal Strain Questionnaire, which measures strain, can range from a high strain level of 200 to a low strain level of 40 points, with a midpoint score of 120. For this sample of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students, the average strain score was 83% indicating below average strain levels. The majority of respondents (53%) were in the first quartile, indicating a very low strain level. As with the stress scores, 91% scored within the first two quartiles, with no responses falling in the fourth quartile. These results suggest that respondents feel low to moderate strain related to their jobs.

Coping Level Results. The Personal Resources



Questionnaire, which measures coping ability, can range from a high coping level of 200 to a low coping level of 40 points, with a midpoint score of 120. For this sample of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students, the average coping score was 129, indicating slightly above average coping abilities. The majority of the respondents (63%) were in the third quartile, with a total of 69% demonstrating above average coping skills (quartiles three and four). Only eight teachers (3%) were within the lowest coping quartile, with less than one-third falling in the lower two quartiles. These results suggest that respondents cope on a slightly above average level with job related stress and strain.

Intercorrelations Among Dependent Variables. Pearson correlations were computed for the dependent variables (See Table 4.5). As would be expected from the summary statistics, a moderately strong positive relationship was evident between stress and strain ( $r=.64$ ). The strain by coping results indicated a moderately strong inverse relationship ( $r=-.63$ ). The more teachers were able to cope, the less strain they perceived. The relationship between stress and coping was also inverse, but of a weaker nature ( $r=-.38$ ). Implications of these findings are that higher level coping abilities are more strongly

Table 4.5

Correlations for Stress, Strain and Coping Variables

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Stress</u> <u>(r)</u>	<u>Strain</u> <u>(r)</u>	<u>Coping</u> <u>(r)</u>
Stress	1.000		
Strain	.640	1.000	
Coping	-.381	-.636	1.000

correlated with strain reduction than they are with stress reduction.

#### Relational Information

To answer the second research question about the relationship between various teacher demographic variables and stress, strain and coping, either Pearson correlations or t-tests were computed, as appropriate for each of the demographic variables.

For the third research question about the relationship between teacher assignment variables and the dependent measures, summary statistics for dependent measures are presented separately by levels of community size and teacher assignment setting. These are followed by the results of three 3x4 analyses of variance (ANOVA), with independent variables of community size and teaching setting. Results for the two research questions will be addressed separately.

#### Relationships Between Demographic and Dependent Variables

The Pearson correlations computed between continuous demographic variables (age and experience) and the dependents (stress, strain and coping) yielded no significant relationships (See Appendix, Table C). The

t-tests calculated for sex on each of the dependent variables indicated no significant relationships (See Appendix, Table D). Although male respondents were slightly more stressed than were female respondents ( $p=.08$ ), this was not significant at the .05 level. No relationships were found between teacher demographic variables and stress, strain and coping.

#### Relationships Between Teaching Assignment and Dependent Variables

Mean stress, strain and coping scores broken down separately by community size and teaching setting are given in the Appendix, Table F. Based on a 3x4 ANOVA with stress as the dependent variable, there was no interaction between community size and teaching setting ( $F=1.000$ ,  $p>.05$ ) (See Appendix, Table G). Also, neither main effect produced a significant result for the stress variable.

In a second analysis, with strain as the dependent variable, a significant interaction ( $F=2.325$ ,  $p<.05$ ) was found for community size and teaching setting (See Appendix, Table H). A graph of the means (See Figure 4.1) indicates that the most marked difference existed among teachers in centers with therapy. Urban and rural

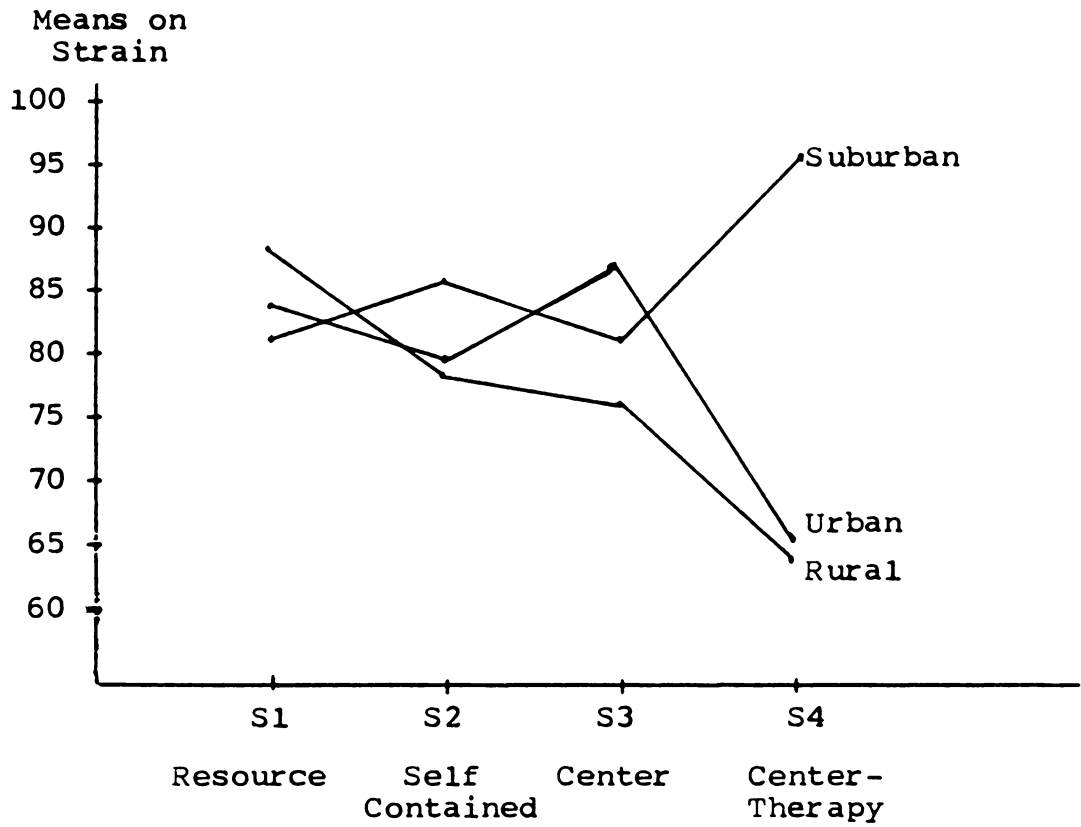


Figure 4.1 Interaction Between Community Size and Teaching Setting on Strain Variable

teachers in this setting had the lowest levels of strain, yet teachers in suburban centers with therapy had the highest levels of strain.

In a third analysis with coping as the dependent variable, no significant interaction was found for community size and teaching setting ( $F=.768, p > .05$ ) nor was there a main effect for setting on the dependent variable coping ( $F=.432, p > .05$ ). There was a significant main effect for community size ( $F=6.867, p < .01$ ) (See Appendix, Table I). The mean coping skill level for the total sample was 129. Urban teachers had the highest coping levels (136); rural teachers had average coping skills (130); and suburban teachers were the least skilled group in coping abilities (125).

### Summary of Study Findings

Results of the study showed that public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students had low to average stress and strain levels. Over half of teacher respondents had above average coping skills. No teachers fell within the highest stress and strain quartiles, while only 3% fell within the lowest quartile for coping skills. There were no significant relationships found between teaching experience variables

and the dependent variables of stress, strain and coping.

There were no significant relationships between teaching assignment variables community size and teaching setting on the stress variable. There was an interaction between community size and teaching setting on the strain variable. There was also a relationship between community size (urban, suburban, rural) and the dependent variable coping, but there was no relationship between teaching setting (resource, self-contained, center, center with therapy) and coping skill levels.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The association between occupational responsibilities, stress, strain and coping responses has been of increasing concern to professionals in the field of special education. Results of several studies have found that teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students ranked highest of all categories of teachers of handicapped children in levels of occupational distress.

A detailed knowledge of the specific facets of the working environments of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students is necessary to give support and to insure optimum growth of both teachers and students. An understanding of occupational stressors, resultant strain responses and the abilities of these teachers to successfully cope with stress and strain are essential elements of problem analysis.

The purpose of this study was to assess the current stress, strain and coping levels of public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students and to determine if there were relationships between these dependent variables and teacher demographic and teaching assignment variables.



### Summary of Findings

Findings were that teachers scored low to average stress and strain levels with 91% of respondents' scores for stress and strain falling within the two lowest quartiles. No respondents scored in the highest stress and strain quartiles. Sixty-nine percent of teachers' coping levels were above average. Eight teachers (3%) scored in the lowest coping quartile, identifying them as a possible high risk group.

Older teachers were found to be slightly less stressed, less strained and possessing slightly higher level coping skills than were younger teachers. A t-test produced no significant correlations across variables age, teacher experience items and stress, strain and coping.

Chi-square analyses were computed and ANOVA results indicated no relationship between teaching assignment variables community size and teaching setting and stress, but that there was a relationship between these teaching assignment variables and strain levels. There was also a relationship found between coping skill levels and community size (urban, suburban, rural), but no relationship between coping levels and teaching setting (resource, self-contained, center, center with therapy).

Additional data, not relevant to the research

questions, emerged and were provided as supplemental sample characteristics. Results of Pearson correlations showed a high correlation ( $r = .81$ ) between total years of teaching with total years of teaching in special education. A second relatively high correlation ( $r = .74$ ) existed between total years of teaching in special education and total years teaching the seriously emotionally disturbed.

### Discussion of Results

#### Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, the major conclusion to emerge is that the sample of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students who participated in this study do not appear to be as stressed and strained as those samples documented in the review of current literature. This study does not support the findings of Lawrenson and McKinnon (1982), Zabel, Boomer, et. al. (1984), Zabel and Zabel (1980), Weiskopf (1980), and Zabel, Dettmer and Zabel (1984).

In this study, 91% of respondents reported average to below average stress and strain levels. These lower than expected levels may be explained in several ways. Since the scales used in this study were not job specific, lower

scores may have resulted than in those studies where a teacher specific inventory was used.

The sample of teachers who participated in this study may not have been representative of the population of public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students. The teachers in the present sample are members of the Council for Exceptional Children, Behavioral Disorders Division. All eligible teachers do not join this professional organization. For example, this observer was recently assigned to a suburban center for 425 seriously emotionally disturbed students. Eighty teacher members of the staff were eligible for membership in the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD), but only three were members.

As stated previously, the goals of the CCBD are to improve communication, teacher training and to facilitate the exchange of ideas among members. Teacher members receive updated information, journals, and regular opportunities for peer networking at workshops and conferences. Continuing education, enhanced professionalism, and communication accompany membership. Intrinsic satisfaction may also be a result of involvement in this organization. The preceding supportive factors may have depressed scores for stress and strain levels and

may account for the differences in findings for this study when compared with results of other recent research in this area.

The "super teacher, saint syndrome, or Pollyanna Principle" may have been in effect as teachers completed the stress and strain surveys. This sample of teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students may indeed perceive themselves as less stressed and strained than they actually are.

Eighty percent of the sample had earned degrees beyond the B.A. in special education or education of the seriously emotionally disturbed. Eskridge and Coker (1985) found, the fewer years of professional preparation one has as a teacher, the greater the likelihood of stress. The present sample obviously represents a group of professionals with credentials above minimum requirements. Thirty-eight percent indicated specific training in teaching the seriously emotionally disturbed. These factors may have also helped reduce the stress scores for the group.

This study found that as teachers age, they are slightly less stressed and strained and appear slightly better able to cope than are younger teachers. Numerous studies support this finding (Farber, 1984b; Eskridge and

Coker, 1985; Kirk and Walter, 1981; Gold, 1985). It is logical to believe that older teachers have experienced a wide variety of stressors both within their professional lives and in their lives away from school. They have built up a repertoire of coping strategies which are successful in a variety of settings. It must also be noted that the most highly stressed teachers have left the field.

Young teachers just entering the profession are often very idealistic, have lofty social change goals and believe they can accomplish goals with disturbed students where others have failed. Their high expectation levels often leave them as prime candidates for stress. It has been documented that seriously disturbed students are both physically and verbally aggressive. They often attack a teacher's appearance, physical attributes and detect flaws which they highlight consistently. Although the young teacher has learned that these behaviors are facets of the disability, teacher self-esteem is lowered with daily abuse and it is debilitating to realize that previously set goals for students will not be reached. It is difficult for young teachers to depersonalize aggressive behaviors.

Younger teachers are also the age group usually

dealing with new marriages and young families. Extrinsic stressors compound occupational environment stressors. Poor coping skills and resources, inadequate training in practical teaching matters and a lack of insight into the problem of stress make the initial years of teaching the most frustrating and stressful.

This study found that males were slightly more stressed than were females. Similar results have been found by Anderson and Iwanicki (1984), but are inconsistent with Feitler's (1980) research. In this study, this difference between male and female respondents is a tenuous finding since only 32 males participated.

Farber (1984) and Crane and Iwanicki (1986) found suburban teachers were not suffering from stress. In the present study, although 91% of teachers scored below average on the individual stress variable, when stress was analyzed by community size and teaching setting, suburban settings ranked first in highest stress and strain and lowest in coping levels. In fact, suburban settings held first, second and third place for lowest coping skill levels in this study. These results are consistent with research cited by Sergiovani (1984).

The American dream of a home in the suburbs persists. Young upwardly mobile parents move to the suburbs and

insist on good schools to prepare their children. These parents are often on a par with the educational level of the teacher and are no longer willing to rely on the "best judgment" of the teacher regarding educational planning. Parents are actively involved in the educations of their children and monitor the total school system closely.

With handicapped children, the law mandates that parents be given advanced notice and be invited to meetings where their child's educational program and placement will be discussed. The parents are asked to sign an annual individualized education program plan for their special child and are expected to be involved in placement and instructional program decision making.

Teachers in suburban areas of this study interacted most significantly with stressors. It is not to be interpreted that teachers in urban or rural areas are not pressured in similar ways or that parents in those urban or rural areas are not as educated or involved in educational planning. For reasons about which one can only speculate, in this study, suburban teachers were more stressed, strained and less able to cope than were urban or rural teachers.

Usually the highest levels of educational service for the most disturbed students in the public school setting

are special centers with no therapeutic component. A psychologist may be assigned to this setting, but individual therapy on a regular basis for students is not intended as a component of that job responsibility. It is not surprising then, that the special center was found in this study to be the most stressful setting for teachers. These teachers possessed below average coping skills, the lowest of teachers in any of the four settings studied.

The lowest stress and strain levels were reported by urban teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed students coupled with the highest coping abilities. Classes for the seriously disturbed in city schools could be visualized as one of the most stressfully intense settings in the field of education, yet urban teachers reported the lowest stress and strain scores and the highest coping levels. These teachers are excellent examples of maintenance of homeostasis within their occupational environments and can serve as models for other school systems and individual teachers of the seriously emotionally disturbed.

An enigma exists when analyzing results for teachers at centers with therapy. These teachers were the least stressed and scored almost ten points below the mean. They were the least strained group and had above average



coping skills. When the variable community size was added to the dependent variable analyses, urban and rural centers with therapy continued to earn the lowest stress and strain and highest scores for coping. Suburban centers with therapy scores were not consistent, however. Those teachers ranked fourth highest in the stress category, highest in strain and lowest in ability to cope.

Centers with therapy usually have the greatest number of resources available to students and staff. The students exhibit the most deviant behavior of all groups analyzed, but resources usually include: medical as well as educational staff; services are often provided in a residential setting, which allows total control of a student's behavior if necessary; outside influences (family, friends, harmful substances) can be eliminated. How and why does the suburban setting differ so drastically from those in urban and rural areas to affect teachers so dramatically and negatively? The answer to this question is beyond the scope of this study's results, but deserves future consideration.

Rural resource teachers fell within high stress and strain categories and rural self-contained teachers ranked second in high stress. Several factors are at work here. Rural special education teachers usually suffer a greater

degree of isolation than teachers in urban and suburban areas. Handicapped children in rural areas often must travel long distances to classes, especially self-contained classes, but resource teachers usually travel to meet the children in their home schools. Resource teachers are often assigned to two or more schools in order to facilitate delivery of instructional services to all children needing this special instruction. This may require long distance driving between school assignments with few hours spent in the same school on consecutive days. For the resource teacher, communication with other professionals will most often be of a school-based, student oriented nature because of time constraints. In this fertile setting, it would appear that little time would be available to nurture peer or administrative contact or support. Structured isolation could certainly be a factor in high stress, strain and low coping levels for the rural resource teachers in this study.

### Recommendations

This study has established present stress, strain and coping skill levels for a particular group of public school teachers of seriously emotionally disturbed

students. Age was a minimal factor for levels of teacher stress, strain and coping. Males in the study showed slightly more stress than did females. Relationships were established between teacher assignment variables and strain and coping levels and community size of teaching assignment (urban, suburban, rural).

Implications of study findings for future research and educational policy and practice will be discussed in three sections: (1) confusion in the field; (2) organizational interventions; (3) individual stress management.

Confusion in the Field. As previously stated in Chapter II, an area which demands clarification is the recurrent interchange of the terms "burnout" and "stress." This exchange of terminology confuses research results rather than adding to a solid foundation of scientifically based information.

Research in the area must specify the parameters of the study and state unequivocally whether the study concerns stress or burnout. These terms are not interchangeable as recognized by certain authors (e.g. Farber, 1984a). It is recommended that future research be based on an accepted measure of the symptoms and intensity of the stress, strain and coping observed. Research must

have an approved way to differentiate between reported stress and real stress. Since the study of human behaviors is not an exact science, developing a universally accepted and accurate instrument will be a monumental task. Present findings are flawed at best because no such instrument exists.

Most studies have focused on the individual and individual stress management strategies to remediate assessed problems. The need of the future will be an instrument and/or organizationally initiated plan to define specific job characteristics which are debilitating as they evolve into occupational stressors for public school teachers of the seriously emotionally disturbed.

Each study reviewed has assessed the greatest causes of stress for the particular sample studied. Each list of stressors differs widely from the next. If effective planning and remediation are to be undertaken, occupational stressors must be predicted and predicated on the basis of an accurate assessment. So many stressors have emerged in recent literature that remediation has been recommended in scattered fashion in an attempt to address every stressor identified. The reader begins to believe that there is little validity in the literature and has little faith in the studies' results. Development

of an instrument to assess foundation stressors is imperative if groundwork for meaningful comparative research is to be prepared. A single study, no matter how methodologically sound, will never provide definite answers. Replication, although difficult when observation of human behavior is concerned, is of necessity to ascribe meaning to any of the contradictory results presently found in the study of stress.

Organizational Interventions. Although the present teacher sample had below average stress and strain levels and above average coping skills, relationships were found between teacher assignment variables and strain and coping skill levels and location of teaching assignment. It is recommended that central administrative units in school systems take responsibility to develop an indepth analyses plan to:

- 1) Diagnose environmental and occupational conditions for the position title teacher of seriously emotionally disturbed students
- 2) Assess stress, strain and coping levels for individual teachers of the disturbed and plan appropriate individualized stress management and coping skill development plans when needed

- 3) Focus on removal of identified occupational stress sources from the environment
- 4) Implement change strategies to bring system resources together to support both teachers and building administrators
- 5) Regularly evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of implemented strategies

The key to the plan should be the goal to modify strain sources as well as to plan individually designed coping strategies. These strategies should be continually supported and built into the structure of each school, otherwise they will be only cosmetic changes and will not alter the nature of a stressful system. Intervention should be multilevel for coping and for strain prevention.

Sufficient resources for mental health should be made available to staff members who are employed in diagnosed high stress or strain teaching situations. School psychologists and social workers should have staff consultative time built into their job responsibilities. This time could be utilized in consultation regarding behavior management of students or regarding personal problems the staff member is experiencing.

If the employee is stressed or strained to a point beyond which school based resources are no longer helpful,

a central employee assistance center should be available for self referral or referral by building administrator. This center should provide both consultation and referral services to community based mental health centers, if necessary. Confidentiality should be assured.

Administrators should observe regularly in classes for the disturbed and be knowledgeable of stress and strain symptoms. Stress is likely to affect staff members differentially and administrators must be prepared to identify and assist those members who are experiencing job related stress.

Improving coping skills should be a topic which regularly appears on agendas for pre-service and in-service training. It is often effective to ask staff members assigned to the school, as well as outside speakers, to plan and conduct stress management sessions for the staff. No one will know the intrinsic stressors better or be able to identify successful practices already in use than a master teacher in the environment. Morale is also enhanced by spotlighting such staff members.

Each teacher of the disturbed should be scheduled into regular in-service sessions. Monthly meetings would be ideal wherever possible. Stress should not be the topic for each meeting. Problem solving, effective student

behavior management methods, and curriculum issues should be planned. Observation opportunities in regular classrooms and at other special education settings should be scheduled for teachers of the seriously emotionally disturbed. Observing normal behavior keeps disturbed students' behavior in perspective and seeing successful practices being implemented in other special settings can give teachers of the disturbed role modeling and networking opportunities.

The present sample of teachers showed no relationships between stress, strain and coping and teacher experience variables. A correlation existed between total years of teaching and total years of teaching in special education which in turn correlated with total years teaching the seriously emotionally disturbed. The majority of teachers entered special education and have remained within that specialization area. This stability might be explained by looking at the sixty-one percent of the sample which reported no regular education experience. They may only possess certification in special education, thus limiting them to this specialty area. Since there is also a strong relationship between special education and years teaching the seriously disturbed, this sample has spent the majority of their special education years teaching



disturbed students. Of an average of eight years teaching in special education, an average of six years have been in teaching disturbed children. Planned mobility should be considered within school districts. A change of assignment for the rural resource teacher who deals with isolation and travel between schools might be a positive factor in assistance toward a less stressed and strained professional life. Opportunities to observe in other teacher settings might also facilitate both administratively planned and voluntary teacher reassignments.

First year teachers in a special center should be brought together with an administrative leader often to discuss successful teaching or behavioral methods they've adapted in the classroom. Gradually the administrator can be removed from the sessions. These strategies will facilitate peer support group development and decrease isolation of these teachers, especially the younger teachers.

Central administrative units and school based administrators must make role clarity an objective in every interaction with staff members. The concept that educating seriously disturbed children is a shared responsibility should be reiterated often by the

administrative staff to the teacher. That support must not only be verbalized, but administrative behavior should also reflect the honesty of the concept and the administrative commitment to support the teacher.

Field experiments to determine relationships, if any, between teacher stress and student population characteristics are recommended. Student age and grade level variables have been investigated in many school settings, but not with a population of seriously emotionally disturbed students in a public school setting. Data for student age and grade variables should be collected so that meaningful interpretation is possible for special education teachers who most often teach across a range of student ages and grade levels.

Studies should also focus on the teacher responsibilities involved in mainstreaming these students into both academic and vocational regular education settings. Which of these additional mainstreaming responsibilities are stress producing for the teacher? Can the teacher of the seriously emotionally disturbed be expected to support mainstreaming activities of these students as well as provide individualized instruction within the classroom? Further research is necessary to assist administrators in determining which preventative

methods are the most successful in which schools and classrooms and to plan for adequate resources to help the teacher of the seriously disturbed to fulfill all facets of responsibilities to their students.

Individual Interventions. Farber (1984b) has said that individually oriented coping strategies have been shown to be relatively ineffective in dealing with job related stress. In a majority of school systems if the topic of stress is addressed, it usually focuses on the individual, rather than the sources of the stress.

It is recommended that administrative examination of each teaching assignment setting include diagnosis of individual teacher stress, strain and coping levels. This diagnosis must be accompanied by well thought out individualized relief approaches recommended by the system and supported by its resources. Replacement of unproductive and negative thoughts or avoidance techniques with a variety of effective coping skills should be the goal of individualized training.

Teachers should naturally be encouraged to continue productive coping practices which are already in place, both in their work and private life settings. If relaxation exercises, jogging, aerobics, weight training,

leisure reading or other productive activities foster well being, they should be continued. The assessed occupational stressors for each individual teacher should, however, be addressed in an individualized plan for stress reduction and coping skills improvement. This plan should be monitored by the building administrator and redesigned as conditions in the workplace change for the teacher.

### Summary

Stress in the teaching environment is not a new phenomenon. It appears that stress in recent years has been compounded by additional societal and systemic responsibilities which interfere with the teacher teaching. The administrative leadership of public schools must analyze work settings and work conditions in an attempt to eliminate the sources of occupational stress. Realistically, all stressors will not be removed. Individual school and classroom settings should next be assessed along with the teachers in those settings.

Preventative stress coping skills should be continually developed by all teachers of the seriously emotionally disturbed. Individualized plans are recommended for those teachers with diagnosed deficiencies. Implementation of relief strategies and

support resources is necessary to help these teachers to become and remain more effective. Continued monitoring, research, and field studies are recommended to identify the most successful coping strategies to correlate with teacher demographic and teaching assignment characteristics.

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## APPENDICES

Table A

Independent Variables Crossed With Wave Response\*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>df</u>	<u><math>\chi^2</math></u>	<u>p value</u>
Sex	1	0.0334	0.8549
Degree	2	1.4270	0.4899
Degree Area	8	3.2826	0.9154
Place	2	0.1224	0.9406
Setting	3	0.1765	0.9813

\*  $p > .05$

Table B

t-Test Results of Selected Variables  
With Independent Variable Wave Response

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Means (S.D.)</u>		<u>t statistic</u>	<u>p-value</u>
	Wave 1	Wave 2		
Age	36.6 (8.4)	41.2 (8.5)	-3.02	.003*
Degree	1.8 (.48)	1.9 (.41)	-1.04	.297
Year Degree Earned	79.8 (6.0)	78.7 (6.3)	1.01	.314
Total Years Teaching	9.7 (5.6)	10.6 (5.8)	-0.82	.411
Total Years Regular Ed.	1.74 (3.3)	2.09 (4.1)	-0.56	.575
Total Years Emotionally Disturbed	8.0 (4.1)	8.5 (4.2)	-0.55	.585
Total Years Present Position	3.6 (2.8)	4.1 (3.3)	-0.82	.415
Lowest Grade Taught	4.3 (3.3)	4.2 (3.7)	0.16	.872
Highest Grade Taught	7.7 (3.3)	8.7 (3.7)	-1.68	.095
Youngest Age Taught	9.7 (3.4)	9.4 (3.7)	0.41	.685
Oldest Age Taught	14.6 (3.9)	15.8 (3.6)	-1.70	.090



Table B (Continued)

t-Test Results of Selected Variables  
With Independent Variable Wave Response

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Means (S.D.)</u>		<u>t statistic</u>	<u>p-value</u>
	Wave 1	Wave 2		
Stress	141.6 (27.3)	141.7 (25.0)	-0.02	.983
Strain	83.2 (24.6)	83.6 (25.7)	-0.28	.782
Coping	129.0 (22.6)	129.6 (25.2)	-0.15	.883

Table C

Correlations Between Demographic and Dependent Variables\*

Variable	Stress (r)	Strain (r)	Coping (r)
Age	-.094	-.150	.134
Total Years Teaching	.004	-.090	-.034
Total Years Regular Ed.	-.024	-.067	.033
Total Years Special Ed.	.021	-.053	-.063
Total Years Disturbed	.006	-.061	-.044
Total Years Present Position	-.117	-.133	.055

\*  $p > .05$  for all correlations

Table D

t-Test Comparison of Males and Females  
for Dependent Variables\*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Means (S.D.)</u>		<u>t-statistic</u>	<u>p-value</u>
	Male	Female		
Stress	149.3 (24.2)	140.7 (27.2)	1.71	.088
Strain	85.2 (22.8)	82.1 (25.0)	.66	.508
Coping	127.4 (24.6)	129.3 (22.7)	-.045	.651

\* p .05 for all comparisons

Table E

Community Size Crossed With Teaching Setting

Count Row % Column %	Setting				Row Total
	Resource	Self-Contained	Center	Therapy	
Size Urban	22	42	10	19	93
	23.4	45.2	10.6	20.2	31.5
	27.8	32.1	20.8	51.4	
Suburban	37	69	28	14	148
	24.8	46.6	18.8	9.4	50.2
	46.8	52.7	58.3	37.8	
Rural	20	20	10	4	54
	37.0	37.0	18.5	7.4	18.3
	25.3	15.0	20.8	10.8	
Column Total	79	131	48	37	295
	26.8	44.4	16.3	12.5	100.0

Table F

Means for Dependent Variables Broken Down  
by Community Size and Teaching Setting

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Means (SD)</u>		
	<u>Stress</u>	<u>Strain</u>	<u>Coping</u>
Total Sample	141.64(27.0)	82.45(24.7)	129.10(22.9)
Community Size			
Urban	138.40(26.81)	78.81(24.23)	135.83(20.65)
Suburban	143.14(16.52)	85.29(24.89)	124.55(23.53)
Rural	143.11(28.24)	80.94(24.56)	129.98(21.65)
Teaching Setting			
Resource	142.44(26.26)	83.85(24.32)	130.43(18.90)
Self-Contained	142.43(26.00)	83.37(24.58)	129.52(23.94)
Center	145.75(27.19)	82.00(23.72)	124.98(21.51)
Center-Therapy	131.81(27.83)	76.81(19.94)	130.14(21.48)

Table G

ANOVA of Stress Scores on  
Community Size and Teaching Setting\*

<u>Source of Variation</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Sums of Squares</u>	<u>Mean Squares</u>	<u>F.</u>	<u>Significance of F.</u>
Main Effects	5	5212.740	1042.548	1.444	0.209
Community Size	2	695.059	347.529	0.481	0.618
Teaching Setting	3	3784.462	1261.487	1.747	0.158
Size by Setting	6	4322.090	722.015	1.000	0.426
Residual	283	204343.082	722.060		
Total	294	213887.912	727.510		

\*  $p > .05$  for all analyses

Table H

ANOVA of Strain Scores on  
Community Size by Teaching Setting

<u>Source of Variation</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Sums of Squares</u>	<u>Mean Squares</u>	<u>F.</u>	<u>Significance of F.</u>
Main Effects	5	3688.922	737.784	1.244	0.289
Community Size	2	2238.150	1119.075	1.887	0.153
Teaching Setting	3	1137.741	179.247	0.640	0.590
Size by Setting	6	8272.665	1378.777	2.325	0.033*
Residual	283	167809.450	592.966		
Total	294	179771.037	611.466		

Table I

ANOVA of Coping Scores on  
Community Size by Teaching Setting

<u>Source of Variation</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Sums of Squares</u>	<u>Mean Squares</u>	<u>F.</u>	<u>Significance of F.</u>
Main Effects	5	7965.146	1593.029	3.149	0.009*
Community Size	2	6947.570	3473.785	6.867	0.001*
Teaching Setting	3	654.993	218.331	0.432	0.731
Size by Setting	6	2332.620	388.770	0.768	0.595
Residual	283	143169.183	505.898		
Total	294	153466.949	521.996		





## VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION — NORTHERN VIRGINIA GRADUATE CENTER

January 7, 1987

Dear Special Educator,

Your help and approximately twenty minutes of your time will aid in providing data in a regional study regarding stress, strain and coping levels of teachers of behaviorally disordered students.

In your occupational environment, you face daily frustration and stress in interactions with emotionally impaired children. Without some stress you would not grow and change, but continued high stress levels can be detrimental and deplete both emotional and physical resources.

The intent of this study is to gather current information which could have implications to enhance your professional standing. The data will identify occupational environment stressors, personnel requirements, and staff development needs for teachers of behaviorally disordered students.

Please answer all questions contained within the three enclosed scales. The questions were not designed to be job specific, therefore, each item may not apply to you directly. It is very important that you answer each item to the best of your ability. Disregard information requested following the directions on each scale. Instead, please complete the Demographic Information sheet which will provide your background data as well as information regarding the setting in which you teach.

Please return the completed demographic sheet and three scales in the enclosed, stamped, addressed envelope by January 28, 1987.

Although your packet has been coded in order to cross check returned responses, you are assured confidentiality. Once the raw data has been collected, the code book will be destroyed.

If you would like to receive summary results of the study, please check the box on the demographic sheet.

Your help is very deeply appreciated. Thank you for the courtesy of your assistance and your prompt return of the completed packet.

Sincerely,

(Mrs.) Joan C. Benz

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_ Year of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Present Job Title \_\_\_\_\_

Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Highest Degree Earned \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_ Area \_\_\_\_\_

**Experience in Education:**

Total Years of Teaching \_\_\_\_\_

Years Teaching in Regular Education \_\_\_\_\_

Years Teaching in Special Education \_\_\_\_\_

Years Teaching Behaviorally Disordered \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Present Position \_\_\_\_\_

**Present Teaching Assignment:**

School Setting: Urban \_\_\_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_\_\_ Rural \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level of Behaviorally Disordered Students \_\_\_\_\_

Age Range of Behaviorally Disordered Students \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Education Setting in Which You Teach:**

Resource Room Within Regular School Setting \_\_\_\_\_

Self-Contained Class Within Regular School Setting \_\_\_\_\_

Special Education Center \_\_\_\_\_

Special Education Center With Therapy Integrated \_\_\_\_\_

I WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE SUMMARY RESULTS OF STUDY

The Occupational Environment Scales consist of six subscales of ten items each for a total of sixty items.

## OCCUPATIONAL ENVIRONMENT SCALES, FORM E-2

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Columbus, Ohio 43209 - 0189

	Most of the Time	Usually	Often	Occasionally	Rarely or Never
	5	4	3	2	1
1. At work I am expected to do too many different tasks in too little time.					5 4 3 2 1
8. I wish that I had more help to deal with the demands placed upon me at work.					5 4 3 2 1
42. I spend time concerned with the problems others at work bring to me.					5 4 3 2 1

The Personal Strain Questionnaire is a forty item Likert scale inventory with four subscales of ten items each.

## PERSONAL STRAIN QUESTIONNAIRE, FORM E-2

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	Most of the Time	Usually	Often	Occasionally	Rarely or Never
	5	4	3	2	1
1. I don't seem to be able to get much done at work.					5 4 3 2 1
16. Lately, I respond badly in situations that normally wouldn't bother me.					5 4 3 2 1
30. I have been withdrawing from people lately.					5 4 3 2 1

The Personal Resources Questionnaire is a forty item Likert scale inventory with four subscales of ten items each.

## PERSONAL RESOURCES QUESTIONNAIRE, FORM E-2

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	Most of the Time	Usually	Often	Occasionally	Rarely or Never
	5	4	3	2	1
1. When I need a vacation I take one.					5 4 3 2 1
6. I spend a lot of my free time in participant activities (e.g., sports, music, painting, woodworking, sewing, etc.).					5 4 3 2 1
34. I can establish priorities for the use of my time.					5 4 3 2 1



VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION — NORTHERN VIRGINIA GRADUATE CENTER

February 4, 1987

Dear Special Educator:

Early in January you were sent a survey requesting you to complete a demographic information sheet and three scales concerning the stress, strain and coping levels of teachers of behaviorally disordered students.

If you have returned your survey packet, I appreciate your interest and thank you very much. If you have not, would you please share your responses with me by returning the completed packet today or by February 18th at the latest?

If you find that the survey does not apply to you for any reason, please note that information on the demographic sheet and return the uncompleted scales. It is important that each person in the sample respond, even if he/she cannot complete the scales.

Once again, your help is very deeply appreciated. Thank you for the courtesy of your assistance and your prompt return of the packet.

Very sincerely,

(Mrs.) Joan C. Benz

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