

# The Principals Stress and Coping Strategies in Bedouin Schools in Israel

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The purpose of this research is to investigate the principals' stress and coping strategies to deal with stress by principals in Bedouin schools in Israel. Data were collected in this research by combining a quantitative and qualitative mixed method. A quantitative research questionnaire was conducted for school principals in 36 schools, in addition to an interview with three principals based on the causes of principal stress and coping mechanisms. Research results show that the principals experiencing balance had the highest mean (M) of 3.28 and standard deviation (SD) of 1.64 on a five-point scale. Principals experiencing moderate stress was parents (M = 3.10, SD = 0.57) and teachers (M = 3.14, SD = 0.54), while workload had the lowest mean (M = 2.97, SD = 0.64).

*Keywords:* Bedouin, stress, principals' stress, burnout, coping strategies

## Introduction

One of the issues that has received special attention in the context of discussing the concept of stress and which has great public and scientific interest in Israel and the world is the issue of stress at work for principals. According to Selye (1976), stress is a state of biological change in a person sufficiently powerful to create imbalances in the physiological system and is caused by events that increase stress. Stress refers to the mental and physical state that affects a person's output rather than work, quality of work, personal efficiency, and health (Comish & Swindle, 1994). Others see stress at work as an employee's state of mind that evokes exaggerated and deviant demands (Reddy & Anuradha, 2013). On the other hand, positive stress is defined as stress that allows employees to perform better and increase their job satisfaction (Jarinto, 2010). The research, which dealt with the management in schools in Israel and all over the world, identified various factors of stress such as: work overload (Denecker, 2019; Perry, 2016; Boyland, 2011), role overload and even lack of social support (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010), conflicts between teachers themselves and between teachers and principals (Trenberth & Dewe, 2005; Alasomuka, 2019), lack of trust between principals and parents, sizes of schools (Ozer, 2013), stress that comes from teachers and parents (Fridman, 2002; Mahfouz, 2018), early principals' retirement (Itzhaki, 2017), and cannot balance the personal life with the work life because of pressure in their work (Slobogin, 2009). School principals are key figures in the design of an organisation that supports teachers and promotes student achievement. School principals deal with students, parents, teachers,

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and external situations in their daily work, indicating that they are multi-role performers and often under stress. So, the current research focuses on the stress of the principals in Bedouin schools in Israel and talks about how they dealt with it.

### **Bedouin in the Negev**

The Bedouins who were identified as Israeli citizens in the Negev are indigenous Palestinian Arabs who remained in Israel after 1948 and are today a minority of Israeli citizens, most of whom live in the Negev (Abu-Saad, 2006). About 250,000 Bedouins live in the Negev, most of them in recognised areas and a minority in unrecognised areas. In terms of their socio-economic status, the Bedouin areas in the Negev are among the weakest in the State of Israel, and they are all in Cluster 1, the lowest according to the socio-economic index of the Central Bureau of Statistics (Weissblai, 2017). The education system in the Bedouin sector is characterised by complex and unique characteristics, as the Bedouin community is a traditional society (Alasad, 2016). In recent decades, the state has established schools and education has become more accessible than its predecessor, but the academic success of students in schools is among the lowest in Israel (Abu-Saad, 1997). More recently, the Bedouin population has undergone changes in the workforce and in the education system, such as an increase in education and an increase in the education of women in the Bedouin sector. Bedouin schools still lack physical and human resources. One of the most difficult problems facing Bedouin education in the Negev is the lack of proper teaching-learning and poor physical infrastructure in the existing educational buildings (Weissblai, 2017).

### **Stress**

There is no agreement among researchers on the concept of “stress”. Khan et al. (2012) define stress as the body’s response to the negative demands of the environment. Kyriacou (2001) defines stress situations as an experience of negative emotional states such as frustration, worry, anxiety, and depression. Chitty (2005) saw it as the pressure caused by body reactions while trying to maintain balance and meet the requirements of life. Gmelch and Gates(1998) define four stages of stress: cause, response, confrontation, and outcome. The first phase examines the causes of stress; the second deals with the stress response, which is psychological and physiological. The third phase is the confronting reaction, and the fourth stage defines the consequences of the stress.

### **Positive Stress**

Positive stress, according to Jarinto (2010), is a two-edged sword that can either harm or benefit employees. Positive pressure is defined as a healthy thing that leads to a sense of accomplishment (Datt& Washington, 2015). Positive pressure improves performance at work and is encouraged in the workplace, which helps employees to remain motivated and perform effectively at work (Datt & Washington, 2015). According to Jarinto (2010), positive stress is the main factor in improving job satisfaction. This is based on the principle that stress should be stimulated moderately, not excessively.

### **Burnout**

Burnout is a continuation of the stress phenomenon at work (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2011; Whitaker, 1995). Freudenberger (1974) describes the concept of burnout as a syndrome that includes physical and mental fatigue and low motivation toward clients. Burnout is the result of cognitive evaluation processes interpreting the encounter with a stressful event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Burnout is the result of cognitive evaluation

processes interpreting the encounter with a stressful event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Recent findings indicate that conflicting roles, ambiguity in roles, and workload, along with some personal factors, such as age and gender, have significant and positive impacts on school principals' burnout (Yildirim & Dinc, 2019).

### **Early Studies on Stress and the Principalship**

The meaning of work is expanded by school principals in terms of complexity and quantity (Andreyko, 2010). Research literature has pointed to a variety of factors related to school management stress. Gmelch and Gates (1998) examined the causes of stress: role-based stress, task-based stress, boundary-breaking stress, and stress-mediated conflicts. The few studies that examined the causes of stress among school principals indicated the following results: According to Friedman (2002) and Denecker (2019) time constraints and excessive workload was the main cause of stress for principals. Managers spend long hours working outside of work, causing them mental and physical fatigue (Alasomuka, 2019; Perry, 2016), and disruption to school teacher relationships (Menes, Olivencia, & Cano, 2017). In addition, conflicts between the teachers themselves and between them and the principals (Trenberth & Dewe, 2005) imbalance the personal life with the work life (Slobogin, 2009).

### **Strategies Used to Cope With Stress**

Successful stress management can lead to growth and development. When stress cannot be managed, it can be a distressing experience (negative pressure). Moreover, long-term exposure can cause fatigue at work (Devereux, Hastings, & Noone, 2009). Stress and pressure can affect the employee's well-being (McGowan, Gardner, & Fletcher, 2006) and have effects on the performance of organisations (Kukemelk & Bedi, 2018). In a study that examined coping mechanisms in high school teachers, any management of coping mechanisms used in their work found that they reduced stress levels (Dua & Sangwan, 2016). Coping mechanisms in the day-to-day work of school principals to deal with and reduce stress are directed to reduce workload. School principals are under great strain in their work. Research literature on stress management suggests two major groups of coping methods. One group includes trying to remove the stress source while trying to solve the problem or problems that caused the stress. This adaptation pattern is called "problem-focused strategies". The other group includes attempts to relieve emotional distress without trying to address the source of stress. These adaptation patterns are called emotion-focused strategies (Fridman, 2002).

### **Aim of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the principals' stress and coping strategies to deal with stress by principals in Bedouin schools in Israel. Hence, this research paper addresses the following questions:

1. What is the source of the stress of the school principals and where does it come from in Bedouin schools in Israel?
2. What are the coping strategies that school principals use to manage their stress in Bedouin schools in Israel?

### **Results**

The results of this research were completed by 36 male principles from 36 Bedouin schools in primary school, junior high school, and high schools in the Negev, in the south of Israel. The research included questionnaires based on the used principal's stress causes questionnaire, which measured the principals' stress

level through four sub-scales: parents, teachers, balance, and workload. The stress questionnaires were adopted by Friedman (1995) and the balance items were adopted by Shteigman (2010). Also, the researcher added items to adapt them to the study population. In addition, an interview with three school principals was conducted to collect information about their personal opinions regarding their stress levels.

### Background Variables

Thirty-six male principles participated in this study and completed the stress-related questionnaire. The majority of the participants were of masters' academic level (80.6%), about 48% of them were aged 41-50 years, and about 42% were aged over 50 years. About 42% of principals had less than 20 years of experience in education, and about 31% of them had more than 20 years of experience in education. Regarding seniority in management, about 47% of the principals had 10-20 years of experience in management, and 25% of them had more than 20 years of experience in management. The principals were distributed as 44.4% of junior schools, 38.9% of high schools, and the rest were principals of elementary schools. 41.7% of the responding principals had 30-60 teachers in the schools they managed, and about 30.6% had 60-100 teachers in their schools. Regarding school size, 47.2% of the principals manage schools of 500-700 students, while 22.2% of them manage schools of 300-500 students, about 8% manage schools of more than 1,000 students, and just about 2% manage schools of less than 200 students. In addition, three school principals from different schools and with different years of experience in the Bedouin area in the Negev have been interviewed to collect information.

Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the principals stress scale and its sub-scales. The mean score of the principals stress level was 3.09 (61.8%), which is a moderate level ( $SD = 0.5$ ). Regarding the fourth sub-scales, balance had the highest mean score (3.28, 65.6%), while workload had the lowest mean score (2.97, 59.4%).

Table 1

#### *Principal Stress Level Mean Scores and Standard Deviations*

Scale	Mean score	Percentage	Level	Std. Deviation
Parents	3.10	62	Moderate	0.57
Teachers	3.14	62.8	Moderate	0.54
Balance	3.28	65.6	Moderate	0.76
Workload	2.97	59.4	Poor	0.64
Principals' stress level	3.09	61.8	Moderate	0.50

### Differences in Principals' Stress Levels According to Principles' Demographic Characteristics

This section will show the results of testing differences in principals' stress levels according to each of the following demographic characteristics related to principal: age, seniority in management, school size according to student number, and school size according to teacher number.

Tables 2,3,4,and5 show the results of one-way ANOVA tests for differences in stress level according to each of the demographic variables. There are significant differences in principles' stress levels according to all variables.

As Table 2 shows, the mean stress score of principals whose ages ranged from 41-50 years was significantly higher than that of principals whose ages exceeded 50 years, while principals of ages 31-40 were significantly less stressed than principals of ages 41-50 and those whose ages exceeded 50.

Table 2

*Differences in Principals' Stress Levels According to Principals' Ages*

Variable		Mean	p-value
Age	31-40	2.82	0.000
	41-50	3.20	
	More than 50	3.02	

According to Table 3, principals whose experience in management was less than 10 years were significantly more stressed than those with 10-20 years of experience in management, while principals with 20-30 years of experience in management were significantly more stressed than principals with 10-20 years of experience and significantly less stressed than principals with less than 10 years of experience in management.

Table 3

*Differences in Principals' Stress Level According to Seniority in Management*

Variable		Mean	p-value
Seniority in management	Less than 10 years	3.31	0.000
	10-20	2.94	
	20-30	3.10	
	More than 20 years	3.16	

The results presented in Table 4 regarding school size according to teachers' number showed that principals of schools of 30-60 teachers were more stressed than schools of more than 60 teachers, while principals of schools of more than 100 teachers were less stressed than principals of schools whose size was 30-60 teachers or more than 60 teachers.

Table 4

*Differences in Principals' Stress Levels According to Teachers' Number*

Variable		Mean	p-value
Size according to teachers number	Less than 30	3.05	0.000
	30-60	3.32	
	60-100	3.16	
	More than 100	2.49	

According to Table 5, principals of 200-300 student schools were more stressed than each of the principals of schools of less than 200 students, 300-500 students, and 500-700 students. Principals of schools with 700-1,000 students were more stressed than those of schools with fewer than 200 students.

Table 5

*Differences in Principals' Stress Levels According to the Number of Students*

Variable		Mean	p-value
Size of the school according to number of students	Less than 200	2.88	0.000
	200-300	3.41	
	300-500	2.91	
	500-700	3.04	
	700-1000	3.40	
	More than 1000	3.14	

### Interviews Analysis

School leadership is important to school performance. According to research, school principal stress has become a serious issue in recent years as they try to deal with all kinds of challenging relationships between teachers, students, parental demands, and the Ministry of Education.

The majority of school principals stated that they were unable to balance their personal and professional lives. They said that they tried to balance in order to keep a regular job in front of their personal lives after work, but they did not succeed due to the workload and the stress that stayed with them even after the work day.

School principals face difficulties in their work with their teachers. For example, when they have any changes, they do not feel like belonging to the school. The principals say that when teachers come to school only to spend a working day, it affects negatively the goals and school achievements. They also say that sometimes the pressure that principals exert on their teachers causes conflicts with them.

The principal said there were difficulties with parents at the school. Parents are not involved in student achievement; they do not meet with educators and teachers. Meet only on issues related to student discipline and interfering or non-participating parents.

Principals talked about the workload: attending many meetings with teachers, parents, students, and supervisors. Also, the principals told us: multiple paperwork, dealing with issues in one working day, dealing with issues related to work teachers when they do not do their job properly, and resolving disputes with students, parents, and presidents.

The principals discussed intra-organizational difficulties and coping strategies, including workload, school partners, and themselves. Principals discussed out-of-school coping mechanisms, external coping mechanisms, and after-work activities, with physical activity being one of the stress-management strategies used by principals. Furthermore, principals advised taking a walk with family and children.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study was guided by two research questions; the first was to understand what the source of stress is for school principals and where it comes from in Bedouin schools in Israel; the second question was to understand the coping strategies that school principals use to manage their stress in Bedouin schools in Israel.

First of all, this study showed that principals who participated in the research had moderate to high stress levels that related to parents, teachers, and balance. In addition, while workload had the lowest stress, according to Table 1, the parents scored moderate in terms of principal stress level. The influence of this factor was 3.28, meaning that it moderately affected stress among principals in the Bedouin sector. Parents are seen as stakeholders and are important to the education system in improving their children's achievements in the Bedouin sector in Israel. The involvement of parents can make it easier for school principals and teachers to deal with students and school goals.

The school principal's interview findings reveal that their feelings during the interview experienced stress from the parents can be major sources of stress for their job. Results in the present study align with previous results showing that school principals face stress from parents (Fridman, 2002). During the interview, the principals said that there were difficulties working with parents on issues related to meetings with teachers and student achievement as well as student discipline and interfering and non-involved parents. The lack of contact with the parents is a significant stress factor among school principals in the Bedouin sector. According to Aravena and González (2021, p. 7), school principals have indicated feeling stressed when they have to set up

relationships with “complicated” parents. In addition, this finding reinforces the idea that principals are not only focused on improving the climate within the school. They need to maintain relationships with stakeholders, such as parents. In addition, parental involvement in schools in the Bedouin sector is very low, possibly due to the parents’ socioeconomic status. According to Tirosh and Eyal (2018), all recognised Bedouin areas are included in the lowest socio-economic cluster. Therefore, there is a relationship between socio-economic status and parental involvement that has a direct impact on principals’ stress.

However, another cause of stress mentioned is the teachers. Table 1 shows the teachers’ scores moderate in principal stress level. It moderately affects stress among principals in the Bedouin sector. This finding is in line with the studies of Menes et al. (2017) and Friedman (2002), which found that the most common cause of stress in principals was the school teachers and the relationships. School principals in the Bedouin sector indicated that interacting with the teacher staff, resisting changes, and a lack of belonging to the school had been discovered to be principals’ stress factors. As a result, principals with high levels of stress alienate and completely influence the climate of employees and the school. While bad interpersonal relationships can lead to stress, stress can also cause a bad relationship and loss of productivity. This may be an indication that teachers have less stress than principals in the Bedouin sector. The principals faced more stress than teachers, and this could be due to the nature of their work. The teaching staff is an important human resource in the organization. However, the behaviour of the school principal in the Bedouin sector is the main factor that influences teachers’ feelings, such as morale, stress, satisfaction, and respect. Therefore, with collaboration between teachers and principal, and being supportive, friendly, and relaxed, the stress will be very low. Cordial relationships between principals and teachers have positively contributed to the effective management of teachers in their classrooms (Francis & Oluwatoyin, 2019). According to Alasad (2017), school principals in the Bedouin sector sometimes use measures that do not correspond to the measures used in school management (Alasad, 2017). According to Maheshwari (2021, p.11), unclear procedures and policies had a negative effect on school teachers’ performance and their job perception. Therefore, unclear policies and procedures of school principals in the Bedouin sector significantly affect the stress of school principals and teachers together.

A study indicated that Bedouin school principals did not indicate stress in their workload. Our findings, however, contradict the findings of Alasomuka (2019), Denecker(2019), Perry (2016), and Friedman(2002). The multifaceted role of the principal and the way he handles tasks put him under stress. In addition, high amounts of work-related stress have negative consequences when it negatively impacts school principals’ health and well-being. School principals in the Bedouin sector indicated that there was no stress in workload because the stress questionnaires were distributed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is probably one of the reasons why schools were closed during this period and distance learning was transferred to distance learning.

In contrast, school principals in the Bedouin sector talked about the workload in their job, daily school activities that include staff management, off-duty activities, meetings, report writing, and immediate loads. Resolve disputes with teachers, students, parents, and presidents. School principals in the Bedouin sector experienced task-based and role-based stress. Friedman (2002) finds that the time constraints and workload related to the management of the school make it hard for principals to effectively complete their assigned tasks. He found that overload and ambiguity in their jobs were causes of stress for the principals. Excessive workload was the main cause of stress for principals (Denecker, 2019). According to Perry (2016), reporting similar findings, he found a strong relationship between task-based and role-based stress. Therefore, the heavy workload of the principals in the Bedouin sector is considered a major cause of stress among the principals.

The study found that the balance had the highest mean score (3.28, 65.6). This finding is consistent with previous research that found balance-related stressors to be harmful (Slobogin, 2009; Gray, 2014; Mahfouz, 2018; Innstrand et al., 2008). Principals in the Bedouin sector indicated the imbalance caused by stress in their work. The imbalance leads to conflicts within and outside the organization. Stress levels are workload, staff management, and work with parents related to the daily work of school principals are the main causes of imbalance. According to Tuğsal (2017), imbalances in work and personal life can be cognitive, behavioral, emotional, or psychological. Work-related stress levels have negative consequences when they negatively affect principals' health and well-being. This leads to an imbalance that, in turn, leads to a conflict between work and personal life. In other words, work can interfere with the family and the family can interfere with work. According to Pranav (2010), an employee who has a better work-life balance will contribute greatly to the growth and success of the organization. The leadership style can be related to the imbalance between schools in the Bedouin sector due to stress in their work. Hence, a lack of distributed leadership leads the principals in the Bedouin sector to imbalance and stress at work. All of the above are in line with studies that indicate delegating authority and responsibility to employees is one of the mechanisms within the school that researchers attach importance to. According to Abu-Saad and Hendrex (1995), Bedouin school principals are adopting a patriarchal style of leadership. As a result, due to a lack of delegation authority and responsibility to employees, principals in the Bedouin sector will face workload in their job. Therefore, work stress is created (Kyte, 1994). In addition, the stress that stems from workload is related directly to the exhaustion dimension of burnout (Maslach et al., 2011). Exhaustion is one of the signs of imbalance between work and personal life and stands out for long hours of work, which may be complex and add to the family unit (Gray, 2014). It affects work-life balance, and mental and physical exhaustion affects work satisfaction (Mahfouz, 2018; Ross & Vasantha, 2014; Wang, Pollock, & Hauseman, 2018).

School principals in the Bedouin sector talked about the coping strategies they used to manage their stress in their job. During the interview, the managers talked about coping strategies at an individual level and how they reduced their stress levels. The school principals found their stress was relieved by exercise and activity with family and children. This finding contradicts previous research, which found that school principals never exercised (Uba-Mbibi & Nwamuo, 2013, p. 146). The lack of intra-organizational coping strategies is a significant reason for stress among school principals. Therefore, the principals did not use intra-organizational coping strategies. Coping mechanisms in the day-to-day work of school principals to deal with and reduce stress are directed to reduce workload. Lack of principal training in the Bedouin sector for the job leads to stress on the job. As a result, principals must be knowledgeable about management techniques. The research literature has given importance to using intra-organizational coping strategies for school principals in reducing stress. According to Okoroma and Okah (2007), stress is an overload on the principals' daily work due to job decentralisation skills and social and emotional learning (Mahfouz, Greenberg, & Rodriguez, 2019). In addition, cooperation and school staff provide professional support to the principals after decentralising the roles to the management staff and teachers (Beusaert, Fröhlich, Devos, & Riley, 2016), while successful stress management at Bedouin school principals can lead to growth and development. When stress is unmanageable, it can be a traumatic experience (negative pressure). Moreover, long-term exposure can cause fatigue at work.

Another finding is that there are differences in principals' stress levels according to principals' demographic variables related to their age. As Table 2 shows, the stress mean score of principals whose ages ranged from 41 to 50 years was significantly higher than the other ages. This study supports the

literature showing that stress is associated with the age of school principals in Bedouin schools (Kyte, 1994; Itzhaki, 2017). Middle-aged school principals aged 41-50 in the Bedouin sector are considered middle-aged and deal with a group of teachers younger and older than them selves. These ages make it difficult for school principals. On the other hand, teachers over 50 years old are difficult to motivate because of their age. Dealing with ages inside the school causes stress for school principals.

According to the results in Table 3, seniority in management is related to stress, and the higher the seniority in management, the less stress. The principals whose experience in management was less than 10 years were significantly more stressed. Similar findings are in the study of Itzhaki(2017)and Bayar(2016). School principals in the Bedouin sector at the beginning of their careers may feel isolated. New principals report a strong sense of isolation, and these feelings of isolation increase as the principals gain a little feedback from their supervisors. In addition, the lack of training for school principals in the Bedouin sector at the beginning of their management career is a cause of stress at work. Therefore, the principal's education greatly contributes to the organisational functions and success and reduces burnout. Another reason is the lack of distributed work. Bedouin school principals in their first years of experience work approximately individually, which leads to conflicts and pressures at work. And they give priority in the first stage to establishing leadership that focuses on personal goals and not for educational purposes in the school.

Regarding school size according to teachers' number, principals of schools of 30-60 teachers were more stressed. The number of teachers refers to the size of the school, while the number of teachers between 30 and 60 refers to direct work between the principal and teachers, which has an influence on workload and work stress. In addition, the number of teachers in a school is related to the stress the principals face. For example, in schools where more than 70 to 100 teachers work, stress becomes less on the principals because they donot have direct contact with their principals as the duties are distributed among a group of teachers who contact them directly to inform them about their tasks. It is also easier for the principals to manage them through this strategy; beside they might not know all the names of their teachers working in the school.

Another finding is that the size of the school according to the number of students was related to the stress. School size in the Bedouin sector indicates that principals who work in a school with fewer students are less likely to express stress. But, for those who work in large schools, the level of stress is higher. That is, in small schools, there is clear autonomy and close cooperation between employees to design an immediate educational level at the school level. Large schools have more workload, distrust, and lack of communication with all school stakeholders.

Finally, the sources of stress shared by school principals indicate that school principals suffer from burnout and compassion fatigue syndrome on the job. School principals deal with students, parents, teachers, and external situations in their daily work, indicating that they are multi-role performers and often under stress. The findings of this study have indicated that the levels of stress and job satisfaction among principals are moderate to high. In actuality, stress can affect the employee's well-being. The imbalance leads to conflicts within and outside the organization and has effects on the performance of the organization. In addition, it causes negative reactions within the organization. Principals must distribute work among teachers to reduce stress and act optimally. The main and primary thing is awareness. The employer is aware that his school principals are under pressure because of their work due to a lack of training. Management training of principals should also focus on stress management and must learn to use management models to reduce the risk of stress and burnout-related phenomena.

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