

# WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS IN ENGLAND?

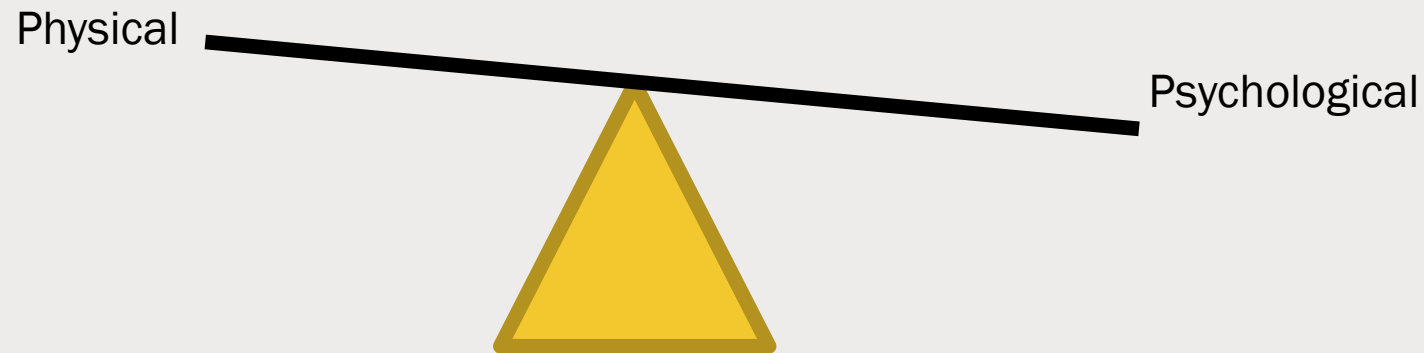
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# Aims of Research

1. This study aimed to identify the key causes of occupational stress being experienced by Headteachers in English Primary Schools and whether their gender, age, experience level or school Ofsted rating had any significant impact on their reported experiences of stress.
2. To try and make some sense of what causes the most stress in 2018, whereas most research in this field comes from pre 2016/17 in the most recent cases.
3. To see if the groupings listed above make any difference to the stress levels experienced by Headteachers, including MAT status.
4. To see if this research can begin to bring about change, through enhanced awareness of the issue.

# Defining Stress

*‘The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them.’ (Cox et al, 2000. P3)*



# Key Papers – Literature Review

Rank	Physical health	Psychological well-being	Job satisfaction
1	<i>Ambulance</i>	<i>Social services providing care</i>	<i>Prison officer</i>
2	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<i>Ambulance</i>
3	<i>Social services providing care</i>	<i>Fire brigade</i>	<i>Police</i>
4	<i>Customer services – call centre</i>	<i>Ambulance</i>	<i>Customer services – call centre</i>
5	<i>Bar staff</i>	<i>Vets</i>	<i>Social services providing care</i>
6	<i>Prison officer</i>	<i>Lecturers</i>	<b>Teachers</b>
7	<i>Mgmt (private sector)</i>	<i>Clerical and admin</i>	<i>Nursing</i>
8	<i>Clerical and admin</i>	<i>Mgmt (private sector)</i>	<i>Medical/dental</i>
9	<i>Police</i>	<i>Prison officer</i>	<i>Allied health professionals</i>
10	<i>Teaching assistant</i>	<i>Research – academic</i>	<i>Bar staff</i>
11	<b>Head teachers</b>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Mgmt (private sector)</i>
12	<i>Secretarial/business support</i>	<i>Customer services – call centre</i>	<i>Fire brigade</i>
13	<i>Research – academic</i>	<i>Director (public sector)</i>	<i>Vets</i>
14	<i>Lecturers</i>	<i>Allied health professionals</i>	<i>Clerical and admin</i>
15	<i>Senior police</i>	<i>Bar staff</i>	<i>Mgmt (public sector)</i>
16	<i>Nursing</i>	<i>Nursing</i>	<i>Lecturers</i>
17	<i>Mgmt (public sector)</i>	<i>Medical/dental</i>	<b>Head teachers</b>
18	<i>Allied health professionals</i>	<i>Senior police</i>	<i>Teaching assistant</i>
19	<i>Medical/dental</i>	<i>Secretarial/business support</i>	<i>Secretarial/business support</i>
20	<i>Accountant</i>	<b>Head teachers</b>	<i>Director (public sector)</i>
21	<i>Fire brigade</i>	<i>Mgmt (public sector)</i>	<i>Research – academic</i>
22	<i>Vets</i>	<i>Accountant</i>	<i>Senior police</i>
23	<i>Director (public sector)</i>	<i>Teaching assistant</i>	<i>School lunchtime supervisors</i>
24	<i>Analyst</i>	<i>Analyst</i>	<i>Accountant</i>
25	<i>School lunchtime supervisors</i>	<i>School lunchtime supervisors</i>	<i>Analyst</i>
26	<i>Director/MD (private sector)</i>	<i>Director/MD (private sector)</i>	<i>Director/MD (private sector)</i>

- There is research into Headteacher stress which dates back to the 1980's but most research exists refers to teachers primarily.
- Key research that draws out comparisons for teachers and headteacher includes JOHNSON, S., COOPER, C., CARTWRIGHT, S., DONALD, I., TAYLOR, P. and MILLET, C., 2005. The experience of work-related stress across occupations. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 20 (2), 178-187.

# Key Papers – Literature Review

*“I wish bureaucrats could see that whilst results are important, schools are more than that.” (Coleman, 2007, p.64)*

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# Change, Change, Change.....

NAHT (Brooks,  
2018)

## A timeline of changes to accountability

- 1988** Education Reform Act 1988 introduced:
- the national curriculum,
  - key stages of education,
  - local management of schools and
  - City technology colleges — grant-maintained schools beyond local authority control.
- GCSE qualifications introduced
- 1991** First statutory assessments based on national curriculum levels introduced
- 1992** Office for Standards in Education created (Ofsted) by Education (Schools) Act 1992
- Annual performance tables introduced
- 1994** Introduction of A\* GCSE grade
- 1997** Key stage 3 SATs introduced
- 2000** Learning and Skills Act 2000 provided for the establishment of the first city academies:  
later known as sponsored academies
- AS levels introduced
- 2001** Ofsted's inspection remit expanded to include day-care and childminding
- 2002** Value-added progress measure introduced
- 2005** Education Act 2005 designed to strengthen accountability framework for schools
- More frequent, shorter inspections
  - Definitions for inadequate schools (special measures/significant improvement)

(Williams, 2017) who writes about two Primary Headteachers choosing to leave the profession because they believed the reformed primary curriculum has been narrowed too significantly and that government accountability measures are too narrow and do not

- 
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- consider the wider impact of the school's work.
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# Key Papers – Literature Review

(Steward, 2014)

- dealing with personnel, safety or child protection issues (all interviewees);
- isolation of the role (all interviewees);

(Howard, 2012)

- dealing with difficult parents
- accessing information online
- the cumulative effects of the number of tasks needing completing

(Harris, 2016)

- Recruitment challenges
- Teacher wellbeing and retention

**Table 10** Percentage of Primary Headteachers reporting activities that occasionally cause stress

Activity	Occasionally causes stress
Dealing with difficult parents	55%
Difficulty accessing online information	54%
The cumulative effect of the number of tasks that have to be accomplished	28%
Relationships with governors	28%
Managing an increased teaching commitment	23%



# Key Papers – Literature Review

(Greany & Higham (2018)

It was concluded that our current educational landscape since (DFE, 2010) has become ‘chaotic’ and that school leaders are confused, threatened and don’t always agree with the direction of policy being delivered by the government.

Darmody and Smyth (2014)

found that experience levels of less than 3 years were directly linked to increased levels of stress adding that in general, Principals are likely to experience their highest levels of stress between the ages of 30-50 due to other family and home related pressures.

(Savill-Smith (2018) who reports that Headteachers are working on average of 51-60 hours per week. This is not a UK only issue.

Savill-Smith (2018)

Found that 74% of Teachers and school leaders struggled to switch off and relax and 65% of the 1502 surveyed said they don’t find enough time to be with friends and family.

# Key Papers – Other factors effecting stress

**Gender** – Coleman (2004), Fotinatos-Ventouratos and Cooper (2005)

**Experience** - Shapero (2017), Draper and McMichael (1998).

**Context** - Bristow et al (2007), Greany & Higham (2018)

Theme title	Description and example duties
<b>Change Management and Policy shift</b>	Creating and maintaining strategic vision Gaining staff efficacy Responding to government policy
<b>Stakeholder Management</b>	Managing expectations and reporting to: Parents, Governors, Community, Local Authority, Multi Academy Trust, and/or other body.
<b>School Business Management</b>	Managing school Estates Budget management Risk management Legal systems Completing general administration.
<b>Human Resourcing</b>	Teacher/leader performance Quality and quantity of staffing Performance management Dealing with under-performance, misconduct or conflict Recruitment and retention
<b>School Performance, Curriculum, Standards, Scrutiny and Accountability</b>	Challenges of school context Safeguarding Pupil outcomes External expectations Ofsted/HMI.
<b>Other</b>	Opportunity for sharing individual causes of workplace stress.

# Method

- Online Questionnaire (largely for ethical reasons) – Quant and Qual
- Created based around a thematic analysis process
- Questions asked in the main:
  1. Biographical and context data
  2. What are the most stressful times of the year (Month)
  3. What causes the most stress on a weekly, termly and annual basis?

Ethical considerations were taken into consideration in line with BERA 2018.

# Results and Findings

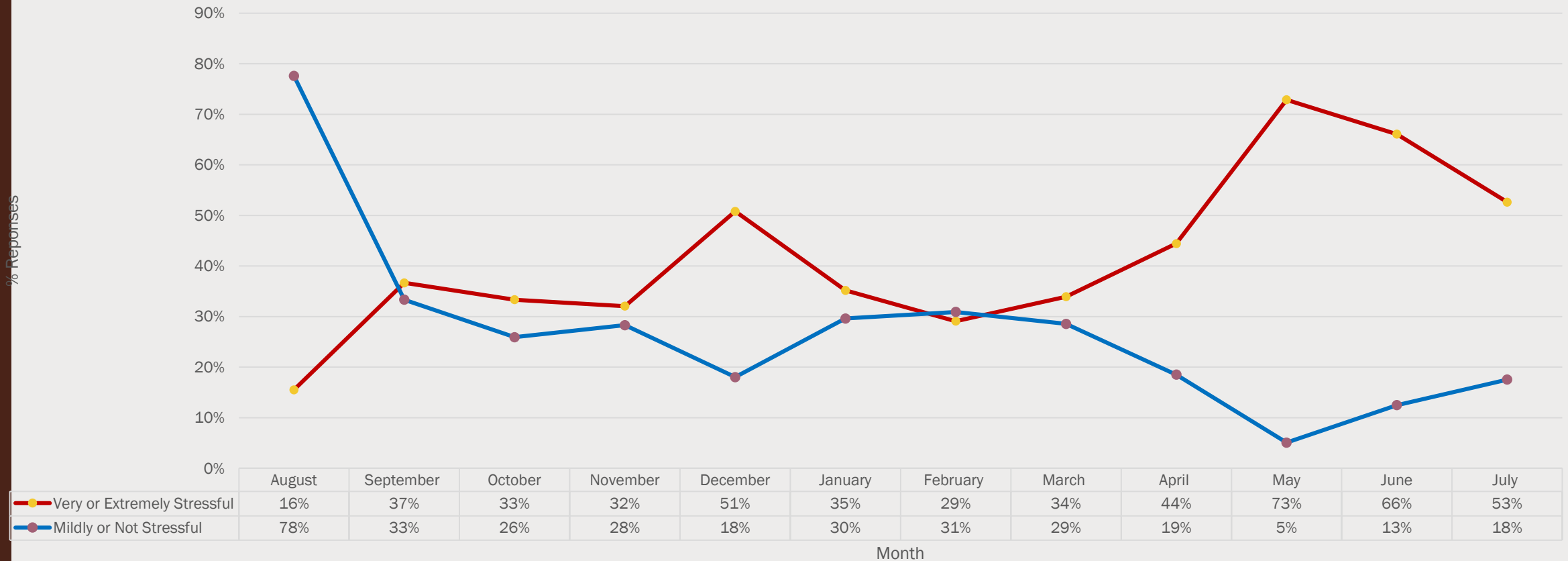
- 65 full responses
- 46 were female (71%) and 19 male (29%),
- 41 (63%) were in their first headship and 24 were not (37%),
- 24 (37%) of the group had been in headship for less than 3 years and are classed as new heads, a term defined by Draper and McMichael (2010) and 41 (67%) had been in headship for more than 3 years.
- Of the group 23 (35%) considered themselves to be a part of a MAT and 42 (65%) were not.

Ofsted Grade	Frequency of response	Percentage of the group
Outstanding	19	29%
Good	36	55%
Requires Improvement	9	14%
Inadequate	1	2%

# Results and Findings (time of the year)

- Of the responses collected to this question 41% of overall responses rated their work as 'very or extremely stressful' all of the time.

Summary of HT Occupational Stress Reporting vs Time of year



# Summary Table

	% Very or Extremely Stressful		
	Activity %overall responses		
Stress Type	Weekly	Termly	Annual
Change Management and Policy shift	22%	29%	37%
Stakeholder Management	43%	41%	40%
School Business Management	19%	27%	32%
Human Resourcing	41%	55%	58%
School Performance, Curriculum, Standards, Scrutiny and Accountability	52%	65%	80%

# Qualitative

- *Report writing and data analysis reports*
- *Involvement of Consultant and Trust Management- attempts to make me leave (constructive dismissal)*
- Safeguarding
- *Dealing with under-performance, misconduct or conflict - Recruitment and retention - particularly during the Spring term*
- poor communication
- *General Health issues - mental and physical for staff. As above for children and parents. Child Protection and Safeguarding issues. Social well being issues - i.e discussing domestic violence, drugs etc with parents or children.*
- *Behaviour of children - was extremely stressful, but is now moderately stressful.*
- Report writing and data analysis reports
- *Involvement of Consultant and Trust Management- attempts to make me leave (constructive dismissal)*
- Safeguarding



# Comparison of Headteacher groupings and their causes of stress

Headteacher Group	Weekly	Termly	Annual	Sum
Inadequate (1)	2.2	2.83	2.92	7.95
Requires Improvement (9)	2.59	2.51	2.27	<b>7.37</b>
Good (36)	3.31	3.49	3.58	<b>10.38</b>
Outstanding (19)	3.12	3.14	3.36	9.62
Non-MAT (23)	3.34	3.46	3.72	<b>10.52</b>
MAT (42)	3.02	3.17	3.24	9.43
Female (46)	3.16	3.27	3.43	9.86
Male (19)	3.09	3.31	3.37	9.77
Experienced (41)	3.13	3.25	3.42	9.8
Non-Experienced (24)	3.14	3.32	3.39	9.85
Whole Group Average	3.14	3.28	3.41	9.46

# Statistical differences between Headteacher groups

Group comparison	Mean difference	Sig. (2 tailed) Equal variances assumed Equal variances not assumed	Significant difference to confidence level of 0.95
Experienced vs non-experienced	-.02500	.42 .41	No
Male vs female	-.06429	.40 .37	No
MAT vs non-MAT	-.48022	.028 .035	Yes
Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding vs Ofsted rating of Requires Improvement or Inadequate.	.54690	.095 .083	No

# Conclusions

- Being a Headteacher is a stressful occupation.
- Some periods of the year are more stressful than others
- ‘School Performance, Curriculum, Standards, Scrutiny and Accountability’ is the cause of the most stress for Headteachers.
- Indications suggest Headteachers in MATs are less stressed than those not in MATs.
- There is little formal support for Headteachers in dealing with stress.

**But now there is...certainly in  
Leicestershire**