Educators’ Experiences of Managing Workplace Stress and Burnout in a Post-Secondary Vocational Institution

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Abstract: The research title of this study is ‘Educators’ Experiences of Managing Workplace Stress and Burnout in a Post-Secondary Vocational Institution’. The research questions driving this study are ‘what stressors do you encounter at your place of work’ and ‘what coping mechanisms do you use to mitigate workplace stress’. The methodology which was deemed most suitable to conduct this study is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith 1990). A total of five lecturers from three different institutes were recruited purposively, and voluntarily, to sit for one individual, in-depth, and semi-structured interview. The data collected from the interviews was transcribed verbatim and analysed using the typical IPA analysis process. The two superordinate themes of ‘stressors’ and ‘coping mechanisms’, together with their respective subthemes, were chosen as the most suitable to represent the participants’ experience.

Keywords: Workplace stressors; burnout; coping mechanisms; resilience; mental health; wellbeing; interpretative phenomenological research

Introduction

Background of the Study

The teaching profession has one of the highest reported levels of stress and burnout worldwide (Yong and Yue 2007). The causes of stress and burnout in educational settings are several and undoubtedly influenced by personal characteristics. Notwithstanding this, research has pinpointed several possible causes which can range from relatively high levels of student oppositionality (Clunies-Ross, Little, and Kienhuis 2008), to high workloads and tense work environments (Collie, Shapka, and Perry 2012), to student diversity (Mizzi 2018). Of particular interest was the study of Roloff and Brown (2011) who noted the fact that teaching seems to infiltrate educators’ personal and family time, with many educators planning and grading after school/college hours. This lack of divide between work and home is seen as a major psychological burden which may in turn expose educators to burnout and high levels of stress.

Exposure to relatively high levels of stress on a regular basis seems to push many educators to find ways to cope. Coping mechanisms are as diverse as the causes of stress. A select number of educators turn to one’s faith and meditation in an attempt to cope (Bousquet 2012). Others focus on meeting their basic needs of sleep and good nutrition, with others turning to humour to buffer them from their workplace stressors (Kozol 2007).

Whilst the abovementioned coping mechanisms are within one’s own locus of control, a thought-provoking study by Price and McCallum (2015) seems to identify other factors that are less so. More specifically, factors such as age, experience in the field, and gender are said to mitigate or concurrently exacerbate educator stress.
Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore in depth what workplace stressors and coping mechanisms MCAST lecturers encounter and utilise. The research questions driving this study are ‘what stressors do you encounter at your place of work’ and ‘what coping mechanisms do you use to mitigate workplace stress’.

Significance of the Study

This study has three main goals. Firstly, it aims to give a voice to MCAST lecturers as to what workplace stressors they have encountered or are currently still experiencing. Secondly, it aims to highlight what personal and organisational strategies are working to mitigate stress, as well as strategies that may not be effective. Thirdly, it aims to encourage more research in the fields of both ‘stress and coping’ and ‘vocational education’ in the local context. Ultimately, it is the researcher’s hope that this platform may serve to be yet another step towards improving the workplace environment of educators at MCAST for the benefit of not only lecturers but students and administrators alike.

Literature Review

Background

Numerous factors, most of which are explored in the forthcoming sections of this chapter, seem to intertwine to cause a phenomenon known as the ‘revolving door’. In this context, the term refers to the phenomenon in which several qualified educators exit the field for another after just a few years of service (Darling-Hammond 2015). At the height of the economic peak in Malta (pre-Covid-19), the local context offers one such example, in that a considerable number of educators chose to leave the field to pursue their careers in the technology, gaming, or financial sectors, amongst others. Closer to home, a few lecturing colleagues at MCAST have alternatively chosen to move on to administrative positions both within MCAST and outside of it, citing the ‘need for something different’.

Defining Burnout

The term as we know it today was coined by Herbert J. Freudenberger in his article ‘The staff burnout syndrome in alternative institutions’ (1975). The term came to reflect his numerous experiences working with clinicians who had an overwhelming number of patients to care for. His later work encompasses the holistic nature of burnout by stating:

*Burnout, manifests itself in various symptoms of physical, mental, behavioural and/or emotional nature. It is also accompanied by a feeling of being overloaded, by a loss of motivation that at one point served to be a major stimulus, and a shift of attitude towards the residents [others] and oneself.*

(Freudenberger 1986: 247)

Of equal importance is the work of Farber (1983) who emphasised both the uniqueness of the burnout experience, as well as the fact that burnout is a ‘process’ rather than an ‘event’. In other words, burnout is qualitative in nature and often the result of a series of factors that impact the individual over a period of time.

Finally, one cannot attempt to define burnout in the modern arena without citing the work of modern-day pioneer Professor Christina Maslach. Maslach is responsible for the world-renowned ‘Maslach Burnout Inventory’ (Masclah 2016), the most commonly used basis
of burnout self-assessment in the West. At its foundation, her work posits that burnout is a combination of crushing exhaustion, pessimism, detachment, as well as a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment (Clay 2018).

**Stressors, Burnout, and Education**

The causes of stress and burnout in educational settings are numerous and undoubtedly influenced by personal characteristics (Faber 1983). Notwithstanding this, research has pinpointed several possible causes which can range from relatively high levels of student oppositionality (Clunies-Ross, Little and Kienhuis 2008), to high workloads and tense work environments (Collie, Shapka and Perry 2012), to student diversity and behaviour (Mizzi 2018).

**Student-Educator Relationships**

The nature of the student-educator relationship has been found to both mitigate stress for educators as well possibly exacerbate it (Jennings and Greenberg 2009; Milatz, Lüftenegger and Schober 2015). More specifically, positive relationships based on mutual respect between students and educators were found to provide a sense of accomplishment and professional satisfaction, which in turn improved educator wellbeing. Inversely, negative relationships characterised by misbehaviour, conflict, and a general disrespect for the student-educator relationship were found to be one cause of educator workplace stress (Aloe, Shisler, Norris, Nickerson and Rinker 2014). The findings of a local study by Mizzi (2018) seem to corroborate the negative impact of unhealthy student-educator relationships: “[educators] expressed their concern at the lack of discipline and unsatisfactory student demeanour. As a result, many participants admitted to feeling disheartened, anxious, and even scared of some of their students” (Mizzi 2018: 34).

**Student Diversity**

Besides the student-educator relationship, a possible stressor that appears in the literature on the subject is the impact of student diversity. Culturally diverse classrooms, as opposed to cultural homogenous ones, seem to create stress and feelings of low self-efficacy amongst educators (Glock, Kleen and Morgenroth 2019). Furthermore, the academic diversity of students within the same classroom has also been shown to be a stressor (Mizzi 2018). A foreign study which recruited an incredible 8,000 educators supports this, stating that: ‘Significant stressors educators identified were lack of sufficient time to plan classes, support students... as well as the time involved in developing and implementing Individualized Education Programs for increasing numbers of students with additional learning requirements’ (Froese-Germain 2014, p. 2).

**Work-Home Divide**

The study by Roloff and Brown (2011) noted that teaching seems to infiltrate educators’ personal and family time, with many educators planning and grading after school/ college hours. This lack of divide between work and home is seen as a major psychological burden which may in turn expose educators to burnout and high levels of stress. The idea that educators’ work spills into their own personal time is further corroborated by the work of Bousquet (2012), who states: “On the surface, teacher schedules appear to provide adequate time for family, exercise, eating, and sleep. However, the realities of the profession are far different” (Bousquet 2012: 8).
Age and Experience

If one were to focus on the vocational teaching environment and the stressors within it, the work by Croom (2003) is ideal for several reasons. Firstly is the fact that the participants were all educators specialising in agriculture, with MCAST itself having a whole institute dedicated to this area of study. Secondly is the relatively large number of educators recruited, a total of 248. Lastly is the significant finding that the more experience the educator has in the field the less symptoms of stress and burnout they reported. This finding seems to be supported in a more modern study in which educators who had less than 5 years’ experience were found to have higher rates of exhaustion (Fisher 2011).

Alternately, the study of Nuri, Demirok and Direktör (2017) seems to contradict the notion that the older and more experienced the educator is, the less stressed and burnt out they are. In fact, their study points to the opposite being true, that is, that educators with less than 5 years of teaching experience reported ‘medium’ levels of workplace stress, whilst those with over 10 years of experience reported ‘high’ levels of stress. It seems that whilst age is an influencing factor, there are contradictory views as to its actual impact.

Wage and Work Environment

Another study focusing on vocational educational stressors is the work of Chenevey et al. (2008), who cites high levels of responsibility, coupled with a low pay and stressful interactions with stakeholders as contributors to the stress and burnout of vocational educators. Such a study seems to exemplify some of the factors that Collie, Shapka and Perry’s (2012) work highlighted when it specifically cites ‘high workloads’ and ‘tense work environments’ as contributors to stress and burnout.

Coping Mechanisms

Being exposed to relatively high levels of stress on a regular basis seems to force many educators to find ways to cope. Coping can be defined as any thoughts and/or behaviours that one mobilises to manage or eliminate stressors (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Coping mechanisms are as varied as the causes of stress, however, they are often classified under one of four categories, namely as either ‘problem focused’, ‘emotion focused’, ‘avoidance focused’, and ‘meaning/appraisal focused’ coping (Hardy, Jones and Gould 1996).

‘Problem focused coping’ (Algorani and Gulpa 2020; Hardy, Jones and Gould 1996) involves by actions or thoughts which address the problem directly. Thus, this category of coping may include planning, prioritising, and better management of resources. On the other hand, ‘emotion focused coping’ seeks to address the negative emotions that are present and may include humour and personal therapy, amongst other such actions. ‘Avoidance focused coping’ involves thoughts or behaviours that aim to remove the person under stress from the stressful situation physically and psychologically. Avoidance-focused coping thus relies on ‘distraction’ and ‘escape’. Finally, ‘appraisal focused/meaning focused coping’ involves reevaluating the stressor in an attempt to find ‘a why to bear any how’ (Frankl, 1985, p. 40).

The Support of Colleagues

The support of colleagues has been identified as one way educators cope with the stressors of the workplace (Cancio, Ross, Sarup, Mary, Bev and Mei 2018; Yin et al. 2016). Colleague support may contribute to both ‘problem focused coping’ and the ‘emotional focused coping’ of the educator. More specifically, a colleague may for example offer their insight into how to best to plan the academic year or in how to deal with challenging behaviour. Alternatively, a work colleague may also offer a listening ear and empathetic response when the ‘going gets tough’.
Collegiality was also confirmed to be one way through which educators coped with workplace stress in the work of Mizzi (2018). Mizzi’s (2018) study identifies somewhat of a correlation between collegiality and coping, in that if collegiality is present it aids educators to cope, whilst its absence can in and of itself be a stressor. The work of Mizzi (2018) also singles out ‘staffrooms’ as being one such place where collegiality is manifested; it stands to be seen whether this is also the case for MCAST lecturers.

Counselling

The use of counselling services has also been identified as a possible coping mechanism utilised by educators to mitigate stress and prevent burnout (Cancio, Ross, Sarup, Mary, Bev and Mei 2018). Like the aforementioned coping mechanism ‘collegiality’, counselling can be seen as a ‘problem focused strategy’ as well as an ‘emotion focused’ one. Counselling may, for instance, provide a problem-focused way of coping by providing educators information on student oppositionality, ways to motivate students, and better time management strategies. Alternatively, it can be ‘emotion focused’ as it offers a safe space in which educators can gauge and improve their emotional wellbeing.

Counselling may also be a mechanism for ‘appraisal focused/meaning focused coping’. This may be exemplified if counselling takes on a ‘reframing approach’ or an ‘existential approach’. In a nutshell, the former is an attempt to see a particular situation from a different perspective, whilst the latter is an examination of one’s life choices and their implications (Wong 2010). Irrespective of the slant taken during counselling, it has been shown that counselling educators has a positive effect on not just the educators themselves, but also their students. In a sense, one can see counselling as possibly being ‘restorative’ for the educator’s multiple relationships at work and at home (Giovazolias and Kourkoutas 2015).

Exercise

According to the literature, exercise is yet another coping strategy used by educators to mitigate the effects of workplace stress (Austin, Shah and Muncer 2005; Cancio, Ross, Sarup, Mary, Bev and Mei 2018). Furthermore, one may view exercise as a ‘positive avoidance strategy’ as it often involves removing oneself physically and psychologically from the stressor. Rather interestingly was the finding that educators who exercised reported being less stressed than does who did not; the opposite was also found to be true, in that those who did not exercise reported the highest stress levels (Austin, Shah and Muncer 2005).

The benefits of exercise in enhancing one’s wellbeing are well-studied and documented (WHO 2018). The relationship between stress and exercise is examined thoroughly in the work of Tsatsoulis and Fountoulakis (2006: 1), which ultimately highlights ‘the beneficial effects of regular exercise in preventing or ameliorating the metabolic and psychological comorbidities induced by chronic stress.’ As such, one may view exercise as both a metaphorical “antidote” and “vaccine” against stress.

Mindfulness and Yoga

Mindfulness, together with yoga, seem to a certain degree a combination of the two previously mentioned coping strategies, that is counselling and exercise. In fact, it has been stated that counselling interventions using mindfulness improve well-being and reduce psychopathology (Brown, Marquis and Guiffrida 2013). Furthermore, yoga, and more specifically ‘Hatha yoga’, focuses on development of the body and physical fitness (Smith, Greer, Sheets and Watson 2011).

The work of Harris, Jennings, Katz, Abenavoli, and Greenberg (2016) sheds light on the efficacy of yoga and mindfulness in promoting stress management and wellbeing in
educators whilst at work. In this study, which managed to recruit a total of sixty-four participants, yoga and mindfulness was practiced four times a week for a total of sixteen weeks. The efficacy of these interventions was assessed in three ways—online self-reporting, in-person physiological assessment, and self-administered saliva collection. The authors concluded that the programme had a small to moderate positive effect on reducing time urgency and burnout, promoting classroom efficacy, and improving self-reported and physiological indicators of wellbeing. Both the results as well as the high validity of the study make a strong case for yoga and mindfulness as effective coping strategies.

**Work-Home Division**

If one were to once again consider that one major stressor reported by educators is the lack of a ‘home- work divide’ (Bousquet 2012; Roloff and Brown 2011), attempts to create such a division would seem an effective coping mechanism. In fact, studies in which educators have reported doing so have shown promise in mitigating workplace stress (McCallum and Price 2010; Paquette and Rieg 2016). This is yet another clear manifestation of ‘problem solving coping’ with the lack of work and home divide as ‘the problem’, with mechanisms directed at creating this division forming the basis of coping.

Mechanisms to encourage a clear work-home divide are numerous, yet time management is probably the most regularly featured. For successful time management to be implemented, several considerations must be made with regard to prioritising, delegating, and scheduling, amongst others. The educator must consider what the most important tasks to complete first are and, alternatively, which tasks can wait before being attended to. Furthermore, there must be a clear attempt to share the workload where possible, and a fixed, pre-planned time and day for work and leisure (Claessens and Roe 2007).

**Method and Methodology**

**The Qualitative Method**

The qualitative method is deemed best suited to explore the research questions ‘what are the workplace stressors experienced in a post-secondary vocational institution’ and ‘what coping strategies do educators utilise to deal with workplace stress and prevent burnout’. Researchers who opt for a qualitative method engage in a pursuit for subjective realities and behaviour within a particular context (Queirós, Faria and Almeida 2017). For the purpose of this study, the ‘subjective realities’ are the workplace experiences of post-secondary educators, whilst the ‘context’ is MCAST, Malta’s largest vocational institution.

The advantages of using a qualitative methodology for the purpose of this study are numerous. Firstly, there is the greater flexibility and exploratory nature of the qualitative method relative to the quantitative method (Blackstone 2012). Considering that this study undertakes a journey both into the educator’s personal workplace experiences, as well as their subjective methods to deal with workplace stress and burnout, the exploratory nature of the qualitative method is best suited in this scenario.

Another strength of qualitative research that readily lends itself to this study is that whilst levels of stress can be quantified, the in-depth, personal experiences as to what causes such stress, the individual impacts of workplace stress on daily living, and the private ways educators deal with workplace stress, cannot. As this study is concerned with searching for the multiple realities of educators—a non-quantifiable variable—the qualitative method is superior and better suited (Creswell 2013).
A third strength of a qualitative methodology is that since qualitative research is participant-guided, it also gives a voice to the population being studied (Flick 2018). In doing so, it provides an academic platform through which to vocalize their likes, dislikes, concerns, failures, and successes. It is the researcher's hope that this platform may serve to be yet another step towards improving the workplace environment of educators at MCAST for the benefit of not only lecturers but students and administrators alike.

Qualitative Methodology: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The qualitative methodology used to conduct this research study is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This approach was developed by Professor Jonathan Smith (1996) and was initially used in studies pertaining to health psychology. A cornerstone of IPA is the search for participants' 'lived experience' and consequently bringing the 'essence of their experience' to light (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, p. 23).

IPA is constructed using the three major pillars of 'phenomenology', 'hermeneutics', and 'idiography'. Interestingly, as Smith (2004) himself states, he is not the originator of these three concepts which in fact pre-date Smith by several years. Rather, he is the person who envisioned their merging. Phenomenology is the study of experiences, that is to say, a phenomenon, and consequently seeking to bring them to the attention of the readers (Ekeke and Ekeopara 2010). Hermeneutics, on the other hand, is the art of interpretation. IPA, in fact, has is doubly hermeneutic as researchers interpret the experiences of their participants, who in turn are also giving an interpretation of what they passed through (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009). Finally, idiography is the intense study of small populations: “… instead of studying a thousand rats for one hour each or a hundred rats for ten hours each the investigator is more likely to study one rat for a thousand hours” (Skinner 1963: 21).

The main strength of IPA relative to other approaches is that it gives a lot more in-depth data collection and analysis than the general inductive approach. The latter often only permits researchers to interpret raw data collected as far as the findings are relevant to the objective and goal of the researcher's study (Alase 2017). It is this freedom and depth which makes it best suited to study both personal experiences of stress and coping mechanisms utilise.

Participants and Recruitment

Participants were chosen using purposive sampling as opposed to random sampling. The first criteria the participants had to meet in order to take part in the study was that they had to be lecturers at MCAST for at least one year. In addition to this, they had to be able to share their own personal experiences about workplace stress and how they coped. The second criteria required them to voluntarily consent to the audio recording of the interview; in the absence of this, the data analysis could not be done and thus the interview would have been rendered unusable. The final sample consisted of five lecturers from three different institutes at MCAST.

The first stage of recruitment consisted of the researcher gaining approval from MCAST's ethics board. After permission was granted, an email with the study’s information letter and consent form was attached and sent to lecturers of different institutes. These sheets provided a detailed explanation of what the research process entailed, as well as the means of them contacting the researcher if they wished to take part in my research. The participants who were willing to take part very kindly contacted the researcher and the interviews took place in an environment they deemed comfortable and safe.
Data Collecting Tool

The main aim of an IPA methodology is to understand the participants' lived experience and thus the participants' own narratives are of utmost importance. In this regard, IPA often employs open-ended, semi-structured interviews as the preferred data collecting tool (Magnusson and Marecek 2015; Reid, Flowers and Larkin 2005). Due to this fact, as well as the strengths highlighted in the subsequent paragraph, open ended, one-to-one, semi-structured interviews will be utilised as this study's sole data collecting tool.

The main advantages of one-to-one, open-ended, semi-structured interviews are, firstly, that they permit first-hand exposure to first-hand accounts of the participants' subjective realities. Secondly is the fact that such interviews allow the researcher to both clarify as well as follow up on important points that might emerge during the interview, thus enabling a truer interpretation of the lived experience of the interviewee (Smith 2004). Thirdly, open ended, semi-structured interviews encourage a bond to be developed between interviewer and interviewee, possibly furthering the depth at which the participants are comfortable speaking and ultimately the depth of the study itself. Finally, the fact that one-to-one, semi-structured interviews are heavily participant-guided grants the participants a voice, as well as giving them a space in which to reflect about the experience they are recounting (Reid, Flowers and Larkin 2005).

Interviews

All five interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams and carried out in the English language. The participants were first briefed as regards their rights. The brief included a review and the signing of the consent form, as well as a period in which the participants could ask any questions pertaining to the study and their participation in it. After this stage, the interviews began as did the audio recording. The audio recordings were later used to transcribe the interviews verbatim. The participants were also debriefed after the interview.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the interviews data began with a separate analysis of each interview before eventually proceeding to an entire participant group-level analysis that brought together data from all interviews to form an ultimate table of themes (Callary, Rathwell and Young 2015). The first step of the process entailed an authentic transcription and, in some cases, translation of the interviews. Only after this step was diligently completed did the researcher immerse himself in the data through multiple readings of the said transcripts. Such immersion is important so as ‘...to enter a phase of active engagement with the data’ (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009: 82).

The second step of the process entailed the researcher writing wide-ranging notes in the left-hand margin of each transcript. The main aim of this step was to condense the often lengthy responses into manageable and, more importantly, meaningful portions (Alase 2017). The third step of data analysis involved the researcher revisiting the transcripts and the newly written notes with the intention of identifying and listing emerging themes in each individual transcript. The emerging themes were at this stage tentative and written in the right-hand margin of the transcript (Murray and Chamberlain 1999).

The fourth step involved what some refer to as a ‘condensation process’. This involves the writing of all emergent themes on a separate sheet of paper, with each separate paper representing a separate interview. The research then seeks to condense the themes by making associations and thus grouping emergent themes together. Themes that are not able to be grouped are left as is, more so if they are interpreted as being very indicative
of the true essence of the participants’ experience. The final process of this step involves deciding which themes are ‘superordinate’ themes and which are ‘subthemes’. The principle for the selection of a superordinate theme was the clarity with which such themes manifested themselves. Similarly, subthemes also highlighted salient themes in the study, but to a lesser extent than the superordinate themes (Murray and Chamberlain 1999).

The fifth and final step involved a repetition of the fourth step, with the difference that instead of the condensation process happening on a micro level (the individual transcript) it was done on a macro level (all transcripts together). More specifically, this involved writing all the superordinate and subthemes of each individual transcript onto one sheet and attempting to condense through assimilation and grouping once again. The final product is a ‘master list’ of themes which is used to construct a ‘master table of themes’ (Figure 1). The master table of themes often has verbatim statements to support each theme in the master table of themes (Callary, Rathwell, and Young 2015).

**Ethical Considerations**

The first step to ensure ethical practice involved requesting the MCAST research committee to review the study; permission to proceed was duly communicated towards the middle of November 2020. Following the study’s approval, the researcher sent out an email invite to potential participants. To protect participants from the potential distress of giving uninformed consent, the researcher attached both an information sheet and a consent form. These forms listed the participant’s rights and information about what participation entailed. As an additional safeguard, before the start of each interview, the researcher read and explained their rights to them. Among the rights explained to them was their right to withdraw at any time during the interview, with any of information collected at that point destroyed. Only after these steps were done did the interview start. The participants were therefore informed of their rights on at least two separate occasions, thus ensuring—to a high degree—that participants gave informed consent for participation in the study.

Furthermore, the researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity of participants by using pseudonyms and not disclosing interview transcripts. Additionally, the researcher felt the need to disguise certain details that might have compromised the identity of the participants, judging by the relatively small population of MCAST lecturers. Audio recordings were conducted in a private place, were password-protected, and will be destroyed after publication. In addition, all participants who requested a copy of the finished dissertation will be provided one in either soft or hard copy form after publication.

Finally, as a back-up measure which ultimately was not needed, the researcher had the details of MCAST’s psychosocial team available. The participants were also debriefed after the interview.
Results

Introduction

Below is the table of themes that emerged as a result of the IPA analysis process. Direct quotations were used to faithfully demonstrate the lived experience of workplace stress and coping as an MCAST lecturer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Stressors</th>
<th>Theme 2: Coping mechanisms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong>²</td>
<td><strong>Exercise</strong>²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student oppositionality³</td>
<td>“Outside of work I walk, do yoga...” (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“… when you go to a lecture and students don’t want to do anything and it’s a constant struggle to pass on information…” (A)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student diversity</strong>³</td>
<td>“It also helps me when I work out... I either go running or going to the gym, exercising to cool down, start afresh…” (I)</td>
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<td>“I teach various students, in various units, at various levels.” (I)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inadequate work environment</strong>²</td>
<td><strong>Professional development &amp; therapy</strong>²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“… organisational stress... going to a lecture room and finding no projector and that not everything is working... shifting rooms because there is raining coming in from the windows. For me this is stress because obviously I believe it diminishes our professionalism.” (A)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“… [I] go to therapy and supervision…” (A)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Colleagues as stressors</strong>²</td>
<td><strong>Personal characteristics as buffers</strong>²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“People do create stress... having IVs not sending you work on time... you have to wait and explain to students that ‘I did my job, but I don’t have the response from the IV’. That is very frustrating, because at the end of the day we are the ones facing the students.” (A)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“For me major stress is an adrenaline rush and I do not collapse... for me it’s this adrenaline rush of ‘fight’ no option for ‘flight’.” (A)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Sometimes colleagues unintentionally burden me excessively with their issues, both work-related and personal. I am quite a good listener and as a result people seem to want to confide in me.” (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I possess a lot of grit” (S)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“What’s important is perspective. If you go down the spiral of negativity, it’s always hard to get back out but if you’re positive, erm, things can be easily tackled. You have to be positive.” (S)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unfair treatment&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Work satisfaction&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>“... Recently I was not paid for something I sacrificed a lot of time for. Now they informed me that I will be paid but I went through hell…. There was a build-up of stress, a build-up of anger, frustration I started to withdraw, not talk to colleagues… I was treated unfairly.” (S)</td>
<td>“What helps me a lot... I love teaching... so when I am teaching, I actually forget about stress!” (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The satisfaction of feeling that I did a good job helps balance my stress out” (M)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stress of online lecturing&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Outside space&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I come from a background in which all we have is human contact, so if you take that away from me its like taking away half my tools, or three-fourths of my tools.” (A)</td>
<td>“I love being in the countryside, it helps me a lot.” (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“One of my current stressors is the sheer number of lectures I have to plan. I usually deliver face to face in class, now I have to develop PowerPoints, extra work so that I can deliver online.” (D)</td>
<td>“It helps me a lot to be in open spaces with nature” (I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think the greatest stress I have experienced during my time at MCAST was the stress of going online. I think that was my biggest stress!” (I)</td>
<td>“I feel like I can get lost in the open area I am in” (I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“It is frustrating switching on your camera and all you see is initials or photos of the students.” (I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Due to Covid... I don’t have that contact [with colleagues], you feel a bit alone, lost.” (S)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics as stressors</td>
<td>Collegiality</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I am a person who… likes to get things done… so I don’t have to stay worrying about it. I place a lot of pressure on myself because of this. I also put a lot of pressure on myself due to my perfectionist tendencies.” (C)</td>
<td>“Opinions of colleagues I trust, people I know will give me good honest advice… that is a stress reliever for me. It gives me reassurance and allows me to move on.” (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t want to let my students down, like in one way or another I don’t want to let my boss down.” (I)</td>
<td>“Basically, I consider myself lucky that I share a staffroom with people who care. I share a staffroom where some of my colleagues aren’t just colleagues, but I consider them as friends.” (I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am quite a pleaser by nature. Trying to please my colleagues, my bosses and my students is very stressful sometimes” (M)</td>
<td>“…Seeing a friend there [in the staffroom] makes it easier… the time we spend at college… it gives you balance. I feel that I am not alone. I feel that if I need support, my friends who are also my colleagues are going to support me. For me that is a blessing.” (I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I sometimes speak to colleagues, fellow staff members, sometimes you know you are very frustrated and angry, you have a chat and you realise that you took a load off and you have this new energy and you are ready to go again. It’s all a matter of perspective.” (S)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The institute I form part of… we view ourselves as a family. You know that you are part of something. There is a core… and we take care of each other. Knowing I am part of that… gives me strength.” (S)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Subjects of management

“We had quite a few directors, ok, and every time a director changes... it was basically in short periods of time, it feels, at least to me... that I had to prove myself from the very beginning... it made me feel like this person doesn’t know me...” (I)

“Recently my stress increased, I think it was mostly due to a change in management” (M)

Support of management

“On an institute level... I think we really appreciate the support we have from management. If I have a problem... they listen to me... you don’t find this everywhere! Even the fact that they give me guidance.” (C)

“It’s nice to feel that the boss is there.” (M)

“When it is too much for me to bear, I discuss, I discuss with people who are in management, I report to them, my directors and deputies. They are always very supportive to be honest, they have always assisted me.” (S)

Experience as a buffer

“Experience made me perceive the situations I encountered differently. In the past it used to be red flags and alarms immediately, but today I am like ‘this is happening again’, I know how to mitigate this so I am fine!” (S)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Table of themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>(^1)Superordinate theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>(^2)Master theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(^3)Subtheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>( ) Participants: A= Alex; S= Simon; I= Irene; M=Mark; C= Catherine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

The final participant sample consisted of a total of 5 lecturers, 3 female and 2 males, who worked at 3 different institutes. All lecturers had been employed by MCAST on a full-time basis for more than 5 years, with most having more than 10 years’ experience. To maintain anonymity, each lecturer was assigned a pseudonym.

Discussion of Themes and Reflexivity

It was concluded that the participants’ experience of workplace stress and coping could be best conveyed using two superordinate themes. More specifically, these were ‘stressors’ and ‘Coping mechanisms’. As represented in the above table of themes, each superordinate theme had corresponding major theme, and in some instances, even subthemes.

The proximity of the researcher to the participants and their context, given that I am also an MCAST lecturer, was recognised. This proximity, if not acknowledged, could have easily
tainted the authenticity of the interviews and subsequently the IPA analysis itself. To avoid such a scenario, a process of bracketing was undertaken prior to the interviews themselves. Whilst in all fairness it is very difficult for researchers to fully detach their experiences from that of their participants, IPA analysis accounts for this. More specifically, IPA has at its cornerstone an appreciation for a double hermeneutic: interpreting participants’ experiences through one’s own interpretations of the events.

### Stressors

#### Students

As regards to workplace stressors mentioned by participants, students were among the first to be mentioned. More specifically, ‘student oppositionality’ and ‘student diversity’ seemed to be catalysts for stress accumulation. In fact, ‘when you go to a lecture and students don’t want to do anything and it’s a constant struggle to pass on information...’ (A) was used to convey the former, whilst ‘I teach various students, in various units, at various levels’ (I) was used to convey the latter.

Regarding student oppositionality, literature reviewed seems to confirm it as a common stressor of some educators’ experiences. Interestingly, whilst the work of Aloe, Shisler, Norris, Nickerson and Rinker (2014) and Mizzi (2018) seemed to portray student oppositionality as conflictual and based on disrespectful actions, the participants in this study portrayed ‘oppositionality’ as a lack of motivation and engagement with the learning process. Similarly, when it came to student diversity as a stressor, this was also referred to in the literature reviewed, however, the participants’ experiences differed from the experiences stated in the work of Glock, Kleen and Morgenroth (2019) and Froese-Germain (2014). The main difference between the authors cited and the findings of this study is that whilst the authors cited ‘cultural diversity’ and ‘academic difficulties’ as ‘diversity’, this study seems to point to the reality of a lecturer teaching the lowest academic level and the highest academic level at the college, sometimes right after each other, in the same day as ‘diversity’. It is understandable that both preparing for and lecturing on such a continuum is highly challenging (Distel 2013)

#### Inadequate Work Environment

The second stressor identified was entitled ‘inadequate work environment’. The participant who shared this spoke of the stress at sometimes not having a fully equipped/fully functional lecture room in which to work: “...going to a lecture room and finding no projector and that not everything is working... shifting rooms because there is rain coming in from the windows...(A)”. Furthermore, it seemed that besides the inconvenience of the environment lacking certain basics, it was also taken as a lack of appreciation for the profession: “For me this is stress because, obviously, I believe it diminishes our professionality”. (A)

Whilst the literature reviewed did allude to the work environment being a stressor, the emphasis was on the high levels of responsibility and frequent interactions with stakeholders as the source of stress, rather than the inadequacy of the environment per se (Collie, Shapka and Perry 2012). The work of Meurs and Perrewé (2011) serves to compound the idea of the inadequacy of the environment as an issue. In fact, it states that stress comes about through the perceived imbalance between the demands and the resources available to meet the said demands. The analogy of attempting to drive long distances with an unreliable car comes to mind and concurrently the anxiety the driver most probably feels at the prospect of breaking down.
Colleagues as Stressors

Yet another stressor identified by two of the participants of the study were their colleagues. One participant stated that there were specific instances were working with colleagues was stressful, as in the instance of ‘verification’: ‘having IVs not sending you work on time… you have to wait and explain to students that ‘I did my job but I don’t have the response from the IV’. That is very frustrating, because at the end of the day we are the ones facing the students’ (A). On a somewhat different note, one participant spoke of the emotional stress he occasionally felt as someone who is often laden with both the work-related and personal difficulties his colleagues would be facing: “Sometimes colleagues unintentionally burden me excessively with their issues, both work-related and personal. I am quite a good listener and as a result people seem to want to confide in me” (M).

When comparing these findings to the literature reviewed previously, it is interesting to note that colleagues are in the largest majority not referred to as ‘stressors’ but rather as means for educators to cope (Cancio, Ross, Sarup, Mary, Bev and Mei 2018). Further research on the topic within an educational context found very little support for the idea that colleagues could in fact contribute to other colleagues’ stress. In fact, the work of Klassen and Chiu (2010) was the only article reviewed that, in passing, stated that teaching colleagues could in fact be stressors, yet unfortunately stopped short of elaborating as to why this might be so.

Researching workplace stress in a different context versus an educational one provided much more insight. In fact, the term ‘toxic handler’ came to light. A toxic handler is a colleague who takes it upon themselves to heal the emotional pain of others (Frost and Robinson 1999, p. 1). In doing so, that colleague is both a hero but also a ‘casualty’, as constantly dealing with the pain of others is draining. Put differently, toxic handlers can easily become the victims of ‘secondary trauma’, in which the receiving of negative thoughts and feelings of others causes the same states/symptoms within the listener (Motta 2008).

Unfair Treatment

Another stress that came to light as the result of the interviews was that of unfair treatment one lecturer had to undergo. In this case it revolved around an issue of not being paid for a service the lecturer had provided: ‘... recently I was not paid for something I sacrificed a lot of time for. Now they informed me that I will be paid but I went through hell.... there was a build-up of stress, a build-up of anger, frustration I started to withdraw, not talk to colleagues...I was treated unfairly’ (S).

Wage payment as a stressor did feature in the previously reviewed work of Chenevey et al. (2008), however, it was qualitatively differently to the experience of the lecturer in this study. Whilst the work of Chenevey et al. (2008) cited the perception of not being paid enough for the work done as the stressor, the participant in the study cited the turmoil of initially being refused payment for a service he provided. The work of Rynes, Gerhart and Minette (2004: 5) sheds more light on the importance of pay as a motivator, as ‘the broad usefulness of money as well as its many symbolic meanings suggests that, far from being a mere low order motivator, pay can assist in obtaining virtually any level on Maslow’s motivational hierarchy, including social esteem and self-actualization’. In essence, payment validates the employee in more ways than one and thus denying it is a large metaphoric blow.
Stress of Online Lecturing

This theme was by far the most commonly expressed stressor; four out of the total of five lecturers interviewed chose to indicate online lecturing as a stressor they encountered at the workplace. The stress of online learning ranged from the feeling of losing contact with students and colleagues, to needing to get used to new technology, to the additional planning required to shift from face-to-face lectures to online ones.

Previously reviewed literature by the author did not take this stress factor into account, most probably due to online lecturing being the exception and not the rule before the Covid-19 pandemic. A term which featured in the subsequent revisiting of the literature was ‘technostress’ (Obrad 2020, p. 5). The term, whilst not only used in the educational context, refers to the stress of getting used to new technology. It is often accompanied by feelings of frustration and helplessness. Online lecturing ‘may also be negative for teachers because it could imply changes in their teaching methods or pressure to acquire technological skills, leaving sequelae such as physical, social, and psychological problems’ (Fernández-Batanero, Román-Graván, Reyes-Rebollo and Montenegro-Rueda 2021: 1).

Personal Characteristics as Stressors

It was interesting to note that whilst the stressors thus far were for the most part external, the stress that comes about because of one’s own personality has an internal focus. Participants who had personality traits which included ‘perfectionism’, ‘pleasing’, and a deep feeling of ‘responsibility’ seemed to be inevitably creating high demands on themselves and evidently more stress: ‘I am a person who… likes to get things done … so I don’t have to stay worrying about it. I place a lot of pressure on myself because of this. I also put a lot of pressure on myself due to my perfectionist tendencies’ (C).

The classical work of Faber (1983) had in fact highlighted the influenced of personal characteristics on one’s stress experience. A contemporary doctoral dissertation on the topic also supports the idea that personality and stress experiences are positively linked (Arike 2021). The author even goes as far as advocating for the increased introduction of personality tests during job interviews as a means to predict which potential candidate is more prone to stress. In conclusion, cutting-edge research is pointing to the inverse as possibly also being true, that is, that workplace stress may in fact mould a person’s personality. Such a change is said to come about through neurochemical changes triggered by stress (Smallfield and Kluemper 2021).

Frequent Changes in Management

Two participants highlighted having frequent changes in administrators, both at an institute level as well as on a college level, as being a source of stress: ‘we had quite a few directors, ok, and every time a director changes… its was basically in short periods of time, it feels, at least to me… that I had to prove myself from the very beginning…it made me feel like this person doesn’t know me…’(I).

Whilst this stressor was not featured in the literature review, the work of Wisse and Sleebos (2016) sheds a very clear light on the effect of organizational change on employees. Whilst confirming it as a stressor in and of itself, the work also goes on to point out that both an employee’s personality and what ensuing daily changes come about as a result of the change in leadership mitigate the extent to which a change in leadership is perceived as stressful. The words of the participant above, ‘…it made me feel like this person doesn’t know me’, showcase another facet of the stress experience mentioned in the work of Wisse and Sleebos (2016) and the feelings of ambiguity that such a novel situation brings about.
Coping Mechanisms

Exercise

Exercise as a means to cope with the aforementioned stressors featured prominently in all of my participants’ interviews, as well as in the literature reviewed (Austin, Shah and Muncer 2005; Cancio, Ross, Sarup, Mary, Bev and Mei 2018). Exercise took on many different forms—walking, running, yoga, home workouts and going to the gym were all mentioned during the interviews. One participant indicated the restorative properties of exercise by stating ‘…I either go running or going to the gym, exercising to cool down, start afresh…(I)’. It is noteworthy to point out that since all the participants mentioned exercise as being one of their coping mechanisms, the researcher was unable to make gain any insights as to whether educators who exercised reported being less stressed than does who did not (Austin, Shah and Muncer 2005).

Therapy and Professional Development

One participant mentioned therapy together with professional development as a means to cope with the stress of work. The idea of counselling as a possible coping mechanism utilised by educators to mitigate stress and prevent burnout has already been identified in the literature reviewed previously, however, this was a standalone factor and not combined with professional development (Cancio, Ross, Sarup, Mary, Bev and Mei 2018). Specifically on the topic of supervision, the participant made a passionate argument as to how she believed that educators should be required to have several supervision sessions, akin to what professionals in some of the helping professions are required to attend. A quick online search showcases strong support for the argument, with supervision being described as ‘restorative’, ‘guiding’, ‘educational’, and ‘quality ensuring’ across a range of professions (Koivu, Saarinen and Hyrkas 2012; Moga and Cabaniss 2014; Valentino, LeBlanc and Sellers 2016).

Personal Characteristics as Buffers

It was very fascinating to note the duality of personal characteristics in this study. As previously examined in the theme entitled ‘Personal characteristics as stressors’, some personal characteristics seemed to amplify stress. Inversely, this theme examines personal characteristic as mitigating the typical stress response. Two such verbatim statements, from two different participants, that shed light on this buffering property were: ‘For me major stress is an adrenaline rush and I do not collapse… for me it’s this adrenaline rush of ‘fight’ no option for ‘flight’ (A); as well as ‘what is important is perspective. If you go down the spiral of negativity, it is always hard to get back out but if you’re positive emm things can be easily tackled. You have to be positive’ (S).

All in all, the nature of duality underlying personal characteristics and their relation to one’s experience of stress point to the subjective nature of stress. That is to say, that whilst there are objective measures of stress, both how one experiences stress and consequently reacts to it, it is also a very personal and subjective matter influenced by one’s personality (Christensen, Dich, Flensborg-Madsen, Garde, Hansen, and Mortensen 2019).

Work Satisfaction

One theme that featured quite prominently in this study but not in the literature reviewed initially was the effect of ‘work satisfaction’ on alleviating stress. In fact, one participant stated: ‘what helps me a lot… I love teaching… so when I am teaching, I actually forget about stress!’ (C). Contextually, the participant’s recounting of stressors seemed to revolve more
around the planning and administrative processes she had to partake in as a lecturer and not anything having to do with lecturing per se. Such an experience seems to point towards the possibility that teaching is in fact acting as an ‘avoidance focused’ coping mechanism (Algorani and Gulpa 2020; Jones and Gould 1996). In other words, the enjoyment of lecturing seems to remove the person under stress, physically and psychologically, from the stressful situation brought about through other work duties at MCAST.

**Outdoors Space**

Another prominent coping measure used by participants in this study was immersion in an outdoors space. One participant stated, ‘I love being in the countryside, it helps me a lot’. (C) The idea of one’s environment as having a psychological impact on the individual is not new. It is in fact the focus of a branch of psychology entitled ‘environmental psychology’ that emerged towards the middle of the twentieth century, most notably through the work of Roger Baker in his book *Ecological Psychology* that was published in 1968.

A far more contemporary work by Olafsdottir, Cloke, and Vögele (2017), not only emphasises the importance of a ‘green context’ but directly cites it as being ‘stress buffering’. Furthermore, their study is particularly valid as it investigated the stress experience using both physiological testing as well as phenomenological investigations, with both semi-structured interviews and diary-writing techniques utilised for the latter. Possibly the best way to conclude the discussion of this theme, is using the verbatim statement of one participant who expressed the positive impact that the outdoors had on her stress levels by stating: ‘I feel like I can get lost in the open area I am in’ (I).

**Collegiality**

This theme manifested itself very strongly both during the interviews and data analysis, as well as in the literature reviewed on the topic of stress management. Colleagues in the same staff room offered many benefits, including ‘restorative feedback’, ‘reassurance’ and overall feeling of ‘support and family’: ‘...Seeing a friend there [in the staffroom] makes it easier... the time we spend at college... it gives you balance. I feel that I am not alone. I feel that if I need support, my friends who are also my colleagues are going to support me. For me that is a blessing (I)’. To this effect, another participant stated: ‘...we view ourselves as a family. You know that you are part of something. There is a core... and we take care of each other. Knowing I am part of that... gives me strength (S)’. These findings are identical to those of Mizzi’s (2018) who found that educators cherished the stress management properties of both their colleagues as well as the staffroom. All in all, it seems that staffrooms and the people within them are metaphorically a ‘safe space’ in which educators unwind and regenerate. Interestingly, the concept of having a ‘safe space’ for workers to unwind and regenerate in is being applied to other fields such as financial and healthcare with the terms ‘recharge rooms’ and ‘tranquillity rooms’ emerging (Putrino, Ripp, Herrera, Cortes, Kellner, Rizk and Dams-O’Connor 2020).

**Support of Management**

In keeping with the previous theme of support, support of management was also mentioned by three of the participants as being key to their coping with workplace stress: ‘On an institute level... I think we really appreciate the support we have from management. If I have a problem... they listen to me... you don’t find this everywhere! Even the fact that they give me guidance (C)’. This was seconded by another participant who stated: ‘when it is too much for me to bear, I discuss, I discuss with people who are in management, I report to them, my directors and deputies. They are always very supportive to be honest, they have always assisted me (S)’.
The role of management as aiding coping did not feature in the initial searches on the topic and hence was not included in the literature review. However, further research brought to light the pivotal role that managers play in stress prevention and stress transformation. This is because they are prominent shapers of the educational climate as well as the first port of call in the case of organisational problems (Naidoo 2011). In conclusion, one might hypothesise that the quality of management is directly related to either positive or negative outcomes to employees’ stress response. Managers could help or hinder the educational environment very easily, keeping in mind the power influences they have on it.

Experience as a Buffer

Whilst analysing stress literature with the purpose of writing the literature review, the researcher noted that there was a divergence in whether experiences hindered or helped an educator when it comes to managing stress. The words of one participant seem to shine some light on this: ‘Experience made me perceive the situations I encountered differently. In the past it used to be red flags and alarms immediately, but today I am like “this is happening again” I know how to mitigate this, so I am fine! (S)’ The participant’s experience seems therefore to contradict the work of Nuri, Demirok and Direktör (2017) which found higher stress levels in educators having more experience, whilst supporting the work of Fisher (2011) which found experience as a safeguard to stress. Whilst the results of this study favour the ‘experience as a buffer’ hypothesis, one must once again acknowledge the subjectivity of every individual’s stress experience, and thus the possibility that the opposite is also true for some individuals.

Conclusion

Limitations and Alternative Approaches

One limitation of the study lies in the fact that participants were only interviewed once. Whilst depth can certainly still be achieved through one interview, it has been shown that ‘serial interviewing’ can reap numerous other benefits, amongst them the collection of data that is more valid and more extensive than what one-off interviews may produce. Furthermore, interviewing participants more than once over a period of time has also been suggested when the study in question investigates a series of past and present events as opposed to specific one-time experiences (Read 2018).

Another limitation could have been the sample size of 5 interviewees, which although from three different institutes, may not be enough to give a somewhat more representative experience of MCAST lecturers across all institutes. This limitation may have partly stemmed due to the timing and the context in which the interviews took place, which was between academic semesters and during the Covid-19 pandemic, respectively. The period between semesters is characteristically a time of increased work pressure due to the finalisation of course content and preparation for the lecturing of new content. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic brought about challenges which were both technical and emotional in nature, some of which lecturers never had to previously deal with. It could thus be argued that given the nature of the study, that is one focusing on workplace stress and coping, the timing was right; however, conversely, when it came to recruiting, it may have negatively affected participation.

Lastly, another limitation revolved around the fact that the majority of literature reviewed focused on the experiences of ‘teachers’ and not ‘lecturers’. Whilst collectively known as ‘educators’, there are differences in work conditions and responsibilities. This difference is clearly manifested in both the differing employing institutions and work contracts.
Implications and Recommendations for Research and Practice

A topic for further research was discussed with one interviewee during the actual interview. It was suggested that just as many of the helping professions have obligatory ‘supervision sessions’ which are both restorative and consultative in nature, so should educators. Future research could focus on both the educators’ perspectives and readiness to engage in such a practice as well as ways that supervision could be adapted and applied to the teaching profession.

To further learn about the psychological stressors and coping mechanisms one experiences and utilises at MCAST, one could change the population under study. One idea would be to study students’ views on the subjects. If one considers that students enter MCAST at a time when they are undergoing rapid psychosocial, physical, and intellectual changes, the study is likely to have high ecological validity (Whitebourne 2012).

The study has highlighted certain organizational experiences which, hypothetically, if dealt with, may contribute to reducing stress levels for academic staff and preventing burnout. Inadequate lecture rooms, frequent changes in management, and occasional unfair treatment have been underlined by the participants of this study as some of the main contributors to their stress experience. The study has also shed light on what may continue to be strengthened at MCAST in order to continue buffering and possibly also reducing stress at MCAST. Generally speaking, these include more outdoor spaces, increased opportunities to foster collegiality, and the continued support of management at both institute and college level.

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I would like to firstly thank the five participants of my study. Without their kind participation, this study would not have been possible. Heartfelt thanks also go to Dr. Maria Cardona and Dr. Massimo Pierucci, ICS Research Officers, for their guidance and support. I wish to also thank Ms. Ann Marie Cassar, ICS Director, as well as MCAST management for allowing me to pursue this study as part of my workload.

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