



Influence of Occupational Stress on Psychological Well-Being of Senior High School Teachers in Nanumba South District, Ghana

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of occupational stress on psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in Nanumba South District in the Northern Region of Ghana. The study used a quantitative research approach and a descriptive survey design. The population included all Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District. A survey sampling technique was employed to include all 101 teachers in the only Senior High School in the District. Structured questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. The data was analysed using means and standard deviations. The study found that Senior High School teachers mostly felt anxious or depressed at work whenever they are stressed, sometimes they get low self-esteem when stressed up with excessive workload, there was no difficulty in working with colleagues of the opposite sex, lack of support from the immediate supervisor had no effect on the psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District. Based on

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the findings, it was recommended among others that Senior High School teachers across the nation should device means of dealing with occupational stress such as making time for periodic relaxation (lunchtime, evenings, weekends and holidays), teachers should request for assistance and support from others whenever they feel exhausted with their task. The Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service in collaboration with school counsellors should organise frequent workshop/seminars for teachers on how to manage occupational stress.

Keywords: Stress; occupational stress; psychological well-being; senior high school; ministry of education; opposite sex; workload; sampling technique.

1. INTRODUCTION

Anecdotal reports and narratives from Senior High School teachers in Nanumba South District suggest that most teachers are showing signs of chronic fatigue and burnout, physical illness, substance abuse, and family problems due to stressful working conditions, which led to low productivity, absenteeism, and increased rates of accidents on and off the job. This accounts for the reason why the researchers have decided to conduct a study on the influence of occupational stress on the psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District.

“In this study, occupational stress refers to the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of teachers’ job do not match with their capabilities, skills and resources and needs. Notably, in this study, occupational stress is synonymous with work-related stress and are used interchangeably. Also, psychological well-being, in the context of this study is the positive mental state of teachers. Occupational stress impacts the health and psychological well-being of workers which affects their attitude to work, leading to high absenteeism, poor morale, high staff turnover, reduced efficiency and declining job performance” [1,2].

1.2 Background to the Study

Teachers’ job seems to be very stressful especially in modern days where teachers’ welfare seems to have been neglected by their employers. Health and Safety Executive [3] observed that “in 2013/2014, 39% of work-related illnesses were associated with work-related anxiety, depression, and stress which has remained at a similar percentage for more than a decade with each case resulting in 23 days being lost each year”. Oludeyi and Olajide [4] noted that “in African traditional society, people combine work activities with domestic activities at

home. Anecdotal records revealed that teachers in Ghana, particularly in the Nanumba South District, carry out numerous family and home-related responsibilities as required by Ghanaian culture. It is an established fact that the performance of a teacher mainly depends upon the individual’s psychological state of mind”.

Health and Safety Executive (2014) reported that “the age group 45 to 54 had the highest stress level leading to stress-related illnesses”. “For instance, in Ghana, most workplaces have no respect for mental health of their employees though such is supposed to be part of the work social contract” [5] “Besides, most workers including teachers are presented with work demands that are not matching with their knowledge and abilities which challenge their ability to cope [6]. “The issue of occupational stress has attracted the attention of organisational behaviourists due to the fact that various problems that employees face emanate from work place experiences” [7].

Pooring [8] observed that “teachers’ stress often affects their ability to function effectively, sometimes to the extent of causing burn out”. “Other common negative effects of teachers’ occupational stress include; reduction in work performance and output, inability to manage time or delegate, feeling of alienation and inadequacy, lack of motivation, increasing introversion, irritability with colleagues, unwillingness to cooperate, frequent irrational conflict at work, withdrawal from supportive relationships, loss of appetite for the job, frequent infection and accident proneness” [8]. “It is therefore important to note that different professions manifest different types and level of work stressors and workers perception of their occupation is a good determinant of their job attitude and psychological well-being” [9].

“Stress up to moderate level, is inevitable and leads to motivation, but prolonged teacher stress has been found to result in both physiological and psychological ailments which ultimately have

adverse effects on teachers' professional efficacy" [10]. Borg [11] observed that "up to one-third of teachers perceive their occupation as highly stressful". Berg [12] posited that "stress involves a subtle but progressive erosion of behaviour, attitude, health and spirit that eventually inhibits an individual's ability to function effectively at work". "Teaching has become very stressful profession in the present times. Stress plays some role in 50% to 70% of all physical illnesses" [13].

"Moreover, the effects of occupational stress have resulted in some of the most devastating and life-threatening ailments known to medical sciences. For instance, stress has been implicated in the occurrence of heart-related diseases, high blood pressure, hardening of the arteries, asthma, cognitive impairment, obesity, viral infection, depression, ulcers, and even diabetes" [13]. "Occupational stress and its effects on teachers' psychological well-being in recent times, has taken a heavy toll on teachers' psychological well-being leading to deteriorated health, ineffectiveness and low productivity. This phenomenon has attracted the attention of many stakeholders in education and this remains a public discourse. Extensive research has shown that majority of teachers are vulnerable to stress in the schools which would be attributed to the nature of their work that is widely acknowledged to be stressful, dangerous, and emotionally demanding" [14].

Additionally, teachers are also seen as being responsible for developing and enforcing classroom rules and regulations that enhance effective lesson delivery and students' learning, supervises students during extracurricular activities such as playground, conducts in-class activities and plans field trips for students to have practical understanding of the theories taught in class. Jack and Punch [15] have also identified "certain sources of occupational stress of teachers to include, poor working environment, inadequate infrastructural facilities, excess workload, inadequate instructional materials, delay and non-payment of salaries, in-service training and indiscipline. Mental health is inextricably linked to psychological well-being".

World Health Organisation [6] defines "mental health as subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, inter-generational dependence and self-actualisation of one's intellectual and emotional potential among others". "The link between work stress

and personal health according to medical experts is very strong with quantifiable facts" [16]. Ganster and Schaubroeck [17] avowed that "work stress is a causal agent in physical and mental disorders as well as organisational outcomes such as absenteeism, substance abuse tendencies and reduced productivity has gained widespread acceptance. Since teachers are major stakeholders in knowledge dissemination and implementation of the educational curriculum of the nation, it is very important to investigate the extent to which occupational stress affects their psychological well-being, hence, the need for this study".

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Academics in tertiary institutions are trained in their respective disciplines to acquire psychological and social skills, and abilities that contributes to optimal functioning in their specific fields of study. However, same cannot be said of Senior High school teachers who combine teaching with co-curricular activities such as sports, athletics and ensuring the enforcement of school rules and regulations among students. Osman [18] study revealed that over 420,000 teachers across the country were experiencing occupational stress, which have already affected their focus on teaching. Relatedly, Bell et al. [19] carried out a study to examine job stress, well-being, work-life balance and work-life conflict among Australian Academics. It was found that perceived job stress was strongly and negatively related to work-life balance thus having a negative relationship to well-being of employees, but had a weaker positive relationship to the ill-being of employees. This has created a knowledge lacuna which will be bridged in this study by investigating effects of occupational stress on psychological well-being of teachers. Also, Bell et al. [19] study focused on Australian Academics which has resulted in the creation of population gap which the present study in tends to fill by extending the population to Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District in the Northern Region of Ghana.

In view of the implementation of new curriculum for pre-tertiary education in Ghana, which include Senior High Schools, teachers play a pivotal role in the curriculum implementation and assessment. This has added additional responsibility to them making them to experience more occupational stress than before. Although the effects of stress are different depending upon the circumstances and attributes of the people

involved, resulting in the outcomes for the people to be reliably unexpected. If occupational stress of teachers increases, it will result in having an effect on their psychological well-being, warranting more research into this phenomenon. It is in view of this that the researchers were aroused with curiosity to investigate the influence of occupational stress on teachers' psychological well-being in the Nanumba South District in the Northern Region of Ghana.

1.4 Research Objectives

The study sought to:

1. Find out the effects of occupational stress on psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District.
2. Find out the extent to which social relationships at the workplace affect psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

3. What are the effects of occupational stress on psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District?
4. To what extent does social relationships at the workplace affect psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study incorporates Transactional Model of Stress [20] and Psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). The theory explains that stress sets in when an individual appraises an event as stressful and has inadequate resources to cope. According to the Transactional Model, the efficiency of coping techniques might influence stress results. Ineffective coping can lead to increased stress and its associated repercussions, whereas effective coping can lessen the harmful impacts of stress. Stress, according to Lazarus and Folkman's theory, is a dynamic and subjective process, with individual variances in how people perceive and respond to stressors [20]. It emphasises the significance of

cognitive processes and coping mechanisms in shaping stress responses which has an impact on the psychological well-being of the individual.

The theory of Psychological Well-Being viewed psychological well-being as the optimal psychological functioning and experience. From the theory, individuals' life experiences and their interpretations of these experiences influence their well-being. The six components of the theory include; Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in life, Personal Growth, and Self-Acceptance. The self-acceptance component explains that an important component of psychological well-being is a positive attitude towards oneself and one's present and past life. In view of this, individuals should be able to celebrate their strengths and weaknesses rather than focusing only on their positive or negative. The positive relations with others component also highlight the need for valued, satisfying relationships with others as an important component of psychological well-being.

The autonomy component also expresses the need for an individual to have a sense of self-determination, independence, and freedom from norms. They should have the freedom of choice and not feel pressurised to please others or meet the societal expectations. In addition, the purpose in life component also indicates that the individual should have life goals and a belief that one's life is meaningful. The environmental mastery is also another component of psychological well-being that highlights the ability to manage life and one's surroundings. There is also the personal growth component that portrays the need to be open to new experiences as well as having continued personal growth.

1.7 Empirical Review

"Stress is a term in psychology and biology, first coined in the biological context in the 1930s, which has in more recent decades become commonly used in popular parlance" [21]. Malow-Iroff and Johnson [22] are of "the view that stress is the individual's response to events such as response to our biological temperament, interaction with others and the environmental conditions in which one is placed". "Life events and the stress they place on the individual are not the problem until the individual fails to handle the situation competently and engages in poor coping skills" ([22]).

“Occupational stress is a term used to define ongoing stress that is related to the workplace. The stress may have to do with the responsibilities associated with the work itself, caused by conditions that are based in the corporate culture or personality conflicts. Occupational stress can result in tension between oneself and at other times between co-workers, which has the cumulative effect on both physical and emotional well-being if not managed effectively” [23] “Occupational stress may be as a result of the individual characteristics of the person or related to the individual’s environment” [24]. “As occupational stress begins to take toll on the body and mind, a variety of symptoms can result” [25].

“In this study, occupational stress is taken to mean teachers’ experiences and emotions which are considered unpleasant such as tension, frustration, anger and depression resulting from their job demands”. [26] “In the opinions of Manshor, Rodrigue and Chong [27], occupational stress is caused by lack of resources and equipment, work schedules such as working late or overtime and organisational climate which are considered as contributors to employees’ stress. Occupational stress often shows high dissatisfaction among the employees, job mobility, burnout, poor work performance and less effective interpersonal relations at work” [27].

According to Tsutsumi et al. [28], “occupational stress occurs when there is discrepancy between the demands of the work place and that of individuals. Occupational stress is a serious work hazard which has the power to bring crises on teachers. It is an ongoing stress that is related to the workplace”. The body has a normal mechanism for dealing with stressful situations that is known as the “fight or flight” response [29]. “Occupational stress can be described as a condition where occupation related factors interact with the worker to disrupt the individual’s psychological or physiological condition, so that the person’s mind and/or body is forced to deviate from its normal way of functioning” [30].

“Working in organisations not only provides individuals with life sustaining income but also exerts its own pressures on them. This can ultimately have negative consequences both for achieving the goals of the organisation and meeting the needs of the individuals working in them. Thus, the work environment is a source of

social and psychological stress, which has harmful effects on the well-being of the employees. Stress in general and occupational stress in particular is universal and is a frequently disabling human phenomenon. Stress arising at work place has detrimental effect on the behaviour of people, which ultimately results in personal and organisational inefficiency, ineffectiveness and low productivity” [26].

Ma and Macmillan [31] found that “poor working conditions and time pressures predicted burnout for rural school teachers while pupil misbehaviour and poor working conditions predicted burnout for urban school teachers. In addition to school type and location, workplace conditions have been found to impact on the job effectiveness of teachers”. According to Ma and Macmillan [31], “workplace stress such as administrative control, teaching competence and organisational culture negatively affect teachers’ job effectiveness”. “Good working conditions such as good relationships and a suitable workload at schools have positive influences both on schools and teachers. Some of these positive influences are reducing teachers’ stress, turnover, absenteeism, sickness, and are increasing teachers’ motivation, job satisfaction, cooperation, and effectiveness in classrooms, and increasing student achievement” [32]. Kinsman (2001) states that “there are hardly any nearby primary health care services in schools where especially female teachers with babies can send them in case of emergency situations. The absence of such basic facilities nearby is a major source of teacher de-motivation for female teachers. Besides, there are lactating rooms in schools where nursing mothers can breastfeed their children but, in most instances, they are compelled to breastfeed their babies in the classrooms in the glare of students exposing their breasts to students which is psychological well-being concern”.

According to Ijaluola [33], “physical working condition refers to those things that must be available in the work place for effective office work. In the context of the school system, working condition of teachers are the resources that enable the teacher to be able to teach effectively and contribute to the achievement of the school goals and objectives without stress or fatigue and distraction”. Subair and Awolere [34] state that “there should be maximum use of certain physical conditions such as lighting, adequate ventilation, well-constructed buildings, sufficient windows, doors, vents and fans to cool

the heat during hot season and reduce stress among teachers. All these improve work and health of both the teachers and the learners". Felix (2004) opined that "a good school organisation must have appropriate physical conditions necessary for effective work performance".

In the view of Adams [35], "a quiet, cool, clean and beautiful environment makes the teacher happy and enhances performance and productivity. School is an environment of continuous interactions and social relations which may generate a psychosocially stressful work environment for teachers". Wilson [36] and Ijaduola [33] caution that "with poor physical working condition, there are usually mental fatigue, truancy, frustration, discomfort, and poor health which consequently increase stress of teachers as well as reduce teachers' their productivity". Ijaduola (2018) noted that "many employers do not only meet this elementary condition but recognise that good working conditions reduce work stress and improve job effectiveness". "Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions such as crowding, noise, air pollution, or ergonomic problems as well as unrealistic deadlines, low levels of support from supervisors are known to cause occupational stress and invariably lower teachers' job effectiveness" [37]. The author added that lack of facilities create anxiety in the task of teaching, thereby making teaching difficult and reducing teachers' performance on their job.

"Social support can be considered a product of the social dimension of lifestyle, especially related to mental health" [38]. "In the workplace environment, depression among employees may be minimised by having more social support because they can defend themselves against the adverse effects of life" [39]. "In the context of the education sector in Malaysia, teachers with low social support will be more likely to have high psychological distress" [40]. "The case of Ghana is even dire as teachers are confronted with managing large class sizes with limited teaching resources which is inimical to the psychological well-being. Humans' beings are social creatures who are nested to interact and seek social support from others in stressful times. The school as a social unit can only help to improve the mental health of teachers by providing maximum support when the need be. This is because teachers needing positive social support, encouragement and effective communication from school leaders and colleague teachers to

enhance their well-being in the workplace" [41]. Brough, et al [42] asserted that "social support serves as a moderator in stress relationships, where individuals with strong support can avoid the negative effects of stress. In the workplace, provision of social support is essential because it can prevent psychosocial stress and enhance psychological well-being of both teachers and students".

2. METHODOLOGY

The research study employed the quantitative approach and descriptive survey design which helped in discovering the hidden reality of the influence of occupational stress on psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in Nanumba South District. The population for the study comprised of Senior High Schools teachers in the Nanumba South District. Interestingly the District had only one Senior High School at the time of the study with a total of 101 teachers including both male and female. The researchers purposively included all the teachers in the study since the Senior High School was only one with few teachers. Bhandari [43] argues that it is only straightforward to collect data from a whole population when it is small, accessible and cooperative. In situations where a high level of precision or accuracy is necessary, researchers may opt for population-level data collection. By doing so, they mitigate the potential for sampling error and obtain more reliable estimates of population parameters.

Structured questionnaires were used for data collection. The questionnaires were made up of three sections (A and B). Section A contained items on the influence of occupational stress on teachers' psychological well-being while section B had items on how social relationships at the workplace affect psychological well-being of teachers.

2.1 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

In order to ascertain construct, content, and face validity of the instruments, the questionnaires were given to research experts in the area of statistics, measurement and evaluation from the Department of Educational Foundation, University of Education, Winneba for examination, comments and corrections before it was administered. Their experts' comments, views, suggestions and recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the

questionnaire. This helped ensured how well the instruments measured what they were intended to measure [44].

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted among 10 teachers in Winneba Technical/Vocational Institute of the Central Region of Ghana. The 10 teachers of Winneba Technical/Vocational Institute were chosen for the pilot study because they shared similar characteristics with those in the Nanumba South District in terms of work schedule, age similarities, gender and status in ranks. Data was imputed into SPSS version 25.0 and its reliability was computed using Cronbach Alpha. Its reliability coefficient (α) was found to be .89. This suggests that the questionnaire was good and capable of collecting reliable data from the participants for the study.

3. RESULTS

Research Question One: What are the effects of occupational stress on psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District?

This research question sought to examine the effects of occupational stress on psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District. Views from various teachers were solicited and the results are presented in Table 1.

Results in Table 1 shows that all the Senior High School teachers in Nanumba South District unanimously agreed that occupational stress had some effects on their psychological well-being, with majority (M=3.02, SD=.55) of the participants agreeing to the statement “My pressure rises high at work when I am stressed”, (M=2.83, SD=.36), followed by the participants who also agreed to the statement “I feel anxious at work when I am stressed up”. The statement that attracted the least number of teachers

agreeing was “There is change in my appetite when I am stressed at work” (M=2.65, SD=1.41).

Research Question Two: To what extent does social relationships at the workplace affect psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District?

The primary intent of this research questions was to find the influence of social relationships at workplace on psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District. Responses from the various participants are presented in Table .2.

Results in Table 2 indicates that the Senior High School teachers in Nanumba South District had mixed feelings about the influence of social relationships at workplace on psychological well-being as some agreed and other disagreed to the statements that were presented to them. Table 2 reveals that majority (M=2.52, SD=.71) of the participants agreed to the statement “Students and other teachers making unreasonable demands does not have effect on me”, with (M=2.50, SD=.76) of the participants also agreeing to the statement “Difficulty in working with colleagues of the opposite sex”. However, a portion of the participants (M=1.82, SD=.57) disagreed to the statement “Criticisms by other teachers concerning my efforts in the school makes me feel bad”, with a good number of the participants (M=1.16, SD=.84) also disagreeing to the statement “Lack of support from my immediate supervisor”.

4. DISCUSSION

The first research question sought to find out the effect of occupational stress on psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District. Results indicated that most Senior High School teachers felt anxious or depressed at work when they are

Table 1. Effects of occupational stress on psychological well-being

Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
I feel anxious at work when I am stressed up	2.83	.36	Agreed
I feel depressed at work when I am stressed up	2.71	1.49	Agreed
My pressure rises high at work when I am stressed	3.02	.55	Agreed
There is change in my appetite when I am stressed at work	2.65	1.41	Agreed
I feel chest pains/palpitations when I am stressed at work	2.74	.64	Agreed

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 2. Influence of social relationship on psychological well-being of teachers

Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
Difficulty in working with colleagues of the opposite sex	2.50	.76	Agreed
Lack of support from my immediate supervisor	1.16	.84	Disagreed
Being overloaded with colleagues works	2.55	.44	
Criticisms by other teachers concerning my efforts in the school makes me feel bad	1.82	.57	Disagreed
Students and other teachers making unreasonable demands does not have effect on me	2.52	.71	Agreed

Source: Field Data (2024)

stressed. The finding is supported by Lavy and Bocker [45] who discovered that unpleasant emotions and behaviours such as workload, fatigue and anxiety, are closely linked to occupational stress. Also, Griffin, [46] avowed out that work-related stress is accompanied by anxiety, uneasiness, worry, hardness, tension, frustration and suffering.

The results further revealed that most Senior High School teachers in Nanumba South District experienced high blood pressure when stressed up at work. This is evident in the work of Baron [13] who postulated that stress has been implicated in the occurrence of heart-related diseases, high blood pressure, hardening of the arteries, asthma, cognitive impairment, obesity, viral infection, depression, ulcers, and even diabetes. Furthermore, most Senior High School teachers in Nanumba South District experienced low self-esteem when there are stressed with excessive work. The finding corroborates with Arvidsson et al. [47] who concluded in their finding that teachers occupational stress is characterised by factors such as low self-esteem or low self-confidence, unmotivated students, time pressure and role conflict.

The second research question looked at the influence of social relationships at the work place on psychological wellbeing of Senior High School teachers in Nanumba South District. The study found that there was no problem with the teachers when they do not get enough support from their immediate supervisors. The findings contravene with the findings of Abenga [37] which underscored that “unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions such as crowding, noise, air pollution, or ergonomic problems as well as unrealistic deadlines, low levels of support from supervisors are known to cause occupational stress and invariably lower teachers’ job effectiveness”. Roxana [48] also confirmed that “job satisfaction increases, and

stress can be reduced when employees receive support from colleagues and supervisors”. In the same vein, Grandey [49] argues that “employees who receive high support from colleagues and supervisors are less affected by adverse emotional effects”.

The study further revealed that students and other teachers making unnecessary demand does not have effect on the psychological well-being on Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District. This finding run contrast with Jendle and Wallnäs’ [50] study which concluded that too much pressure would result in burnout and stress from the inability to handle the demands from work. Also, Malik (2019) argued that work overload is one of the factors causing burnout among teachers that causes reduced physical and emotional energy leading to psychological stress [51-52].

5. KEY FINDINGS

The following findings emerged from the study;

1. Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District felt anxious or depressed at work whenever they are stressed, sometimes gets low self-esteem when stressed up with excessive workload.
2. There was no difficulty in working with colleagues of the opposite sex, being loaded with a colleague’s work does not amount to any psychological stress, lack of support from the immediate supervisor had no effects on the psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it was concluded that Senior High School teachers the Nanumba South District felt anxious or depressed at work

whenever they were stressed, sometimes they got low self-esteem when stressed up with excessive workload.

It was also concluded that there was no difficulty in working with colleagues of the opposite sex, being loaded with a colleague's work does not amount to any psychological stress, lack of support from the immediate supervisor had no effect on the psychological well-being of Senior High School teachers in the Nanumba South District.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the study findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Senior High Schools across the nation should devise strategies for managing occupational stress. These include delegating workload to coworkers, assigning some tasks to others, taking time off for family and friends, and reducing work overtime.
2. The Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service in collaboration with school counsellors should organise frequent workshops and seminars for teachers on how to manage occupational stress.

COMPETING INTERESTS

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Alfred Alunga Anovunga, Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Education, Winneba, P. O. Box 25, Winneba, Ghana.

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