

# Relationship between Type A Personality Trait and Stress Management among High School Principals in Kenya

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**Abstract** In Homa Bay County of Kenya, there are reported cases of stressful experiences among high school principals. This has made some principals to opt out of their position of responsibilities. The present investigated the relationship between type A personality trait and stress management among high school Principals in Homa Bay County. The study adopted a Convergent Parallel research design within the Mixed Method approach. From a population of 295 principals, the study used stratified random sampling to sample the one hundred and sixty nine (169) high school principals. The Personality Questionnaire and stress management Questionnaire were used to collect data. Pearson Correlation was used to analyse data. The study established a negative ( $r = -337$ ) relationship between personality type "A" and stress management. The study concluded that intrapersonal traits assist high school principals to mitigate stressful situations.

**Keywords** Type A personality trait, Stress management, High school, Principals, Kenya

## 1. Introduction

Stress is a normal even essential part of life that goes hand in hand with working towards any goal or challenge. A stressful situation can spur us on greater effectiveness and achievement. In fact whether we like it or not we can't escape stress for complete freedom from stress is death (Motah and Pointe, 2008). A World Bank report (2009) on high school leadership revealed that the education system world over have been ineffective and has failed to address the issue of high school principals stress and burnout. This has negated efforts to create a stronger human resource base which is invaluable for development in all its spheres in the school. Several studies have been carried out on possible variables that could affects stress management for example Howart (2012) cited age; Berkel (2009) cited gender while Birdie (2015) cited teaching experience. However very scanty information are available on the relationship between intrapersonal variables and stress management. Intrapersonal variables are variables which are within an individual that makes them act and behave in a certain way. In the present study intrapersonal included type A personality traits.

It is expected that high school principals are adequately prepared to cope with their working conditions associated with their responsibilities which includes attending to parents; organize meetings, classroom teaching and

coordination of the teachers and to supervise the support staffs amongst other duties that entails sound school management. High school principals spend more time on the job than they did in the past, and they are navigating ways to be successful in the high stakes of work context that has permeated their job as principals and this changing nature of the principal ship has required more time, political savvy, stress, accountability measures, legal expertise, and the ability to deal with health concerns. The Personal Construct theory by Kelly (1991) is based on an analysis on our perception of ourselves and our environment, and postulates that our personality is our own cognition about our self in relation to our environment. Personal construct theory suggests that people develops personal construct about how the world works. They then use this construct to make a sense of their observations and experiences. The theory postulates that the world we live in is the same for all of us, but the way we experience it is different for each individual. Likewise the school environment where individual principals work is the same but all depends on individual principals' management skills (Adams, 2006).

Reviewed studies have been documented, for example, Siadat and Ali (2013) in Canada showed that there was a positive relationship between Principals' personality characteristic of introversion and extroversion and performance dimensions, and 35% of score variance in leadership, human relationship and organizational dimension was explainable by extroversion and introversion scores. While the reviewed study was conducted in Canada, there is scanty literature which has been conducted in Kenya. Therefore the present study filled the gap in the existing body

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of knowledge. In addition, the reviewed study was quantitative in nature and it lacked qualitative aspect in it which could have provided findings as participants' feelings and experiences. Therefore, the present study adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods to fill in the gap in literature. Another study, Grants, and Fox, (2006) in Australia showed that low Neuroticism with high extraversion and conscientiousness predicted low stress exposure, physical ill health and job dissatisfaction whereas high neuroticism –low conscientiousness predicted higher stressors exposure, dysfunctional coping, physical ill health and job dissatisfaction, and lower problem-focused coping. Brunela and Schlotter (2011) in Europe also indicated that high cognitive test scores are likely to result not only from high cognitive skills but also from high motivation and adequate personality traits. In another study, Kenney (2013) in Ireland found that none of the other personality measures (conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience) were significant in the relationship with teacher stress and job satisfaction. The reviewed study above was done among primary school teachers and not Principals of high schools. Bakker, Dollard and Lewig (2006) in Netherland also showed that emotional exhaustion was uniquely predicted by emotional stability and intellect/autonomy; and personal accomplishment is predicted by extraversion and emotional stability. The study was on terminally ill patients and not high school principals therefore filled the gap in existing literature. Dumitru and Cozman (2011) in Nigeria reported that correlations between personality factors and stress both in concerns of perceived stress and level of subsequent stress symptomatology were identified. The reviewed study was conducted among nurses and not high school Principals whose nature and condition of work differs considerably.

Mustafa (2015) study in Kenya revealed that more than a half of the principals 64% had quit principal ship for other jobs, 72% of the principals reported that the extent of their stress is so stressful. In addition a report by the Kenya High Schools Heads Association (KESSHA) indicated that 67% of their deaths were as a result of heart attacks, high blood pressure, hypertension and other ailments triggered by stress (Awiti, 2014). The report further reiterated that principals were held responsible for student's performance and school management. This entails planning meetings with parents, teachers, and coordinating all development activities in their schools (KESSHA Conference Report, 2014).

In Homa Bay County of Kenya, there are reported cases of stressful experiences among high school principals. This has made some principals to opt out of their position of responsibilities. The changing environment of the learners, challenges of acquiring teaching and learning materials and blame for examination cheating and failure, creates stress on the principals because of being answerable on the school to all education stakeholders. All these seem to make the high school principals experience a lot of stress.

## 2. Methodology

This research study was based on a mixed method research approach which was used for collecting, analysing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Creswell, 2013). The Convergent parallel design was used in collecting both qualitative and quantitative data separately. The population of the study were 295 high school Principals in public high schools in Homa Bay County of Kenya. The study used Krejcie and Morgan's 1970 Table of determining sample size from a known population. For a population of two hundred and ninety five (295) according to the table, a sample size of one hundred and sixty nine (169). The Personality Questionnaire and Stress Management Questionnaires were used to collect data. This questionnaire contained 20 test items of which the Principals were expected to respond using a 5 likert scale of Strongly Agree=5, Agree =4, Undecided =3, Disagree=2 and Strongly Disagree= 1. The questionnaires were tested to 20 principals sampled from one neighbouring County to test if they captured the concept under investigation. This ensured content and face validity of the research instruments. A pilot study was conducted before the main study to ensure that the instruments were measuring what they intended to measure.

To test the hypothesis, for the responses on type A personality questionnaire for each respondents were summed up and the totals obtained. Since the questionnaire had 14 test items, on a 5 likert scale, the maximum score which could be obtained was 70 and the minimum score was 14. Therefore the mean scores on the responses were obtained for each participant. The same was done to the stress management questionnaire which had 25 test items on a five likert scale. The mean score was also obtained. This made the data to be at an internal scale. Hence parametric test (Pearson correlation) was used to analyse data. Therefore, a Pearson Product Moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between type A personality questionnaire and stress management.

## 3. Results & Discussions

To investigate type A personality traits, a questionnaire with fourteen (14) core aspects of personality type A traits was used. The traits used were; the Principals strong accent to key words in everyday life, doing more than one thing at a time, often feeling guilty if they use extra time to relax, involvement in great number of projects all at once, need to win in order to derive enjoyment from games and sports besides other behaviours. The response on these fourteen items on the principals' behaviour, feelings and actions were in form of Likert scale of 1–5 (1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3- Undecided, 4-Agree, 5- Strongly agree). The respondents were expected to respond on each statements based on their level of agreement or disagreement. Their responses were summarized as percentage frequencies and to

establish the index of the Principals' behaviour, feeling and actions, the means of the individual ranking on the items were calculated. The means obtained were therefore used as

an index for behaviour, feeling and action items as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Personality type A traits of the Principals (n = 169)

Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean
Strongly accent key words in everyday life	24 (14.2%)	97 (57.4%)	36 (21.3%)	9 (5.3%)	3 (1.8%)	2.2
Try to do more than one thing at a time (such as eat and read simultaneously)	27 (16.0%)	56 (33.1%)	23 (13.6%)	51 (30.2%)	12 (7.1%)	2.8
Often feel guilty if use extra time to relax	18 (10.7%)	49 (29.0%)	19 (11.3%)	60 (35.5%)	23 (13.6%)	3.1
Tend to get involved in great number of projects all at once	10 (5.9%)	72 (42.6%)	22 (13.0%)	50 (29.6%)	15 (8.9%)	2.9
Need to win in order to derive enjoyment from games and Sports	42 (24.9%)	64 (37.9%)	34 (20.1%)	15 (8.9%)	14 (8.3%)	2.4
Generally move, walk and eat rapidly	10 (5.9%)	58 (34.3%)	41 (24.3%)	48 (28.4%)	12 (7.1%)	3.0
Agree to take on too many responsibilities	22 (13.0%)	86 (50.9%)	28 (16.6%)	29 (17.2%)	4 (2.4%)	2.4
Detest waiting in a line or Queue	37 (21.9%)	33 (19.5%)	22 (13.1%)	55 (32.5%)	22 (13.0%)	3.0
Clench or pound the fist or use other gestures to emphasis their views	28 (16.6%)	60 (35.5%)	17 (10.1%)	40 (23.7%)	24 (14.2%)	2.8
Feel that things should be done now or be done quickly	66 (39.1%)	61 (36.1%)	27 (16.0%)	12 (7.1%)	3 (1.8%)	2.0
Must get things finished once started	87 (51.5%)	69 (40.8%)	5 (3.0%)	1 (0.6%)	7 (4.1%)	1.7
Anticipate others in conversation (nods, interrupts, finishes sentence for others)	15 (8.9%)	63 (37.3%)	45 (26.7%)	26 (15.4%)	20 (11.8%)	2.8
Try to do more than one thing at a time and thinks about what to do next	46 (27.2%)	63 (37.3%)	15 (8.9%)	26 (15.4%)	19 (11.2%)	2.5
Are vigorous and forceful in speech (use a lot of gestures)	32 (18.9%)	47 (27.8%)	34 (20.2%)	46 (27.2%)	10 (5.9%)	2.7

SA-strongly agree, A-agree, UD-undecided, D-disagree, SD-strongly disagree

The findings of the study in Table 1 show that majority of Principals in Homa Bay County feel that things should be done now or be done quickly. This fact was confirmed by 39.1% (66) of the respondents who strongly agreed to that statement and another 36.1% (61) who also agreed that things, when started should be accomplished immediately. This is in tandem with Carver and Smith (2010) in Miami United States of America who found out that most high school principals hold immediate and frequent stakeholders meetings and consultations in their schools as a way of resolving conflicts. Only a mere less than a tenth (8.9%) (15) of the respondent did not support the statement. The findings are in agreement with McManus, Keeling and Paice (2004) in United Kingdom who in their study found a strong association between personality traits and coping styles, as individuals with high rewards dependence were more inclined to engage in emotion focused coping while high rewards dependence were more inclined to engage in low emotion coping. However, 16.0% (27) of the principals who participated in the study remained undecided. On the same note, more than nine out of ten (strongly agreed: 51.5%; (87) agreed: 40.8% (69) respondents believed that they must get things finished once started. Only less than five percent (4.7%) (8) of the respondents held a different point of view. This statement received the least (mean = 1.7) rating, an indication that it had the largest number of respondents agreeing to it. This is in tandem with Ghamwari and Jamal (2013) in Lebanon who found out that, the individuals with maladaptive personality traits are at great risk of experiencing psychological distress as they are avoiding coping. These types of Principal can be at risk of contracting heart diseases, hypertension for they want to do everything all at the same time which cause a lot of pressure on them hence the cause of their stress. They should learn that people should only do what is realistically possible. There is need for these category of principal to be advised to take a rest or plan ahead of time to avoid last minute rush or beating tight deadlines.

To test the hypothesis that, "there is no statistically significant relationship between Types A personality trait and stress management among high school principals in

Homa Bay County". A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between the two variables. This was done by computing a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. It was used to establish whether there was any significant relationship between the two variables. The scores of Type A personality traits, as measured by personality traits questionnaire, was used as the independent variable, while principals' stress management was used as the explanatory variable. Table 2 below shows computed SPSS out of the Pearson product moment correlation.

From the computed SPSS output in Table 2, the study established a plausible negative ( $n=169$ ,  $r = -.337$ ) relationship between personality type 'A' trait and stress management. The analysis revealed a highly significant ( $p<0.05$ ) negative relationship between the two variables, with high level of personality type A trait associated with negative stress management. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. To get an idea of how much variance the two variables share, a coefficient of determination was computed. It was established that the two variables share,  $R^2 = .1135$ , of the variance scale which implied 11.35 per cent of their variance. This showed that there was a reasonable overlap between the two variables; implying that principals' personality type A traits alone help to explain about 11 per cent of the variance in respondents' scores and stress management scale. This was a reasonable amount of variance explained by only one independent variable. This is in agreement with Goswami (2014) who, found out that stress and burnout were found to be statistically significant predictors of job stress and burnout. This finding is also in tandem with Lee-Baggley, Preece and Delongis (2015) in Kenya who in his study found that type A personality principal are poor in managing stress. They clench their fist and are forceful as they talk. They normally do not take a no for an answer hence difficult to convince, this makes them more stressed in case they cannot get their way out. It is important that stress management strategy be put in place for those types of principals to help them relax and eased their pace of doing things.

**Table 2.** Correlations between Type A personality traits and Stress Management

		Personality Type A	Stress Management
Personality Type A	Pearson Correlation	1	-.337**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	169	169
Stress Management	Pearson Correlation	-.337**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	169	169

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.5 level (2-tailed).

Qualitatively the main themes emerged through verbatim excerpts from individual principals in their stress management skills. It is these duties which have concordance to their abilities to manage their stresses. To ascertain the relationship between type A personality traits and stress management, qualitative data was obtained from the interview transcripts and was analysed on how the principals with type A personality manage their stressful situations in their work environment. The principals with type A personality are those who are impatient, wants things done immediately, can't wait for long in a queue, eat and talk at the same time, competitive for positions and do many things all at the same time. Findings from the analysed data indicated that most principals reported that they adopted multi-tasking to manage their stress. In multi-tasking this meant that the principals had to undertake variety of tasks at the same time in order to meet deadline. For example some excerpts from the participants were:-

"Am responsible for implementing educational policies in the school, keeping track of all activities within the school, ensuring that the school is running smoothly, motivating and encouraging both the learners and teachers. I have to ensure that the students are disciplined, you know the positive school climate exist because of the principal and not by chance" (Principal, 5)

From the excerpts it was noted that the principal have a lot of responsibility and must multi-task in order to make ends meet. This means that for a principal to manage the school properly they must do more than one thing at a time. This finding resonates Harlow (2008) in United States of America whose study found out that role stress and task stress contributed most to the relationship between personality type, stress and job satisfaction. Similarly another principal on her side responded that:-

".....it is good for a human being to express his/her feeling and I am not an exceptional. As a principal the other stake holders must know my feelings about something. I also ensure that those feelings are adopted and implanted. (Principal, 4)

This response means that the principal 4 is hands on in her management of the school. This finding is in tandem with Brunnella and Schlotter (2011) whose results indicated that high cognitive test score are likely to result not only from high cognitive skills but also from motivation and adequate personality traits. Similarly Dumitru and Cozman (2011) in Nigeria noted that a high intensity of psychological symptoms following stress was associated with low social presence, low empathy, low independence, low good impression, low orientation and low psychological institution. This means that principals with type A personality are poor stress managers. They do not engage in strategic mechanisms to manage their stresses.

Another principal reported that:-

"I have to attend to parents or visitors to the school at the same time I have to see to it that the classes are on and the

support staffs are also engaged. This calls for me to move and monitor each and every section of the school at the same time. I can't just do one thing at a time. I have to be engaged in several activities in order to enable the school run smoothly. If I over concentrate only on one activity, I may lose track of the happenings in the school (Principal, 2).

From the excerpt it is evident that principal 2 has a lot of duties to do and must multi-task in order to make ends meet. This is in agreement with Ortega, Brenner and Leather (2007) who found out that personality type A traits were directly related to work stress, coping strategies, tension and burn out, and they were negatively related to overall job satisfaction. These means that type A personality have very poor stress management strategies.

From the above excerpts, it is evident that type A personality trait involve in multi-tasking as they undertake many activities at the same time, this makes them think a lot and work without much relaxation leading to poor stress management strategies. This finding is in agreement with Siadat and Ali (2013) whose studies found positive relationship between principals' personality characteristics of introversion and extroversion and performance dimensions. Generally from the above findings, most of the principals interviewed concurred that they had to do more than one thing at a time further affirms that principals who exhibit type A personality always have a task list of things to do within and outside the school. It is evident that apart from the normal classroom teaching, high school principals have other duties which they have to do and the task must be accomplished for the success of the school. They have to attend to meetings called by the Education office, Board of management meetings, Parents associations, Ensure that the resolutions passed are implemented successfully, Monitoring the teaching staff, teach their own subjects, this means that type A personality traits are always stressed and for that matter, they have poor stress management techniques hence become prone to diseases such as depression, heart attack and hypertension.

## 4. Conclusions

Principals who exhibit type A personality characteristics are susceptible to more stress and are highly likely to develop disease because they get overwhelmed with responsibilities and in most cases stop doing things for themselves and have no time for leisure or relaxation. They want things done and concluded immediately because they are naturally impatient. Thus the principals with type A personality were relatively poor stress managers and are therefore susceptible to effects of stress. The study recommends that The Teachers Service Commission in appointing high school Principals should carry out personality test on would be principals. This would enable them appoint principals who could manage their stress well and hence manage their schools effectively. This is because the study found out that personality traits influence stress management among the principals. The

study limitation was that some Principals were quite suspicious about the confidentiality of the data released and the researcher had to assure them of total confidentiality, and that the study findings were meant for research purpose only. Future studies could focus on the influence of other factors on stress management among high school principals.

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