

Public Abstract

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Title:IMPLICATIONS OF STRESS AND COPING MECHANISMS IN THE SUPERINTENDENCY

The study examined in what ways and to what degree, if any, school superintendents perceive stress and what, if any, coping mechanisms were engaged. Moreover, the study sought to identify any significant differences between the frequency of stressors by gender and coping mechanisms utilized by female and male leaders. This study focused on qualities of coping mechanisms and their effectiveness. Research constructs undergirding the study included: need for effective stress management skills, need for effective leadership, organizational health, professional development geared towards developing a stress model, and creating a positive school culture. The study population consisted of 380 superintendents in the state of Missouri. All participants were currently employed as superintendents.

The mixed design study utilized the Superintendent Stress and Coping Mechanisms survey to collect pertinent data, as well as qualitative, open-ended questions.

Study findings revealed that there is a statistical difference between the types of coping mechanisms utilized and effectiveness between male and female superintendents. While no significant difference exists between the overall occupational stressors experienced by gender, the frequency data identified high levels of stress among over 50% of the superintendents. Superintendents believed that exercise and getting away were most frequently utilized coping mechanisms, while artificial means was least commonly used. Exercise was identified as the most effective coping mechanism for both genders; however male utilized getting away more frequently, while woman used exercise most frequently. Qualitative findings established the school district personnel provided no known support to superintendents in developing stress management skills and coping strategies. Other themes that arose from the study included; barriers in the perception of stress as it relates to gender, inconsistencies in the leaders ability to take time off, while superintendents agreed the school board is the predominant influencing factor, and the need for professional development programs.

Implications of this research study were identified in the areas of leadership preparatory programs, as well as education in stress management skills reform at the district level.