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Causes of Financial Stress and Intervention Strategies used by Teachers in Public Secondary Schools in Nakuru Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Financial stress is experienced in many households in Kenya due to high inflation rates and the current state of the economy. Financial stress is usually associated with psychological problems like moodiness, trouble sleeping, frustration, depressive disorders among others. This study examined the causes of financial stress and intervention strategies used by teachers in public secondary schools in Nakuru Sub- County to manage it. Financial worries are a leading source of stress and can affect mental well-being which can in turn lead to health problems and affect work attendance and performance. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Stratified, purposive and simple random samplings were used to select the study sample. Data was gathered using the teachers financial stress questionnaire. Data was summarized and described using frequencies and percentages. The latest version of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) computer programme aided in data analysis.The results indicated that teachers in Nakuru Sub- County experience financial stress but do not seek professional counseling. The paper recommends that the teachers be provided with financial counselling as mitigation against the stress.

Key words: ***Causes, financial stress, strategy, intervention.***

1. Introduction: Financial counseling is an overall review of your financial situation, with a goal to develop short-term solutions and long-term plans (Study mode.com, 2006). Financial stress can be devastating to people as individuals, at the family level and the employer and employee level. In the family, financial stress can result in poor relationships between family members as they act out their frustrations, lead to serious health consequences as medical care is postponed until it is absolutely necessary, and foster psychological and emotional effects on family member's self-esteem, sense of control over their lives and development of anger and alienation (Greenberg, 2002). At the job level, when employees experience increased financial-related anxiety, stress levels increase and manifest in ways such as insomnia, irritability, crying, poor work performance or missed days at work. According to a survey conducted by the American Psychological Association in 2008, the percentage of women who stressed over money was 78% while in men the percentage was 73% and an overall of 73% of Americans name money as the number one stress factor (APA, 2008). In Nakuru County, a research carried out by Jonyo, 2015 on the effects of occupational stress on work perfomance of police officers showed that the officers cited poor renumeration as the major source of stress with a percentage of 90%.

Psychological counselling may help both the individuals and their family members to deal with financial crisis. For people in employment, in addition to Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) services, stress management coaching and health coaching- to help increase resilience and coping skills as well as addresses unhealthy habits such as drinking and eating or smoking more than usual. Behavioural treatments that impact the way employees relate to people and stressful situations may also be used (Greenberg, 2002). Weiten (2006), states that people troubled by personal problems often solicit help from their friends, relatives, clergy, and primary care physicians. These sources of assistance may provide excellent advice, but their counsel does qualify as therapy. Psychotherapy refers to professional treatment by someone with special training. Although therapists come from a variety of backgrounds, clinical and counselling psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, psychiatric nurses and counsellors are the principal providers of therapeutic services.

2. Statement of the problem: Financial stress is prevalent among teachers in public secondary schools in Nakuru Sub-County. The teacher as the implementer of the curriculum in education is important in the achievement of the national goals of education. These financial constraints could turn into stressors that could affect the health of the teachers and even their working hours and service delivery. These could in turn affect the performance of the institutions and hence the national goals. The effects of stress due to poor remuneration have been studied among other professions in Nakuru County but not among teachers. This study therefore sought to find out the causes and intervention measures for financial stress on the teacher.

3. Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study was to investigate the cause and of financial stress among teachers in public secondary schools in Nakuru Sub- Coumty and strategies used in its management.

4. Objectives of the study:

i. To determine the causes of financial stress among teachers in public secondary schools in Nakuru Sub- County.

ii. To establish the intervention strategies used by teachers in public secondary schools in Nakuru Sub- County to manage financial stress

5. Research questions:

i. What are the causes of financial stress among teachers in public secondary schools in Nakuru Sub- County?

ii. What intervention strategies do teachers in public secondary schools in Nakuru Sub- County use to manage financial stress

6. Literature Review:

Causes of Financial Stress: One of the causes of financial stress is debt. Debt levels are rising faster than both incomes and assets. Never has it been easier to access debt in all forms – lines of credit, mortgages, credit cards. Debt has created a lot of the economic problems we face today and was the biggest factor in the world financial crisis in 2007 (Miami-dade.com, 2006).The debt problem has been fueled by consumerism and consumption. In 2005, a national Symposium in Financial Capability suggested that Canadians spend 25% more than their income (Richard, 2004). People no longer practice delayed gratification. Instead they practice delayed consequence. Savings rates have been steadily declining since a peak in the early 80′s when it was almost 18%. Today savings is pretty much non-existent hovering around 2% to 5% (investor words.com). This is less than half of what we need to save to be financially secure in the future. This is a real serious problem because our financial future both on a macro level and a micro level is largely dependent on how much we save today. Unfortunately the real consequence of a low savings rate has yet to be seen. For most of the 1990′s wealth was created by the stock market as we experienced one of the strongest and longest financial booms in history. Unfortunately, stock markets do not move in a straight line and they experience cycles just like anything else (nytimes.com, 2005). For most investors, the decade from 2000 to 2010 was not very prosperous. In fact, for many, the stock market has destroyed wealth as opposed to create it due to two major bear markets in the last 10 years (Breuning et al, 2004). Not only has the stock markets contributed to the ups and downs of financial stability but so has real estate. Anyone who owned real estate in the financial boom loved their investment. It was a period of time I call 'stupid money'. Stupid money exists when money can be made without any effort. The problem with every real estate boom is some people become over leveraged and over extended. When the boom stops, slows down or experiences a correction, that's when problems hit. Because real estate is largely leveraged which means you don't pay cash but you borrow lots of money to buy real estate, period after booms can create massive problems like the financial crisis in the late 2000.Payment increase or mortgage adjustment. Currently, this is the most common reason for financial distress. Billions of dollars of bad loans were written during the most recent real estate boom, and many of them were "creative products" designed to bring borrowers who couldn't normally afford to buy a home into the home-buying game (mytimes.com, 2005). Now that those products are adjusting, the result is typically a payment that the borrower can no longer afford. The tragic part is that the terms of the loan make it clear that the adjustment is part of the plan, yet most home owners do nothing to prepare for the change (Barbatto, Cocannon & Leppert, 2006) .Loss of Employment is another factor. If you lose your job, in most cases, unless you're fortunate enough to receive a severance package, you are without income immediately. This will suddenly become a source of seemingly insurmountable stress. For the self-employed, your income depends on your skills as an entrepreneur, and the market you're in. Without a solid contingency plan for your business finances, the loss of your business also means the loss of your income (Breuning, & Cobb-clark, 2004). Unexpected damage to property also causes financial stress. When there's damage to your home, it will cost you. When your insurance company fails to provide for the full amount of your claim, you'll be left filling the gap, which in many cases exceeds 60 days reserve. One of the most devastating life experiences is the loss of a loved one, especially if they were the primary income earner in the family. This is why it is critical that you have a plan in place and have proper life insurance for your situation. If a primary wage earner dies, it's just like losing an income, instantly. Death of a family member is another source of financial stress. When a family member who is not earning income dies, it is emotionally devastating and the ripple effects will spread throughout every area of your life, affecting your work, your business, and your relationships. This can produce undue stress and affect your earning ability. It may even lead to needing to support survivors which will increase your costs (Miami-dade,com,2006).Sever**e** illness can lead to extremely high medical debt and loss of income during recovery.

Effects of Financial Stress: The effects of financial stress are negative and affect not only the individual but all the people they interact with. People who are financially stressed like to forget about their problems and anxiety by drowning themselves through drinking, smoking, overeating and other unhealthy behaviors that just leads to more stress (studymode.com,2006). Another effect of financial stress is the loss of sleep. People experience sleeping problems due to the pressure of thinking about where to earn more. Lack of sleep then impairs their immune performance and cognitive abilities, making them unproductive and more prone to moodiness and irrational decision-making People who are under a lot of financial stress also tend to put aside less money for their own self-care. Since they are in a tight budget, they sacrifice the portion for their health care for a more basic need like food, water bills, and housing payments (Greenberg, 2002). This might be something small, but often ignoring your health can lead to a larger problem thus adding more stress .Another common effect of financial stress are developing unhealthy emotions. A great deal of debt can take a toll on a person's health. They experience anxiety, frustrations, and tend to feel hopeless as the debts and bills they have to pay rises up into a big heap of stress. This often leads to depression and in some cases to suicide (Weiten, 2006). With people ignoring their own selves and work their bodies into exhaustion, financial stress would be too hard to handle. It needs a lot of mental, physical and emotional re-assessing in order for one to get back on the right track and start handling these sources of stress and finding ways to manage them in a more healthy way to avoid these common effects of financial stress and their other stressors.

Intervention for Financial Stress: There are several ways of dealing with financial stress and this will depend on how one is affected. According to quotes abut stress com, remaining calm can help. When we feel threatened, our fight or flight response the body's stress response kicks in and makes changes in the body. The heart rate quickens, stress hormones like cortisol are released, and a host of other changes occur that allow the body a quick burst of energy to run away fast or stay and fight strategies that have worked for thousands of years, but aren't always practical now. While that jolt of energy and alertness can inspire you to act, if your body remains in this state for long periods of time (as in the case of chronic stress), it can be damaging to your health in many ways. That's why it's important to have some stress relief strategies that can be used in a variety of situations, to calm your body's stress response so you can think clearly and stay healthier. Miami-Dade a university of Florida publication recommends the following stress relief strategies:

i) **Breathing exercises:** Breathing works well because it can be done anytime and anywhere. People don't have to know you're even doing it, but focusing on your breathing can help you calm your body and soothe tense emotions within a few short minutes.

ii) **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR):** Progressive muscle relaxation is another fast-acting stress reliever that I really love to recommend because it's simple, free and can be done just about anywhere. Again, it can calm your body's stress response so you don't remain in a state of chronic stress.

iii) **Journaling:** For those who are really stressed and need to feel that they're doing something; journaling about stressful emotions can help get them out of your head so you don't end up ruminating on what stresses you. Be sure to end your journaling session with some brainstorming on solutions, and you'll get a better sense of control over the situation, and a more positive attitude.

While we can't always control what happens to us, much of how we respond to life's events depends on how we see what's happening to us; how we make sense of it all. If we see a life event as a threat, for example, we may react more negatively and helplessly than if we see it as a "challenge." If we blame ourselves and imagine that things will never change, a stressful situation feel more overwhelming than if we remember that we can always find a silver lining with the dark clouds. About stress.com 2006, suggests some specific types of reframing that can be very useful in getting through a financial crisis:

i) If you're feeling that your financial crisis is a form of personal failure, remind yourself that many, many people are in this situation as well. The situation itself is not a failure on your part, and working through it only demonstrates your strength.
ii) If you're concerned about the impact on your family, remind yourself that families can grow stronger and closer when they weather challenges together, and that this experience (although you may not have willingly chosen it) can make your family stronger, too.
iii) If you're stressed about the uncertainty of the future, remind yourself that these changes also bring opportunity; down the road, you may find yourself in an even better place. Even if you don't have more money, you may have more happiness.

By acknowledging the feelings and thoughts you have, and gently redirecting your attention to the positive, you can lessen the stress you are experiencing. When you're not under extreme levels of stress, you may even make choices that better maximize the opportunities that you still face. Another way to reframe a situation is to take a break from it, and return later with a more relaxed attitude and a fresh perspective. Many people don't know how to take a break from stressful thoughts, especially when stressing about finances. They tend to ruminate and remain stressed. Spending more time doing fun activities with family and friends, enjoying hobbies, or even simply watching comedies on television can get you into a better frame of mind. These activity-oriented reframing techniques, as well as the mental reframing techniques mentioned, could lead to less stress. A financial crisis presents significant change and challenge to be dealt with, but can also be a valuable learning experience, and a stop on the road to more stable financial times and a healthier long-term attitude toward money. For example, a financial crisis can inspire more frugal habits, better long-term planning, and an attitude of gratitude for material possessions and other important things in life. And even serious financial problems, like foreclosures and bankruptcies, can be overcome. If you keep your eye on the possibilities of the future and bear in mind that much better times can be created ahead, dealing with financial challenges of today can be less stressful. When creating a plan, you should look at all the possibilities you have open even if it may not seem like there are many, and talk to as many wise people as you can, in order to be sure there are no avenues you're overlooking. You may want to speak with a financial advisor or credit counselor, for example, and get a clear idea of where you are right now and where you're going. Your plan may span several years, but it's important to have an idea of how you're going to handle this crisis. Not only will it be easier to know what to do, but having a plan can put your mind at ease so you're not thinking about finances and what to do all the time (about stress.com,2009). In addition to making a plan and maintaining a positive attitude, it's important to keep your positive vision for the future in mind. Your long-term goals may include a stable financial situation for yourself and your family, and a life that includes joyful activities and close relationships. Your short-term goals may simply include getting through the next month — or week — in a relatively peaceful state. Both long-term and short-term goals are important. You can create a vivid mental image of what you hope to find in the future, and revisit it often, or you may want to create a vision board for yourself to flesh out what you'd like to see in the future. It goes along with the advice often given to tightrope-walkers: Keep your eyes on your goal, and don't look down (Quotes about stress.com, 2005).

7. Research methodology:

Research design: The study adopted a descriptive survey design which basically enquires into the state of affairs as it exists without questioning why it exists (Kombo and Tromp, 2006).

Location of the study: The study was carried out in Nakuru Sub- County in Kenya. Nakuru Sub- County was chosen by the researcher purposively because it meets the criteria of having many secondary schools and teachers and where stress due to poor remuneration is high among professionals. It is also an urban center and has diversity of culture.

Population of the study: The target population included all secondary school teachers in public schools within Nakuru Sub- County. According to 2008 records in Nakuru Sub-County Education office, there were 20 public secondary schools with 533 teachers; 212 male and 321 female. The accessible population was 376 teachers in the selected secondary schools.

Sampling procedure and sample size: The sample size was determined by using Krejcie and Morgan (1976) formula as cited by Kathuri and Pals (1993, 54). Stratified random sampling and purposive sampling were used to select the sample. The accessible population of 376 was divided into two strata; 161 males and 215 females. Ten public secondary schools in the district were purposively sampled for the study.

Instrumentation: Data was collected through the administration of a questionnaire to teachers. The questionnaire contained rating scale questions, open ended and contingency questions to provide greater insight into the respondents' feelings and recommendations

Validity and reliability: To enhance validity of the data collection instrument, the researcher reviewed the instrument in line with the objectives then three experts assessed the instrument. To determine the reliability of the instrument a pilot study was carried out to establish the clarity and comprehensibility of each item in the instrument. The data tool yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.76

Data collection procedure: The researcher visited the selected schools sought permission from the heads of the institutions, explained to the teachers the purpose of the study and its importance and administered the questionnaire.

Data analysis: The data obtained was mainly quantitative and was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics mainly frequency counts, means and percentages. The analysis was aided by the use of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 16.5

8. Results and discussions: The first objective sought to determine what teachers perceived as their major causes of financial stress. Psychological stress due to high bank or sacco loan and psychological effects due to high school fees registered highest figures of 69.1% and 65.9% respectively. Psychological effects due to marital separation or divorce registered the lowest percentage of 6.3%. This reveals that financial constraints are the major cause of stress among secondary school teachers in Nakuru Sub-County. The results are summarized below.

Table-1:
Causes of financial stress in percentages

Cause	Yes	No
Death of spouse	11.7	88.3
Disease in family	52.9	47.1
Marital separation/divorce	6.3	93.7
High mortgage rates	11.7	88.3
High school fees	65.9	34.1
High repayment of bank/SACCO loans	69.1	30.9

N = 191

An analysis of the results showed that most of the teachers cited bank or SACCO loans as the major source of financial stress. This could be attributed to the fact that financial institutions allow over deductions on the teachers' salaries in a bid to realize very high interest rates levied on the loans. The second factor is school fees showing that despite their low salaries, teachers still want the best education for their children and are therefore willing to sacrifice their salary to take them to good schools.

Table-2:
Level of Financial stress

Financial stress	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely affected	46	24.2
Moderately affected	105	54.7
Mildly affected	40	21.1
Total	**191**	**100.0**

The study further sought to determine whether the teachers shared their concerns on psychological problems with people. Findings indicted that an overwhelming 64.1% actually opened to someone while 35.9% person indicated they did not. This suggested that teachers were aware of the element of emotional support offered during times of crisis by a close confidant. The findings are presented in the table below.

Psychological effects of financial stress: When asked how they felt during times of financial difficulties, 60% of the women said reported headaches which they described as unending, continuous or unstoppable.70% of the men reported that they felt restless, unable to concentrate and sleeplessness. Both the women and men cited irritability as a major problem. From these statics it is clear that financial stress is a major cause of psychological disturbance amomg teachers in Nakuru Sub-County that if not addressed, work quality and delivery could be compromised.

Intervention strategies used by teachers to manage financial stress: Results showed that only 20% of the teachers sought medical attention when their conditions got worse with 80% stating that they did self-medication which is mainly strong pain-killers. A further 90% of the respondents indicated that they were not aware that they could talk to a psychological counselor about financial matters. They all reported that they at least talked to someone as shown in the table below:

Table-3:
Percentage of teachers that talked to someone

	Frequency	**Percent**
Yes	143	64.1
No	80	35.9
Total	**223**	**100.0**

Table 4:
The personalities that the teachers talked to when in financial stress

	Frequency	Percentage
Friend	80	40.4
Family member	43	24.2
Professional counsellor	3	1.8
Church leader	1	.4
No one	64	33.2
Total	**191**	**100.0**

The personalities that the teachers talked to or opened up to when in financial stress were friends accounting for 40.4% and close family members at 24.2%. Professional counsellors and church leaders featured low at 1.8 and 0.4% respectively. A further 33.2% if the sample indicated to having not shared their concerns with anyone. This implies that many teachers are not keen on or are unaware of the relevance of formal counselling services in dealing with their personal and emotional concerns as shown above.

9. Conclusion: The study showed that the major sources of financial stress among teachers in public secondary schools were due to high bank or SACCO loans, high school fees and disease in family. Other stressors like death of a spouse or high mortgage received relatively low responses. The findings further showed that teachers need financial counselling as a large percentage of teachers responded that they talked to a friend when in financial stress and not a professional counselor the percentage of those who did not talk to anybody at all is also large.

10. Recommendations:

This paper recommends that:

i) The teachers' employer and institutional boards to include financial counseling for teachers in school programmes as it is a factor that is affecting their service delivery.

ii) More studies to be done on financial stress to fill in the gap on financial counseling in Kenya.

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