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## An exploration of the causes and effects of interpersonal conflict related stress among a self-selected cohort of second level teachers in Ireland

Patrick Bruce

*Technological University Dublin*, [patrick.bruce@tudublin.ie](mailto:patrick.bruce@tudublin.ie)

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# **An exploration of the causes and effects of interpersonal conflict related stress among a self-selected cohort of second level teachers in Ireland.**



A thesis submitted to Technological University Dublin for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by:

Patrick Bruce

School of Food Science and Environmental Health

Cathal Brugh Street Campus

Cathal Brugha Street

Dublin 1

Ireland

Supervisor:

Dr Victor Hrymak

2023

## Abstract

Teaching has been classified by researchers as a high stress profession. Stress in teaching has been reported to have many negative health outcomes and also affects productivity. The literature also reports that stress in teaching is a difficult matter to resolve satisfactorily, with mixed outcomes from interventions. An emergent cause of work-related stress in education is IPC and this study sets out to investigate the prevalence of this underreported phenomena.

A sample of 25 teachers working in Irish second level schools were recruited. Semi structured interviews were conducted to report on the experiences of stress, it's causes and effects both inside and outside the school environment. The literature identified that interpretative phenomenological analysis was the most suitable methodology to obtain teachers experiences of stress in schools, this qualitative approach was used to obtain data from participants.

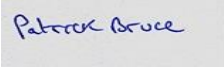
It was found that 22 out of 25 participants reported high levels of interpersonal conflict, (IPC) between colleagues in schools. The majority of participants, 24 out of 25 were also fearful to report stress they were experiencing within their school. An inability of participants experiencing IPC to escape from colleagues was found to be exacerbating stress for participants. A further feature of IPC was that it may have been caused, in a non-intentional and non-repetitive manner. IPC also appears to differ from other challenging workplace misbehaviour identified in the literature. This fear to report stress, high levels of IPC and a perceived inability to escape from this conflict caused considerable stress to participants resulting in very difficult and detrimental working conditions for those affected.

IPC has been described as "a process that occurs between independent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals". Interpersonal conflict however, has not received the same level of research attention. This thesis also supports the idea of re-interpreting interpersonal conflict as a separate category of psychosocial risk, alongside established and reported challenging behaviours such as bullying and incivility.

The findings are a matter of concern for those teachers working in the Irish second level sector. Furthermore, if findings in this study can be generalised, which seems likely, then the health and wellbeing of Irish second level teachers is being substantially and negatively impacted. Furthermore, the lack of successful stress interventions in the educational sector does not seem to offer practical solutions for the prevention of interpersonal conflict. The standalone nature of interpersonal conflict identified in this study warrants further research to investigate dedicated and pragmatic interventions to reduce this particular cause of workplace stress. Finally, research as to whether IPC manifests itself in other workplaces with similar conditions, for example third level teaching is also required.

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for graduate study by research of the Technological University Dublin and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any Third Level Institution. The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the TU Dublin's guidelines for ethics in research. TU Dublin has permission to keep, lend or copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the material of the thesis is duly acknowledged.

Candidate: Patrick Bruce

Signature: 

Date: 23-02-2023

### List of Abbreviations

IPC	Interpersonal conflict
EU	European Union
UK	United Kingdom
CCTV	Close Circuit Television
CREW	Civility, Respect, Engagement in the Workforce
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
HR	Human Resources
PIL	Participation Information Leaflet
ESRI	Economic, Social Research Institute
TUD	Technological University Dublin
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
TUI	Teachers Union of Ireland
US	United States
NIOSH	National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety
OSH	Occupational Health and Safety
WHO	World Health Organisation
EASHW	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
NCTAF	National Commission for Teaching and Americas Future
NET	National Education Association
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAS	Publicity Available Specification
HSA	Health and Safety Authority
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GP	General Practitioner
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
OHSAS	Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my dad, Patrick Joseph Bruce (1936-2014) and my mum, Maura Kenny (1933-2016), for their hard work, good advice and unending love, we miss you.

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*Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory, it instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheeplike passivity and sets us at noting and contriving. Conflict is a “sine qua non” of reflection and ingenuity.*

John Dewey

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# Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Origin of the research question

The author's interest in workplace stress was based on his experiences as a teacher and private sector administrator over 25 years. This included a managerial position in the private sector and subsequently in the public sector as a teacher. The negative effects of workplace stress on employees were seen by the author as resulting in high staff turnover, interpersonal conflict (IPC), bullying, mistrust, incivility, presenteeism and absenteeism. The author's experiences of various workplaces gave rise to an interest to study stress and workplace misbehaviour further.

This interest also gave rise to an aspiration to understand in more depth what are the causes of stress and what effects stress has on employees. Working in the teaching sector enabled access to other teachers to informally ascertain their experiences of stress within that setting. Then an opportunity came along to study stress in the second level teaching sector at a PhD level with TU Dublin.

The beginnings of a study question were considered by reading the literature around teacher stress extensively and by conducting informal discussions with teaching colleagues. The literature seemed to differ from the results of these informal discussions with participants. High levels of interpersonal conflict among teaching colleagues were noted by the author which was not reflected in the literature. The origins of a research question on interpersonal conflict (IPC) then began to emerge as a result. Results that the literature identified did not feature from informal discussions with participants, and thus a curiosity grew to further explore the causes and effects of stress in those teachers who became participants.

### 1.1.1 Stress relationship with Ill Health

Physicians have long recognised that people were more susceptible to sickness when subjected to high levels of stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Known stress related disorders include some kinds of headache, peptic ulcers, ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, diabetes, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, bronchial asthma, and eczema (Tay, 1994). IPC along with other workplace misbehaviours such as bullying and incivility have also been shown to be responsible for workplace stress related illnesses (British Occupational Health Research Foundation, 2006).

As a result, this study will present evidence for IPC being the most prominent cause of stress. The study also presents evidence that IPC is exacerbated by a fear to report stress, as well as a widespread mistrust and an inability to escape from challenging workplace behaviors. Furthermore, there seems to be a paucity in the literature of IPC being a challenging workplace misbehaviour for teachers. This thesis further proposes that IPC be recognised as a stand-alone stressor for secondary school teachers in Ireland which contributes to workplace misbehaviour within secondary schools. Finally, this thesis will identify possible solutions that may alleviate IPC, and challenging workplace misbehaviour and also identify ways to reduce stress for second level teachers in Ireland.

### 1.1.2 Stress in education

Studies have showed that in Ireland, the secondary teacher's workload has changed and increased considerably in the past 20 years (Parsons, 2005). Stress has traditionally been a stigmatic topic along with depression in Irish Society (Wolpert, 2001). Teacher stress is defined in terms of unpleasant negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, anxiety, depression, and nervousness that teachers experience as a result of some facets of their job, (Boyle, Borg, Falzon, Baglioni, 1995; Cosgrove, 2000; Kyriacou, 2001; Rathee, 2014; Wightwick, 2019). Studies by (Chaplain, 1995; Clunies-Ross, Little, Kienhuis 2008; Kerr, Breen, Delaney, Kelly, Miller, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014) found high levels of stress among teachers because of student behaviour, and student, teacher relations. Teachers are personally and emotionally involved with their work because much of that work involves caring for and about others (Perie & Baker, 1997; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; O'Connor, 2008; Connors, 2009).

Many studies on teacher stress have shown negative outcomes for teachers under stress as exemplified by (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; and Conway, Murphy, Rath, Hall, 2009). Teacher stress is associated with negative student outcomes and studies have shown that teachers may leave the profession because of stressful experiences (Cox, Cox, Harrison, 1988; Richards, 2012). Teacher attrition, especially during the early years of a teaching career is a serious problem in many Western societies (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

There has been a growing demand to implement effective interventions to reduce stress for teachers (Phillips & Matthew, 1980). When interventions have been implemented for teacher stress, they have had little consistency in approach or type of treatment, often falling across diverse and eclectic areas (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).



### **1.1.3 Methodology**

The methodology for this thesis set out to see if IPC was the primary cause of stress among secondary teachers in Ireland. Interpretive phenomenological analysis, (IPA) was used because of its stated ability to recognise that different people perceive the world in very different ways, dependent on their personalities, prior life experiences and motivations (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The thesis used a snowball sample to obtain 25 secondary teachers who recounted their experiences of stressful events via semi structured interview over a 14-month period.

The semi-structured interview, which is a more flexible version of the structured interview as it allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Teachers were encouraged to clarify and recount their answers at the end of their interviews and participants answers were transcribed verbatim and analysed through (Smith & Osborn, 2008) eight step cycles of analysis which identified, analysed and reported patterns within the data.

## **1.2 Aims and Objectives**

### **1.2.1 Aim**

An aim is used to formulate what outcome from research is required. A research aim allows an end point to be considered and what objectives are required to reach that end point (Agee, 2008). The aim of this thesis is to ascertain the prevalence of stress caused by IPC in 25 members of the secondary teaching sector in Ireland by examining their lived experiences of stress in their school environment.

### **1.2.2 Objectives**

The formulation of semi-structured interview questions to answer the research aim was also undertaken. The reason this methodology was chosen is that there is evidence to support that this methodology was the most facilitative way to obtain information from teachers about their experiences of stress in teaching. This rationale is further discussed in the methodology chapter. The literature review has also extensive evidence that individual interviews are the most appropriate methodology to obtain information from participants in a fair and transparent manner (Grobel, 2004; Cohen, Manion, Morison, 2007; Maruyama & Carey, 2014).

The objectives of this research were

- I. To formulate an appropriate design to consider the methods of data collection.
- II. To recruit 25 participants to gain knowledge of their experiences of stress within the secondary school environment.
- III. To analyse the findings of the data and to present conclusions and recommendations to build on the literature on stress in teaching.
- IV. To analysis the most pertinent results of relevance to this thesis and an analysis of the conclusions and recommendations.

The aims and objectives of this thesis were also formulated into a research question that was used to facilitate gathering data. The apparent prevalence of IPC described by participants in interviews led to a study question which was “Is interpersonal conflict the primary cause of stress in secondary schools in Ireland”? This thesis will present evidence to support the claim that interpersonal conflict was the prevalent cause of stress in 25 self-selected teachers and by extension, it is possible that stress may be prevalent in the teaching profession nationally.

### **1.3 Conclusion**

This thesis will present evidence that IPC is the primary cause of stress among a self-selected group of 25 secondary school teachers in Ireland. Interpersonal conflict has been described in the literature as a process that occurs between independent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals (Henry, 2004). This thesis will also present evidence that IPC has caused deep hurt and discomfort to the participants of this thesis, sometimes resulting in life changing illnesses. This thesis will show that IPC has initiated more challenging workplace misbehaviours among teachers such as bullying and incivility which have negatively affected teachers’ careers. There is a possibility that the high levels of IPC encountered in this thesis among secondary school teachers could also exist in other parts of the education sector and indeed in other industries.

# Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the current thinking and interventions that have been conducted for work-related stress with particular reference to the education sector. It will begin by presenting the many and often overlapping definitions in this discipline, the causes and effects of stress and how work-related stress is managed before concluding with a consideration of how effective stress initiatives are in reality.

Teaching is recognised as a demanding and stressful profession (Griffith, Steptoe, Crowley, 1999; Johnson, Berg, Donaldson, 2006; Newberry & Allsop, 2017) and teachers experience a high level of stress which is detrimental for well-being (Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz Maulana, Van Veen, 2017). The teaching profession is an occupation with a high prevalence of work-related stress (Johnson & Roloff, 2005; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). This may lead to sustained physical and mental health problems in teachers.

Workplace stress can also negatively affect the health, wellbeing and educational attainment of students (Robertson & Cooper, 2011; Ramberg, Laftman, Almquist, Modin, 2019), and impose a financial burden on the public budget in terms of teacher turnover and sickness absence (Ingersoll, 2001; Confederation of British Industry, 2007; Darling- Hammond, 2010; Naghieh, Montgomery, Bonell, Thompson, Laurence 2015). The issue of stress in the teaching profession has been given a great deal of attention and teaching has been identified as a particularly stressful career leading to burnout (Cordeiro, Guillén, Gala, Lupiani, Benitez, Gomez 2003; Kieschke & Schaarschmidt, 2008; Awa, Plaumann, Walter, 2010). The very nature and the unpredictability of the teaching profession can result in high levels of stress (Bolton, 2015). In Ireland it has also been highlighted as a profession which carries with it a significant amount of stress (Kerr et al, 2011).

### 2.1.1 Definitions of Stress

Definitions for stress are many and varied, for example the (Health and Safety Authority of Ireland, 2007) describe stress as being broadly defined as “the negative reaction people have to aspects of their environment as they perceive it”. The term ‘stress’ “has so many different meanings that it is confusing, elusive, and heard so often its meaning is frequently distorted, and its implications taken for granted” (Arthur, 2005). Disagreement among experts about a common definition for stress and the wide variations in perceiving stress among individuals presents a particular challenge in investigating occupational stress (Grant & Compas, 1995)

Stress is considered by the state’s workplace regulatory as a response to a stimulus and involves a sense of an inability to cope” (HSA, 2016). A more medical definition of stress is “a perturbation to the body’s homeostasis” (Nayak, Nayak, Panda, Das, 2015). The word “stress” is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “a state of affairs involving demand on physical or mental energy”. NIOSH (the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety), defines stress as “the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs or the needs of the worker”.

(Taverniers, Smeets, Van Ruysseveldt, Syroit, Van Grumbkow, 2011) defined stress as a “multifaceted phenomenon comprising of diverse reactions from either tangible or non-tangible threats”. The term “stress”, as it is currently used was coined originally by Hans Selye in 1936, who defined it as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change”. Ambiguity around a definition for stress is cited by many authors and continues to be a topic of debate for stress researchers (Dobson & Metcalfe, 2003). This includes the many phrases used to describe workplace misbehaviours reported that causes stress as will be summarised in the next section.

### 2.1.2 Burnout and stress

“Burnout” is a term that refers to the reaction to a chronic stressor that arises among workers in relation to the different job-specific demands, the symptoms of which are mental and physical exhaustion, a cold and depersonalised attitude and a sense of inadequacy regarding the tasks to be carried out (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Maslach described there being three phases of “Burnout”, an exhaustion period followed by a withdrawal or depersonalisation period and finally an efficacy stage where the individual suffering from “Burnout” is uncaring of their effectiveness in work and adopts a “couldn’t care less” attitude.

The adverse consequences of stress can be monumental for teachers, schools, and students. Extreme forms of stress may lead to burnout, lower personal accomplishment, depersonalisation, and emotional exhaustion (Von der Embse, Kilgus, Solomon, Bowler, Curtiss, 2015; Rabitin et al, 2015; Arnes & Morin, 2016). Burnout is a metaphor that is commonly used to describe a state of mental weariness. Originally burnout was considered to occur exclusively in the human services among those who do “people work” of some kind, (Pine, Aronson, Kafry, 1981; Cunningham, 1982; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

Burnout is a response to a prolonged exposure to stressors and is a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, (i.e., being depleted of your emotional resources), cynicism and reduced professional efficacy (i.e.), evaluating your work accomplishments negatively (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Burnout also tends to be associated with organisational stressors such as high workload and lower levels of autonomy or loss of job control, inadequate resources, increased time pressure (Leiter & Maslach, 2009; Rabitin et al, 2015) or staff conflicts (Puleo, 2011).

Burnout is important because it has been shown to be associated with a range of psychological outcomes including lower productivity, withdrawal, negative attitudes and lowering of well-being in a variety of occupations (Morgan, 2015). It is a long-term stress reaction that mostly occurs among professionals who work with people in some capacity (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

Accumulating empirical evidence suggests that burnout is a process that gradually develops across time (Leiter, 1993). The first stage is characterised by an imbalance between resources and demands. Next a set of negative attitudes and behaviours is developed such as a tendency to treat recipients in a detached and mechanical manner. Eventually these negative attitudes and behaviours that constitute the depersonalisation component of burnout are to be considered as defensive coping mechanisms (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000).

Burnout is a particularly serious factor in chronic stress and one that can impair the human service workers effectiveness (Eckenrode, 1984; Collings & Murray, 1996; Khamisa et al, 2015), and a previous study by (Maslach & Leiter, 1997) predicted that burnout would be related to the desire to leave one’s job. In a study of the ability of emotional support to buffer the impact of job stress, they reported that emotional support by both supervisors and co-workers is associated with lower levels of burnout, work stress and mental health

problems (Himle et al, 1989). A lack of support on the job, particularly executive support, was a correlate of burnout (Fans Beck, 1987).

Burnout and engagement generally have three conclusions. Firstly, that there is a particularly strong and consistent relationship between job demands and burnout, secondly between burnout and health problems and thirdly job resources and engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). International studies show that approximately 60% to 70% of teachers repeatedly show stress symptoms and at least 30% have burnout symptoms (Antoniou, Polychroni, Walters, 2000; Lale, 2001). Other studies have examined the factors that discriminate between resilient teachers and those who have left the profession and found that factors such as values, self-efficacy, beliefs and emotional factors to ascertain differences between leavers and teachers who stay (Hong, Kim, Piquero, 2017).

Job control and autonomy act as a support in the workplace as they allow employees deal effectively with their job demands and reduce negative outcomes which may lead to stress and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Indeed, job control and autonomy have been consistently associated with lower anxiety, depression and reduced burnout (Sanne, Mykletun, Dahl, Moen, Tell, 2005). In addition, these organisational resources also may moderate the negative effect that organisational change has on employees' level of burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). It has also been established that employees perceive that flexible working conditions help them alleviate the stress caused by organisational stressors (Gillespie et al, 2007). Stressors are associated with negative health complaints and burnout (Verhaeghe et al, 2006; Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, Gu, 2007).

## **2.2 The Biology Underpinning Stress**

### **2.2.1 Defining Stress Biologically**

The literature review shows that 'stress' is not a useful term for scientists because it is such a highly subjective phenomenon that it may defy definition. The term "stress", as it is currently used was coined by Hans Selye in 1936, who defined it as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change". Several different definitions exist for the term "stress". Burnout is a term often associated with stress.

Although various definitions of burnout exist, it is most described as a “psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment” (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Burnout is also defined as an expectational mediated, job-related, dysphoric and dysfunctional state in an individual without major psychopathology who has functioned for a time at adequate performance and affectual levels in the same job situation and who will not recover to previous levels without outside help or environmental rearrangement (Brill, 1984). The literature shows a clear correlation between the terms stress and burnout (Fahs Beck, 1987).

Cortisol is a steroid hormone that plays an important part in stress response, it is produced in humans by the adrenal cortex within the adrenal gland on the kidneys. It is released in response to stress and low blood-glucose concentration. Cortisol’s function is to increase blood sugar and to suppress the immune system Hoehn (2010). Adrenaline also plays an important role in the “fight-or-flight” response in stress, its response is to increasing blood flow to muscles, output of the heart, pupil dilation response, and blood sugar level (Bell, 2009).

Initially stress on the body results in chemicals and hormones being produced such as adrenalin and cortisol, but if continued for longer periods anti-inflammatory chemicals are produced and this results in exhaustion and ill health (Hannibal, 2014). The evidence from the literature review shows that the human body is equipped to cope with stress over shorter periods but if this stress continues over longer periods, the body is not equipped to deal with this and illness may ensue (Halliwell, 2006).

The body’s stress system, which is primarily adapted to meeting sudden physical threats, evolved under entirely different conditions than those prevailing in modern society. When the systems are activated over a long period of time, a permanent imbalance arises between the bodies degenerative and regenerative functions. This can lead to acute and chronic stress (Danielsson, Heimerson, Lundberg, Aleksander, Stefansson, Akerstedt, 2012). Common signs an individual is moving towards a more serious stress related state include poorer performance, chronic fatigue, disinterest, dejection, lack of work motivation, memory disturbances, sleeping problems, dizziness, numbness, chest pressure, recurring infections and muscle pain (Danielsson et al, 2012).

### 2.2.2 Synonyms used for workplace misbehaviour

Workplace misbehaviour has many definitions, (Sprouse, 1992) described workplace misbehaviour as “sabotage in the workplace”. Workplace misbehaviour is described as ‘self-conscious rule-breaking’ by (Collinson & Ackroyd, 2005). It is also described as an intentional behaviour and is defined as ‘any intentional action by members of organisations that defies and violates’ (a) shared organisational rules and expectations, or (b) core societal values, mores and standards of proper conduct’ (Vardi & Wiener, 1996).

Unlike workplace misbehaviour which is individual-centered, interpersonal conflict is a natural phenomenon that is bound to occur either in workplaces, associations or groups, as long as people from different or diverse backgrounds congregate. In the workplace, conflict includes any type of disagreements that take place there (Volosevici, (2015). Workplace misbehaviour seems to encompass a wide variety of mostly negative outcomes, some of which are identified below. Table 1 below summarises terms associated with workplace misbehaviour.

**Table 1- Common terms associated with challenging workplace misbehaviour**

Phrases	Definitions	References
Bullying	The use of force, coercion, or threat, to abuse, aggressively dominate or intimidate. The behaviour is often repeated and habitual. One essential prerequisite is the imbalance of physical or social power.	Juvonen, J.; Graham, S. (2014).
Incivility	Low intensity, deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect.	Anderssen I., Pearson C., (1999), “
Interpersonal conflict	A process that occurs between independent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals.	Henry, A., (2004),
Presenteeism	Lost productivity that occurs when employees come to work ill and perform below par because of that illness.	Lofland J., Pizzi L., Frick K., (2004),
Emotional abuse	A form of abuse, characterised by a person subjecting or exposing another person to behavior that may result in psychological trauma, including anxiety, chronic depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder	Dutton, M., Goodman, L, Bennett, L., (2000),
Workplace mistreatment	A broad or overarching term, capturing a range of more specific abuses and insults that workers may experience, often routinely, in their workplace	Hodgins M., MacCurtain S., Mannix McNamara P., (2013),



Ill treatment	The act of treating someone badly, especially by being violent or by not taking care of them	Robinson A., Jones T., Fevre R., Lewis D, (2012),
Mobbing	Bullying of an individual by a group, in any context, such as a family, peer group, community, or online. When it occurs as physical and emotional abuse in the workplace, such as "ganging up" by co-workers, subordinates or superiors, to force out of the workplace, through rumour, innuendo, intimidation, humiliation, discrediting and isolation.	Leymann, H. (1996).
Mistrust	To have doubt about the honesty or ability of someone.	Kramer, R. (1999).
Toxic workplace	A workplace marked by significant drama and infighting, where personal battles often harm productivity.	Benoit, S (2011)
Absenteeism	Habitual pattern of absence from a duty or obligation without good reason and is generally, described in terms of unplanned absences	Genowska, A., Fryc, J., Pinkas J. Jamiolkowski J., Szafraniek, K., Szpak A., Bojar B., (2017).
Workplace aggression	Efforts by individuals to harm others with whom they work, or have worked, or the organisations in which they are presently, employed	Neuman J., Baron R., (1998),
Harassment	A wide range of behaviours that are of an offensive nature. It is commonly understood as behavior that demeans, humiliates or embarrasses a person, and is characteristically identified by its unlikelihood in terms of social and moral reasonableness. In the legal sense, these are behaviours that are disturbing, upsetting or threatening.	Japanese Institute for Labour Policy and Training, (2013),
Intimidation	Includes workplace bullying, as well as antagonistic politics and abrasive personalities. An individual be intimidating in the workplace when his or her actions elicit from a victim a response of fear.	Leymann, H. (1990).
Burnout	A psychological syndrome involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment	Maslach C., Schaufeli W., (1993)
Workplace cliques	A narrow exclusive circle or group of persons, especially one held together by common interests, views or poses, who by definition exclude certain people specifically by isolating them or out casting them.	Pillemer J., Rothbard N., (2018),
Stress	Has so many different meanings that it is confusing, elusive, and heard so often its meaning is frequently distorted, and its implications taken for granted.	(Arthur, 2005)

## 2.3 Stress and health

The literature shows evidence that stress has been linked to many negative health outcomes for individuals (Parent-Thirion, Macías, Hurley, Vermeylen, 2007; Kudielka, 2009; Bruhn & Frick, 2011; Hannibal, 2014). Stress is now viewed neither as a perturbation nor a stereotyped response pattern but as a condition characterised by “a perceived discrepancy between information about a monitored variable and criteria for eliciting patterned effector responses” (Goldstein & Kopin, 2007). It has also been well established by researchers that personality type has a bearing on how stress is perceived by individuals (Kyriacou 2001; Judge et al, 2003; Kokkinos, 2007; Foley, 2013).

The type of coping strategies used by individuals can also affect the impact of stress on individuals (Chan, 1998; Griffith et al, 1999). There is also evidence that job stress can lead to poor health and even injury at considerable cost to employees, organisations and society (Nayak et al, 2015). Understanding and endeavouring to improve the health and overall well-being of individuals at work has been an important focus for psychologists for some time (Arnold, Randall, Patterson, Sylvester, Robertson, Cooper, 2010).

Physicians have long recognised that people were more susceptible to sickness when subjected to high levels of stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). (Bonde, 2008) noted that job strain significantly increased the risk of depression symptoms. It is evident that occupational stress has been linked to physical illnesses such as, heart disease and back pain as well as psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety (Hinkle, 1987; Johnson et al, 2005; Garrick, Winwood, Mak, Cathcart, Bakker, Lushington, 2014).

Known stress related disorders include some kinds of headache, peptic ulcers, ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, diabetes, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, bronchial asthma, and eczema (Tay, 1994). It has been found when under stress the body makes rapid physiological changes called adaptive responses to deal with threatening situations. If the stressful situation continues and the body’s adaptive capability runs out illness could result (Ooi, 1997).

A meta-analysis of 70 papers found several significant correlations between occupational stressors and physical symptoms (Nixon, Mazzola, Bauer, Krueger, Spector, 2011). Another study based in Israel found somatic complaints by teachers over time because of stress in work (Shirom, Oliver, Stein, 2009). The Depression Study in European Society surveyed 78,000 workers and found that 17% had a depressive disorder resulting from stress (Kalia, 2002).

Cardiovascular disease and hypertension are a major cause of morbidity and mortality in modern society (Goldstein, 1995; Adeyi, Smith, Robles, 2007). These diseases have been extensively studied and reported as have the psycho sociological factors that interact with them. Among the many causative factors, mental stress or strain is believed to be a prime culprit (Rosenthal & Atler, 2012; Yang, Wang, Ge, Hu, Chi, 2011). Work related stress is a known contributor to physical and psychosocial health problems as well as an increasing economic burden for enterprises and society (Van Veldhoven, 1996; Rook, 2001; Leka & Kortum, 2008).

Another developing area of the link between stress and psychosocial risks is diabetes. Several studies have shown a significant link between psychosocial hazards and diabetes. (Smith, Glazier, Lu, Mustard, 2012) studied nearly 7500 participants in Canada and revealed that women with low job control were at significant risk of developing diabetes. Also (Heraclides et al, 2009) found that among a large sample of nearly 6000 women, psychosocial work stress was actually a predictor of type 2 diabetes. Despite the many initiatives taken to invest in the health and well-being of employees, workplace data still record the fact that 420,000 employees in Britain in 2006 believed that they were experiencing stress, depression or anxiety at work at levels that were making them ill (HSE, 2007).

## 2.4 Prevalence and measurement of stress

### 2.4.1 Can stress be measured in work?

Despite frequent criticism, most work-related stress researchers continue to use subjective self-reports measures for job stressors. The parameters and scales used for measuring stress as well as the modes of measurement differ from one study to another (Rosenthal & Adler, 2012). Quantitatively the nature and mechanism of the stress response is considered problematic. It is dependent on the pituitary adrenocortical system and is measured in terms of systematic adrenal medullary system reflecting the intensity of stress arousal (Eaker, 2004).

For psychological job strains, such as emotional states, the only viable means of measurement is to ask individuals how they feel (Jex, Beehr, Roberts, 1992), which is the domain of qualitative research. They also reported that alternatives to self-reports used in job stress study have not proved to be more effective at measuring stress levels. Objective measures of job stressors that use methods other than employee self-report and physiological measures of job strain have been shown to be problematic and can be less accurate measures of what was intended than are self-reports (Frese & Zapf, 1988). Many researchers have criticised at least some self-reporting measures as being biased or influenced by common method variance (Brief, Burke, George, Robinson, Webster, 1988).

(Spector & Jex, 1998) used four scales for studying interpersonal stress, organisational constraints scale, interpersonal conflict at work scale, quantitative workload scale and physical symptoms inventory across 18 studies on stress. Their results showed that interpersonal conflict can serve as a constraint in a variety of ways, for example, it can prevent necessary teamwork among employees.

### 2.4.2 The Prevalence of stress and its effect in teaching

An ESRI study in 2019 found that job stress among employees in Ireland has doubled from 8% in 2010 to 17% in 2015. Teaching was also recognised as a demanding and stressful profession (Griffith, et al, 1999). However, the level of job stress in Ireland was still below the average for ten Western European countries in 2015 which was (19%). In 2003 a study undertaken by the Schools Advisory Service, the largest independent provider of teacher absence insurance in the UK showed that one in three teachers took sick leave in the previous year because of work-related stress.

According to the Office of National Statistics in the UK there was an 80% increase in the number of teachers committing suicide between 2008 (35 teachers) and 2009 (63 teachers), these figures demonstrate that instances of suicide for teachers were 30-40 % higher than the national average for all occupations (National Union of Teachers, 2012).

The effect on physical and mental health of the psychosocial environment at work has been well documented (Stansfeld & Candy, 2006). A variety of psychosocial risks in teaching are associated with poor mental health outcomes including clinical depression but that associations between specific exposures and outcomes are difficult to measure in isolation (Ylipaavalniemi et al, 2005).

## 2.5 Stress and costs

The literature shows that negative stress experienced by workers in their workplace has many costs to the individual, to the organisation and to society (McShane & Von Glinow, 2000; Kalia, 2002; Stavroula, Aditya, Lavicoli, Vartia, Ertel, 2008). A survey of UK teachers by the Schools Advisory Service (2004) found that each year 213 300 days of work are lost as a result stress, anxiety and depression, at a cost of £19 million. In 2002 the (European Commission, 2002) calculated the costs of work-related stress in the EU-15 at €20 billion per year. It is estimated that 30 % of sickness absence is directly caused by stress (Lavicoli, Deitingner Grandi, Lupoli, Pera, Rondinone, 2004; Hoel & Einarsen, 2011).

(Ahmad, 2015) noted stress is an organism's total response to environmental demands or pressures and when demand on the individual exceeds their capabilities stress occurs. Stress can have a negative impact on employment and job performance (Judge et al, 2003; Vischer, 2007; Kazmi, Amjad, Khan, 2008) and there are many costs associated for the individual, the organisation and Society, as a result of negative effects of stress (Kalia, 2002; Stavroula et al, 2008). The misdiagnosis of stress related disorders, including anxiety, costs the United States of America billions of dollars each year. The American Institute of Stress has determined that 75% to 90% of all doctor visits are now stress related (Kalia, 2002).

Although the European Union has highlighted and acknowledged that the cost of stress at work at a European level is vast, there would seem to be a need for substantial change to lower or eradicate the problem. In 2002 the (European Commission, 2002) calculated the costs of work-related stress in the European Union 15 countries at €20 billion a year.

According to the labour force survey (2015) in Britain 39%, (487,000) of all work-related illness reported in 2013-2014 was categorised as “work related stress, depression or anxiety”. In the same period, the total number of working days lost to work related stress anxiety or depression was 11.3 million. The 2012-2013 THOR GP (UK) report identified three key issues leading to work related stress. These were changes at work, poor interpersonal relationships and excessive workload and resulted in depression and anxiety.

It is estimated that up to 11 million work days are lost through absenteeism every year at a cost of €1.5bn to the Irish economy and study indicates that stress, anxiety, and depression (SAD) and muscular-skeletal disorders (MSD) together account for 68% of work-related illnesses, (ESRI, 2015).

Work related stress is a major challenge to Occupational Health and Safety, with one in three workers, (nearly 40 million employees) reporting that they are affected by stress at work. This costs 3-4% of GDP per year in the European Union (Leka & Kortum, 2008). A report found that lost output among individuals with mental health disorders in Northern Ireland accounted for a substantial proportion of the overall economic costs, £789 million in 2002–3 (Northern Ireland Association of Mental Health, 2004). According to the (European Risk Observatories Literature Review 2014), there is much evidence of a link between psychosocial risks and stress at work and negative health outcomes. In particular diabetes, mental health problems, musculoskeletal disorders and cardiovascular diseases were most likely to manifest as a result of stress.

A study by (Cox, Griffiths, Rial-Gonzalez, 2000), estimates that 50% of all working days lost have some links with work related stress. A Dutch study in 1998 noted that mental disorders were the main cause of incapacity and the cost of psychosocial illness was estimated to be €2.26 million per year (Koukoulaki, 2004). Some of the serious consequences of employee stress are absenteeism, workers compensation claims, litigation, grievances, accidents, errors of judgement and action, conflict and interpersonal problems, violence, customer service problems, resistance to change, no time to do it right and loss of intelligent capital (Kalia, 2002; Ruiz, Pincus, Borkovec, Echemendia, Castonguay, Ragusea

2004). Interpersonal conflicts with supervisors and to a lesser extent conflicts with colleagues were risk factors for being injured in occupational accidents and stress which had many and significant associated costs (Swaen, Van Amelsvoort, Bultmann, Slangen, Kant, 2004; Dollard, Skinner, Tuckey, Bailey, 2007).

According to the European network for work health promotion, mental health disorders in general cost Europe €240 billion per year. The European Risk Observatory literature review (2014), on calculating the costs of work-related stress and psychosocial risks highlighted the importance of assessing costs related to stress and psychosocial risks resulting in absenteeism, presenteeism and staff turnover in organisations. The review also highlights the relationship between work-related stress and psychosocial risks and mental health problems such as depression, musculoskeletal disorders, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

In the United Kingdom, the Mental Health Foundation reports that stress costs British industry £3 billion per annum. The Report claimed that most companies did not view stress as a mental health problem and that macho environments in large corporations and financial institutions are often hot-beds of stress. The high-profile nature of these jobs often means that mistakes can cost large amounts of cash (British Mental Health Foundation report, 2001). There is little evidence in the literature as to the costs to the Irish education sector regarding stress.

In the UK, the Health and Safety Executive statistics show that for 2006 and 2007 almost 30 million days were lost because of work related illness (HSE, 2007). Stress, depression and anxiety accounted for 13.8 million days lost or 46% of all reported illness making this the single largest cause of absence attributable to work related illness. In the last five years, work related stress, depression or anxiety remains for each year the single most reported complaint (HSE, 2007).

It is important to draw attention to the health-related costs at work but it is as important not to lose sight of the considerable number of ways in which work benefits and contributes to our health and well-being (Cooper et al, 2008). Stress claims however are twice as costly as other types of claims due to the affected person's long duration off work. Thus, whilst the number of claimants may be modest, the costs of the claim are high and consequently require scrutiny (Guthrie, 2006). Guthrie notes that many teachers take sick leave rather than claim workers compensation. This may be because workers compensation schemes in

various jurisdictions all contain provisions that effectively reduce workers' pay after certain periods off work.

## 2.6 Interpersonal conflict (IPC)

While past research on conflict is voluminous, a clear, generally accepted definition of interpersonal conflict is still lacking (Hardwick & Barki, 2002). Interpersonal conflict is a dynamic process that occurs between individuals or groups who are in interdependent relationships and is more likely to occur when a variety of background situational and situational conditions exist (Wall & Callister, 1995). Interpersonal conflict between people is a natural feature of the human condition (Ott Marshall, 2018). Interpersonal conflict presents us with both opportunities and challenges, in all types of interpersonal relationships (Cupach, Canary, Spitzberg, 2010). Definitions of interpersonal conflict, aggression and bullying seem to have considerable overlap (Mikkelsen, Høgh, Puggaard, 2011). This seems not that surprising given that they all describe interpersonal behaviours at work that can cause harm to others (Notelaers, Van der Heijden, Guenter, Nielsen Birkeland, Valvetne Einarsen, 2018).

Interpersonal conflict becomes perceptible when individuals are annoyed by the actions of another person or a group. This is a phenomenon so omnipresent in social life that we too easily take it for granted. People are reluctant to diverge from well-trodden paths: they avoid, they accommodate, they negotiate and sometimes they fight (Van de Vliert, 1998). Bullying differs from interpersonal conflict in that it is characterised by a pattern of repeated behaviours over an extended period of time, whereas conflict and aggression can manifest in a single interaction (Einarsen, Hoel, Notelaers, 2009). Although conceptually, conflict, aggression and bullying seem to have many noteworthy similarities (and differences), there is a shortage of empirical studies on their convergence and divergence (Aquino & Thau, 2009).

(Elmagri & Eaton's, 2011) study shows that identifying the factors which cause conflict in any organisation is considered the main stage in the process of conflict management. This can be managed in different ways, some focusing on interpersonal relationships and others on structural changes. 'Eustress' is a term commonly applied to more positive responses, whilst the term 'distress' appropriately describes negative aspects. 'Stress' therefore, should be viewed as a continuum along which an individual may pass, from feelings of "Eustress"



to those of mild or moderate distress, to those of severe distress (Clancy & Mc Vicar, 2002, Mc Vicar, 2003, Le Ferve, Matheny, Kolt, 2003),

(Hoel & Einarsen, 2011) suggest that a strategy merely aimed at solving an “interpersonal conflict” would not be appropriate if the conflict actually is an example of bullying, and such “conflict management interventions” may be resented by those employees being bullied. The challenge for managers thus is to learn to tell apart workplace conflicts from bullying incidents, as both kinds of social stressors afford different kinds of interventions. It should also be noted that interpersonal management strategies have been found to be ineffective in a climate where bullying is tolerated (Zapf & Gross, 2001). Teachers in conflict can exhibit behaviour changes that can affect and disrupt other teaching colleagues and if several teachers in one school have high levels of conflict, there is potential for the entire school to be affected in a negative manner (Brown & Ralph, 1992).

Interpersonal theory, human behaviour and traits are shaped by two functional desires, to “get along” and to “get ahead” (Pincus & Gurtman, 2006). Harry Stack Sullivan (considered the father of interpersonal theory) noted that social relations are at the heart of psychopathology. Organisational conflicts are inevitable and studies show that about 20% of employee time is spent on managing conflicts in some way (Rahim & Afzalur, 2000).

### 2.6.1 Rationale for a focus on IPC

Interpersonal conflict refers to any type of conflict involving two or more people, it can be mild or severe and is a natural outcome of human interaction (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2018). Interpersonal conflicts have proved to be disruptive in a working environment (Henkin & Holliman, 2009) and conflicts among educators within schools do have a negative effect on school performance (Tekos & Iordanidis, 2011).

People have very different personalities, values, expectations, and attitudes toward problem-solving. When you work or interact with someone who doesn't share your opinions or goals, conflict can result. Both pilot studies and interviews in this thesis noted high level of IPC among participants which had a considerable negative effect on workplace stress.

Conflict isn't always serious though, nor is it always negative. Learning how to recognise and work through interpersonal conflict in productive healthy ways is an important skill that can help you have better relationships in your day-to-day life. High levels of interpersonal conflict (IPC) were reported among participants in this study. Participants seemed to place great value on their interactions with other colleagues and conflict with these colleagues affected participants deeply. This finding is supported by (Berscheid & Reis, 1998), who noted that that the quality of interpersonal relationships in work environments may have an important influence on an individual's behavior, affect, and cognitions.

Participants in this study also noted that negative interactions with colleagues affected their family life as they brought home negative feelings from work. (Veroff, Douvan & Kulka, 1981) found that interpersonal relationships very often have a "dark side" and interpersonal problems rank among the most common sources of unhappiness in people's lives. Some research suggests that bad relationships may have a stronger impact on individuals' lives than positive relationships (Berscheid & Reis, 1998).

(Fields, 1998) notes that teachers are frequently exposed to interpersonal conflict in schools and that many find themselves ill-prepared to deal with these new demands. How teachers manage conflict in the workplace is of considerable importance, not only to the personal professional efficacy and satisfaction of teachers, but also to the overall effectiveness of the school and its curriculum.

Participants also noted the benefits of good interpersonal relations with colleagues in this study, colleagues could be a great source of assistance. This finding would support (Spector & Jex, 1998), who noted that interpersonal relationships may have a positive impact on an individual's life, such as documented in the literature on social integration. (Frone, 1999), noted that job satisfaction, absenteeism and staff turnover have all been related to negative effects of interpersonal conflict in workplaces.

Conflict noted by participants in this study very often begun with minor disagreements that festered and grew over time, sometimes leading to large scale disputes among teachers. Easily begun and in some cases covert, IPC could define a teacher's relationship with the school. There is some evidence in the literature on how IPC affects school environments and individual teachers. This study noted the great value and emphasis teachers placed on IPC with colleagues in schools. The scale of IPC reported in this study and the level of feeling that teachers placed on IPC issues was the rationale for the focus on IPC in this study.

### 2.6.2 Conflict types

Co-worker behaviours can be grouped into two categories, antagonism, and support, both being correlated with job satisfaction (Borg, Riding, Falzon, 1992; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Social relationships are an important predictor of well-being including health and longevity (Demir & Weitekamp, 2007). Conflict interactions, especially those that are contentious and angry, are further compounded by high stress which narrows attention and reduces the complexity of thought which focus cognitive efforts on construction and rehearsal of personal arguments and interpretations (Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, Dub, 2000).

Negativity in social relations has many forms and sources. Problematic social exchanges can result from misguided, failed or withheld social support (Lepore, 1992). Interpersonal conflict is associated with psychological distress among individuals with low levels of perceived social support (Caughey, 1996; Bermejo-Toro & Prieto-Ursúa, 2006). Lepore found that high levels of perceived support in one social domain can buffer individuals from distressing negative interpersonal relations in another social domain. Two other interesting findings of Lepore's, 1992 study were found. Firstly, a link between stressful occupational conditions and family conflict, and secondly having few or no negative social experiences may be as important to emotional functioning as the perceived presence of social support. High levels of perceived presence of social support appeared to minimise psychological distress.

Interpersonal conflicts are by far the most upsetting of all daily stressors (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, Schilling, 1991). Conflicts from ongoing nonfamily relationships may be particularly distressing because these relationships have continuity and usually have insufficient intimacy and understanding to prevent arguments from being perceived as a major threat. An important issue raised in their study on interpersonal stress concerns the determinants of stress resolution, particularly the reduction of conflicts. Approximately one

third of all daily stressors occur on days following the report of similar stressors of that nature (Bolger et al, 1991).

### 2.6.3 Micro politics and Interpersonal conflict in schools

A micro-political perspective focuses on how power relations influence a specific work environment, which involves relationships between various actors (Ehrich & Millwater, 2011). (Blasé, 1988) notes that the concept of power is used either to influence others or as self-protection in the school setting. Micro-politics includes how teachers act towards students and each other in collaboration (Achinstein 2002). The school setting is often full of conflict, tensions and rivalry as well as opportunities for collaboration and coalition, all of which influence the practice of teachers (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Teacher relationships are important to consider through a micro-political lens as relational aspects of the work are a central part of the teaching profession (Shapiro, 2010).

According to Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002) page 756, "Through micropolitical actions teachers will strive to establish the desired working conditions, to safeguard them when they are threatened or to restore them when they have been removed". The desired working conditions involves good relationships with colleagues, and when relationships with colleagues are experienced as negative, this can cause tension with many school stakeholders. (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002) show how a positive relation with a principal can alleviate feelings of frustration and isolation for teachers.

(Zembylas, 2005) notes that teachers' work involves emotional rules regarding whether emotions should be controlled or expressed. Emotional rules are defined as dependent on the context of a specific school, as well as being historical contingent and in part controlled by the teacher. (Uitto, Jokikokko, Estola, 2005) note that in the micro-political school setting, emotions are not only private but also constructed between the teacher and the working conditions of the school. They have argued that the micro-political context is at the heart of the teacher's identity. For example, being part of several relationships within a school can still be experienced as lonely in a culture of silence.

#### 2.6.4 How is IPC being understood?

Since conflict is entailed in diverse types of social interactions its concepts have been applied to a variety of situations. The potential for conflict exists where opposing interests, values and needs tinge our relationships with others (Jeong 2008). Interpersonal conflict in workplaces is a pervasive, complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Interpersonal conflict when poorly managed, can have a range of detrimental effects (de Wit, Jehn, & Scheepers, 2013). Such interpersonal workplace conflict has been associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion, burnout and turn-over (Glasberg, Norberg, & Soderberg, 2007). Interpersonal conflict has also been associated with reduced job satisfaction and increased workplace stress (Stecker & Stecker, 2014).

Malis & Roloff (2006b) described serial arguments in interpersonal conflict as a chronic stressor based on Segerstrom and Miller's (2004) meta-analysis examining the impact of stressors on immune-system functioning. In a second study, Malis & Roloff (2006a) explored how demand and withdrawal patterns typically enacted during argumentative episodes affected stress and stress-related symptoms. This asymmetrical approach/avoidance pattern typifies interpersonal conflict arguments.

A number of studies in the UK and abroad, have recently identified destructive conflict and bullying at work as an occupational hazard of significant magnitude (Zapf et al., 2003). A UK nationwide study sponsored by BOHRF confirms previous findings which suggest that being exposed to destructive conflict and bullying may have many negative implications for individuals (Einarsen, Hoel, Cooper, 2003). A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal 'strength' are in conflict (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003a p15).

(Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996) noted that conflict cannot be regarded as bullying if two more or less equally "strong" persons come into conflict with each other or when only an isolated instance has occurred. Evert Van de Vliert's (1998) notes considerable overlap between conflict and other workplace misbehaviours, his defines conflict as "Two individuals, an individual and a group, or two groups, are said to be in conflict when and to the extent that at least one of the parties feels it is being obstructed or irritated by the other" (p. 351).

Van de Vliert notes that conflicts are subjective, associated with frustration that can be cognitive or effective and frustration associated with interpersonal conflict is often blamed on another. His study also notes that conflict can escalate or deescalate over time and that frustration from conflict is not necessarily coupled with particular conflict towards the other party.

(Pruitt & Rubin, 1986) note that conflict can be one-sided (e.g., when only one party feels frustrated or attributes the frustration to the other). Conflict can also be perceived as a divergence of interest between individuals or groups, a belief on the part of these entities that their current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. In certain cases, conflicts can poison the social climate of a workplace and escalate into serious personal conflicts and internal office war (Van de Vliert, 1998).

The literature review seems to show interpersonal conflict as a nested phenomenon (Niall, 2004). The “nested phenomenon” encapsulates the idea that smaller conflicts are often embedded in larger conflicts, but that it may be possible to address larger conflicts by dealing with their manifestations at the local level (Dugan, 1996). Interpersonal conflict is evident in all organisations and workplaces and is a natural part of human existence and disputes occur commonly in interpersonal relationships (Miller, 1997). (Averill, 1982) reported that a majority of people (66%) become angry with someone in any given week; on any given day 44% of people become annoyed by work colleagues. Many everyday disputes end quickly (Vuchinich, 1987), but some workplace disputes end without resolution (Johnson & Roloff, 1998).

### **2.6.5 Conflict Management**

(Verma, 1998), notes that conflict is as inevitable as change seems to be. When people interact during the course of completing their tasks, there is always a potential for conflict. In fact, it is virtually impossible for people with diverse background skills and norms to work together; make decisions, and try to meet project goals and objectives without conflict. Unmanaged or badly managed interpersonal conflict is stressful, reduces confidence levels, produces anxieties and frustration and leads to lowered job motivation, humiliation, and stress-induced psychological and physical illness, with often dramatic consequences for the employee, family and friends and long-term career damage (McClure, 2000).

The literature notes that three distinct views have evolved about conflict in organisations, The traditional view (dominant from the late nineteenth century until the mid-1940s) assumes that conflict is bad, always has a negative impact, and leads to declines in performance as the level of conflict increases. Conflict must therefore always be avoided (Ajike, Akinlabi, Magaji Sonubi, 2015).

The contemporary view of conflict emerged in the late 1940s and held sway through the 1970s. It argues that conflict is natural and inevitable in all organisations and that it may have either a positive or a negative effect, depending on how the conflict is handled. This approach advocates acceptance of conflict and rationalises its existence. Because of the potential benefits from conflict, managers should focus on managing it effectively rather than suppressing or eliminating it (Verma, 1998).

The present-day perspective or (interactionist) view assumes that conflict is necessary to increase performance. This view encourages conflict based on the belief that a harmonious, peaceful, tranquil, too-cooperative project organisation is likely to become static, apathetic, stagnant, and unable to respond to change and innovation. This approach encourages managers to maintain an appropriate level of conflict, enough to keep projects self-critical, viable, creative, and innovative (Dermaku A & Balliu E, 2020).

Interpersonal conflict resolution techniques are based on the recognition that the choice of a conflict management strategy depends on the intensity of the conflict and the relative importance people place on maintaining good relationships versus achieving goals (Blake & Mouton, 1970). Conflict management involves a wide range of activities, including communication, problem solving, dealing with emotions, and understanding positions of the people involved (Behfar, Mannix, Peterson, Trochim, 2011).

Effective management of conflict is essential for individuals, groups, and organisations to function successfully (Rahim & Afzalur, 2000). Since conflicts affect organisations on a daily basis, the management of them must be taken seriously for the sake of the organisation and its employees (Bordone & Moffitt, 2006).

Conflict management theories have many definitions (Knapp, Putnan & Davis, 1988). Some of the earliest conflict management theories were developed by (Follett, 1940) and (Blake & Mouton 1964). Follett (1940) identified that five conflict management styles exist: domination, compromise, integration, avoidance, and suppression. Blake & Mouton's conflict management approaches were aligned with their managerial grid concept which was based on two dimensions, concern for people and concern for production.

(Blake & Mouton 1970) study presented five general techniques for resolving conflict: withdrawing, smoothing, forcing, compromising, and problem solving. Since each conflict situation is unique and dynamic, it may be difficult to recommend the best conflict management approach. Choice of approach depends on many factors such as the type and relative importance of conflict, time constraints, the position of the participants involved relative emphasis on goals versus relationships (Gross & Guerrero, 2000).

Conflict can be healthy if it is managed effectively. Conflict management requires a combination of analytical and human skills. Good conflict managers work at the source of conflict to resolve it permanently, they must address the cause of the conflict and not just the symptoms of it (Baker & Baker, 1992).

#### 2.6.6 The nested phenomenon of interpersonal conflict and it's emotional domain

The history of interpersonal conflict is embedded within the history of interpersonal relationships. Sustained human social contact requires the formation of interpersonal relationships, and the inevitable and frequent changes in those relationships result in conflict (Donohue & Cai, 2022).

Conflict is a persistent fact of organisational life, conflict in organisations are not always the dramatic confrontations that receive most attention or publicity. Nor is conflict usually bracketed into discrete public forums where negotiation and designated third parties officially participate in the resolution of their differences (Collins, 1975). Disputes in many cases are embedded covertly in day-to-day operations of the organisation (Kolb & Bartunek, 1993).



Kolb & Putman (1992) noted that conflict exists covertly and is enacted in the crevices and crannies of organisations" (p. 22). Their work further develops the thesis that, in order to fully understand the origins and consequences of organisational conflict, it is important for organisations to examine the hidden sources of conflict: those that normally remain concealed, private, offstage and out of sight.

Emotions have been defined as subjective feeling states that include basic emotions such as love, joy, shame, guilt and jealousy (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Research suggests that conflict and emotions are intertwined and conflict can be both an antecedent and a consequence of emotions (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001).

Scholars are increasingly integrating emotion into the study of workplace conflict (Bell & Song, 2005). Conflict can invoke potentially damaging negative emotions, verbal communication during conflict has been shown to include personal elements that suggest the escalation of negative emotions (Lovelace, Shapiro, Weingart, 2001). Disagreeable approaches to managing conflict such as threats, being condescending, and pressuring others, can involve emotions of anger, frustration, and irritation (Alper. Tjosvold, Law, 2000).

The expression of emotions may be exaggerated in the team through the process of emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, Raspsen, 1994). Disagreements among group members may be interpreted as personal attacks (Simons & Peterson, 2000). Emotion is central to all major conflicts, but this presence has long been overlooked and under theorised. Several scholars have lately recognised this omission and stressed the role of emotion in conflict (Baele Sterck & Meur 2016). Studies have shown that emotion cannot be considered simply as an affect that every now and then hampers otherwise rational judgment but rather as a permanent state holding an enduring and systemic role in every cognitive process (Kahler, 1998 p 919).

The experience of emotion is individual but is always expressed to others and hence tends to disseminate among group members. The external manifestations of emotion experienced at the individual level provoke the collectivisation of emotion within a group which may then impact on decisions made (Fattah & Fierke, 2009).

(Salovey & Mayer, 1990) suggest that the successful regulation of emotions in conflict situations allows individuals to refocus their own and others' attention on important organisational problems and away from unnecessary complications. Conversely, if negative emotions are not processed and resolved in a constructive way, organisational and group efficiency and effectiveness can suffer (Jehn, 1997).

## 2.7 Legal definitions of work-related stress

### 2.7.1 Legislation on work related stress

Stress is considered a hazard within workplace safety legislation and it is only recently that regulation of work organisation and psychosocial hazards have been examined academically (Quinlan, 2007). The key general duty on employers in the EU requires to maintain, "as far as reasonably practicable" a working environment that is safe and without risks (Bluff & Johnstone, 2005). Stress is perceived differently by different people and it often depends on character profiles and past experiences (Kudielka, 2009). Mental health problems associated with psychosocial risk factors are a significant occupational health issue both in industrial nations (Parent-Thirion et al, 2007) and in developing countries.

Few countries have provided legislative tools specifically adapted for the management of the broad range of psychosocial risk factors associated with work organisations (Quinlan, 2007). The onus of proving a work-related stress claim through the legal system is stressful and is the subject of vigorous debate and divergent interpretation (Guthrie, 2006).

In the European Union (EU) there exists a broad range of practices in the different member states regarding the prevention of psychosocial hazards; some states do little or nothing, while others have elaborated legislative frameworks and sophisticated inspection practices (Leka, Jain, Lavicoli, Varia, 2011). There are three categories of legal stress claim, "Mental-Physical" which is where nonphysical stimulus induces a physical response, "Physical-Mental" which is where a mental disorder follows a physical injury and "Mental-Mental" which is where some nonphysical event triggers a psychological reaction so as to incapacitate a worker (Staten & Umbeck, 1983). In many cases it is the European States where compensation for mental health problems exists, either through workers compensation or national sickness insurance (Fooks et al, 2007).

### **2.7.2 Irish litigation involving work related stress**

In Ireland the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 contains provisions for securing and improving the safety, health, and welfare for all workers. This Act updates repeals and replaces its predecessor Health and Safety Acts which originated from the requirements of Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12<sup>th</sup> June 1989. This is not just a European problem; the general principles of Australian workers compensation hold that the employer takes the worker as he/she finds the worker. If an employer engages a worker with a pre-existing mental disorder, which is aggravated by apparently ordinary work circumstances, the employer is liable to make payments for compensation provided that the worker satisfies the requested thresholds (Guthrie, 2006).

In an Irish case *Saehan Media Ireland Limited v A Worker*, the legal ruling stated that “work related stress is recognised as a health and safety issue and employers have an obligation to deal with instances of its occurrence which are brought to their attention” (Connolly, 2002). In order for a stress case to be successful, certain criteria must be proved by the claimant, namely that the employer was informed about the stress, the stress caused an illness, the illness was as a result of the stress and the employer did nothing to reduce or eliminate the stress (Connolly, 2002). There is an inference from this study that in many English law cases tends to closely influence Irish law, indeed an English case in 2002, *Sutherland v Hatton*, in which four claimants sued their employers for stress, is such an example (Mendelson, 1990).

Sixteen “Golden Rules” emerged from the *Hatton* case. Although the judgement is not binding on the Irish Courts, the “*Hatton Principles*” have been accepted as useful and have persuasive influence on the Irish Courts in stress cases that come before them, for example; (*McGrath v Trintech*, 2004). The legal profession has viewed stress as an occupational issue. It has been recognised as such since the *Walker Versus Northumberland Council* in 1994. An English Court found that Mr Walker, who claimed he suffered stress because of his employer’s negligence, was entitled to recover damages. Since this landmark case, litigation on stress has increased in the Courts.

A claimant must show that their employer knew or should have known that an employee was at risk of suffering a psychiatric injury, either from previous absences or because of complaints made (HAS, 2009). However, as this study shows, teachers are reluctant to inform their school management of stress experienced in work in case of negative consequences taken against them. It is also worth noting that recent case law in Ireland, *Glynn v Minister for Justice Equality and Law* (2014), made a legal breakthrough with a decision that occupational stress is not actionable but work-related stress is actionable. The decision outlined that occupational stress is not actionable given that it is something that every employed person may experience at some stage of his or her working life (HSA, 2009).

Workplace stress on the other hand may be actionable if certain legal criteria are met. It can be because of negligence, where excessive demands are made of an employee or where their complaints in the workplace go unheeded. With these points in mind, there would seem a difficulty for teachers to take legal action for stress against schools if they are not willing to report stress to their school (Connolly & Quinlivan, 2006; Neligan, 2008).

## **2.8 Wider School Based Factors and Stress**

### **2.8.1 Power**

The importance of leadership and stress is a recurring theme in the education-based literature, this relationship can have negative outcomes for school effectiveness and school improvement and its role in the development of positive staff relations (INTO, 2000). Authority is always the locus of overall organisations responsibility and legitimacy, and anchors the role system of an organisation (Gronn, 2003). The literature review identified 'Power' as an important dynamic in workplace mistreatment and the resulting stress experienced by individuals who are controlled within organisations. Power and how it is manifested is at the heart of workplace mistreatment and bullying as the target attempts to resist the domination of the bully (Rivers, 2011). Power can be achieved in different ways and the type of power utilised has clear implications for the individual's status within the peer group (Vallancourt & Hymel, 2006).

Research addressing aspects of organisational environment indicates the importance of certain managerial actions which are the frequent cause of negative situations experienced by employees (O'Driscoll & Beehr, 1994). (Mannix McNamara, Fitzpatrick, MacCurtain, O'Brien, 2018) noted that the failure of HR to resolve or even address bullying issues was part of a complex web of power relations. These researchers investigated Irish teachers seeking bullying redress and found that the actual process of redress had become technologies of future power and subjugation.

Research has shown that people with power are held in higher esteem and influence than their less powerful peers (Keltner, Gruenfeld, Anderson, 2003). The powerful are looked at more, validated more and respected more which translates into a perception of approval perpetuating the erroneous belief that they are justified in their actions (Jimerson, Swearer, Espelage, 2010). A dominant narrative can be presented as inevitable and logical, will seek to define, limit and exclude and is a reflection of the locus of power in any given society. This will also serve to 'other' those who fall outside their conceptualisation of 'normal'. The dominant discourse generates distinct regimes of truth which regulate how for example people are classified and controlled (Foucault, 2001). The existing power structures are bolstered as the constructed 'other' provides a clear identifying benchmark against which it's members of the power elite can be compared and have their position or status confirmed (Bird Claiborne, Cornforth, Davis, Milligan, White, 2009).

Regimes of the truth accepted are central to these exclusionary processes, delineating people into those who are part of the accepted norm or alternatively the 'other'. A dominant discourse may be manifested through the cohesion of the group dynamic, which is threatened by the appointment of an outsider to the school or the elevation of one of the group to a higher status position within the organisation thus challenging the status quo of the group (Fahie, 2014).

At a micro level, the dominant discourse will seek to create docility in subjects in order to maintain dominance and power relations. Bullying and harassment may then be considered as mechanisms of power, defining, limiting and controlling how certain individuals behave so that they may operate as they wish with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that they determine (Foucault, 2001).

Hierarchical management of schools is not universal in Europe. In a number of countries, there are models of state school organisation that do not concentrate power in the position of the principal. In schools in the German speaking cantons of Switzerland there are no principals. Teachers elect a head teacher but they are a first among equals (Le Métais, 2003).

### 2.8.2 Social Support

Studies of teachers have found that high burnout teachers reported lower social support than low burnout teachers did (Pierce & Molloy, 1996). Social relationships are important in everyday life, and humans are, by their very nature social beings, we are born into families and eventually become members of larger collectives, such as schools, churches and work organisations (Frone, 2000). Outside class interactions with colleagues are sometimes perceived as stressful, however social support from colleagues and a positive social climate are also considered key resources (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, Vanroelen, 2014).

Evidence that programmes designed to enhance the social supports available to teachers may represent an effective strategy for preventing stress and burnout (Russell et al, 1987). Social support and social negativity were correlated more strongly than social support with psychological distress (Schuster, Kessler, Aseltine, 1990). Interpersonal contact with supportive others has long been recommended as a means of alleviating some of the strain (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992).

Kahn & Byosiere further report that social support sometimes has been found to act as a moderator of the stressor-strain relationship. In spite of the common belief, intuitive appeal and promise of social support as a treatment for occupational stress, its success and the specific ways in which it might work have remained unclear (Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Gudanowski, Nair, 2003).

When investigating stress factors such as social support and psychological coping are generally regarded as moderating the impact of stressors on well-being (Griffith et al, 1999). There are beneficial effects of good relationships with co-workers and a harmonious atmosphere at work. Teachers who actively seek social support as a coping strategy may be recipients of both helpful and unhelpful social contacts (Revenson, Schiaffino, Majerovitz, Gobofsky, 1991).

Researchers have had great difficulty trying to predict in advance when a specific type of social support will result in buffering and when it will not, although explanations are often given after the fact (Viswesvaran, Sanchez, Fisher, 1999). Social support needs to supply what is needed in a stressful situation to be influential (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The awareness that stress is evident in the teaching sector in Ireland has filtered to the Irish Department of Education and Skills with its introduction and implementation of an Employee Assistance Service which offers free counselling services to teaching staff and their families in need (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

Some UK studies explored coping strategies and job stress among teachers have found that high stress was associated with low social support at work and greater use of coping by disengagement and suppression of competing activities (Griffith, et al, 1999). In a study by Kyriacou (2001), 26 per cent of the teachers interviewed reported that their work was either 'very' or 'extremely' stressful. The main source of stress identified was the changing education policies of the Government and lack of social support.

### **2.8.3 School culture and stress**

School cultures like all organisational cultures are unstable and susceptible to change (Hargraves, 1999). The type and quality of leadership in organisations has also been put forward as a significant factor in shaping workplace cultures (O'Donnell & Boyle, 2008). A recent study also highlights the importance of social-professional support and its relationship with staying or leaving the teaching profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

There is evidence in the literature review that a supportive organisational culture in which all members of staff are treated with respect and dignity can prevent the development of a bullying dynamic (Padilla, Hogan, Kaiser, 2007). Alternatively, another study has also identified practices, processes and structures within organisations that can promote bullying (D'Cruz & Norohona, 2009). How teachers interpret their contextual environment (i.e., school climate), may influence manifestations of stress, perceptions of teacher efficacy and decisions made within the classroom (Collie, Shapka, Perry, 2012). A supportive school environment leads to less teacher stress and lowers the likelihood of burnout and job dissatisfaction (Schwab, 2001; Rabatin, Williams, Manwell, Schwartz, Brown, Linzer 2015).

(Hargreaves, 1994) noted that there is a need to develop “collaborative cultures” where teachers can engage in collaborative inquiry with the school management to collect and analyse local data. Consideration of issues such as absenteeism, bullying claims, redress procedures were suggested, so that data-based decisions can be made to improve teaching and learning. Collaborating and talking about problems at work may induce feelings of solidarity and empathy and prevent indifferent and negative attitudes towards others.

It is important to consider school culture and what constitutes a healthy culture. Discussions of school culture that begin and end with classroom management and student discipline miss an important part of the puzzle (Jerald, 2006). A school, in which discord and enmity have festered over a number of years, nurtures a pernicious culture, one in which human dignity and worth are a currency to be manipulated and abused (Korkmaz & Cemaloglu, 2010).

(Deal & Peterson, 1999) contend that “the culture of an enterprise plays the dominant role in exemplary performance.” They define school culture as an “underground flow of feelings and folkways its way within schools” in the form of vision and values, beliefs and assumptions, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, and physical symbols.

Managerial support includes a variety of behaviours which show consideration, acceptance, and concerns for the needs and the feelings of other people (Yuki, 1994; Brunborg, 2008). Supervisory support refers to employee’s evaluation of the degree to which supervisors’ value their contributions and care about their well-being (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). More organisations are developing policies to raise awareness about stress and mental health, with the rise of interest in ‘Wellbeing’ in the workplace as well as a greater introduction of stress management tools and other preventative measures within the workplace (Cox, 1993; Mimura & Griffiths, 2002; Shaw Trust, 2006).

Guidelines on dealing with stress and mental health problems at work are more likely to be effective and have greater impact if accompanied by management training (Rolfe, Foreman, Tylee, 2006). As agents of an organisation, managers can influence employee’s perception of their role responsibilities by directing personal attentional processes to expected goals and making role requirements salient and unambiguous (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). A review by (Rolfe et al 2006) highlighted the importance of the managers role in dealing with mental health problems at work and how day to day management of such problems depends on the skills of the manager and the relationship with the employee.



Health and well-being management must begin by changing attitudes, advancing understanding of mental health problems and providing the training and education at all levels so that organisations fulfil their obligation by providing workplaces where all can grow and flourish (Cooper & Dewe, 2008). The management of a school unit is one of the major factors that influence its character. The decision-making process and the existence of a positive climate that is created and maintained, first, by the principal, is associated with its effectiveness (Berry, Smylie, Fuller, 2008). School principals play a critical part in creating and sustaining high performing and reduced stress in schools (Lacey, 2003; Sweeney, 2010). A factor associated with higher levels of female stress in teaching was the influence of family responsibilities as outlined by (Ransome, 2010). Humanistic leadership by supervisors was imperative to ensuring the satisfaction of teachers in their working environment (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

School leaders are not only important but, they are generally taking on more and more roles (Leithwood et al, 2002). Competency lists for school leaders and management can be very long (Mulford, 2003). There are other factors that might lead to stress claims in education, such as the nature of the relationship between employer and employee which in the Government sector is generally ongoing or permanent. Due to a perception of permanence in the public sector such relationships are often pressed into circumstances that might otherwise be resolved by the relationship being terminated in some way or other (Guthrie, 2006).

School type and location, workplace conditions, administrative control, teaching competence and organisational culture have an impact on teacher stress (Pithers, 1995; Ma & Macmillan, 1999). The supportiveness of the school environment or the quality of relationships between teachers, administrators, parents and students, may influence teacher well-being (Bear, Gaskins, Blank, Chen, 2011). Indeed, the school climate is indicative of the strength of social relationships in schools and has been found to be related to increased motivation and achievement (Baker, 2006).

There is evidence that individuals who value positive, harmonious relationships with others will be especially affected by their attitudes toward their co-workers (Fried & Ferris, 1987). A review by (Rolfe et al, 2006), highlighted the importance of the managers role in dealing with mental health problems at work and how day to day management of such problems depends on the skills of the manager and the relationship with the employee. The systematic review chapter in this thesis further details school-based data and interventions applied to reduce and eliminate bullying, incivility, IPC and stress.

#### **2.8.4 Individual factors considered to influence workplace stress**

The role of individual differences, factors in stress and burnout is increasingly acknowledged (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Research by (Murray, 1992) identified the five-factor model of personality that has provided a widely used framework for study on personality. The personality of a teacher influences the behaviour of other teachers in different ways e.g., interaction with students, teaching methods selection, and learning experiences.

According to this model, adult personality can be comprehensively described by five broad traits (Magus, Diener, Fujita, Pavot, 1993), openness, (the extent to which one desires uniqueness, change and variety, conscientiousness (the extent to which one is achievement orientated, dependable, organised, and responsible, extraversion (the extent to which one is cheerful, gregarious, fun loving and enthusiastic), agreeableness (the extent to which one is cooperative, caring, trusting and sympathetic towards others) and neuroticism (the general tendency towards negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, hostility, frustration and guilt (Alarcon, Eschleman, Bowling 2009).

Several authors such as (Foley, 2013), and (Zeigler-Hill, Holden, Southard, Noser, Enjaian, Pollock, 2016), have studied the relationship between personality traits and stress and have shown that certain personality traits resulting in increased susceptibility to stress. There is a growing body of evidence that identifies particular contexts when emotional intelligence does not appear helpful and even suggests there is a “dark side” to the construct (Ciarrochi et al, 2002). Positive associations between narcissism and emotional intelligence have been found in many studies (Petrides, Vernon, Schermer, Veselka, 2011). Research by (Coté, DeCelles, Mc Carthy, Van Kleef, Hideg 2011), found that in occupational settings emotional intelligence could be used as a tool for the emotional manipulation of others.

Emotional intelligence is broadly defined as competency in perceiving, understanding, and regulating our own emotions and, the emotions of others (Zeidner et al, 2009). According to (Martins, Ramalho, Morin 2010), over the past two decades, study has supported a link between emotional intelligence and adaptive life outcomes including mental health and physical health. There is evidence to link emotional intelligence to better mental health and physical health. Study suggests that in some contexts, high levels of emotional intelligence (particularly emotional awareness) may be related to poorer psychological health and adversely impact upon an individual's capacity to deal with emotionally important situations (Davis & Nichols, 2016).

The link between stress and emotional intelligence was strengthened by (Mathews, Emo Funke, Zeidner, Roberts, Costa, 2006). They found that individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence were more likely to experience greater post-task stress. Individuals high in emotional intelligence were able to produce convincing, deceptive displays of emotion and to continue these displays for longer (Porter, Brinke, Baker, Wallace, 2011). Indeed, a growing number of studies suggests that emotional intelligence may be used as a tool for manipulative ends, with individuals high in emotional intelligence being skilled at emotional distortion and antisocial behaviours. This may thwart the developments of satisfying interpersonal relationships (Day et al, 2016).

#### **2.8.5 Bullying and workplace stress**

Bullying has been identified consistently as a source of stress for many employees. (Hogan, Hodgins, Lewis, MacCurtain, Mannix McNamara 2020) noted in their study that on the criterion for bullying used in their analysis (at least two items weekly), bullying's prevalence was estimated to be 9%. Workplace bullying is more pronounced in education, public 28 administration, health, social work, transport and communications (Teague, Roche, Gormley, Currie, 2015). In Ireland, there is currently no dedicated legislation addressing the problem of workplace bullying. The Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act (2005) governs occupational health and safety (OHS) management at work, generally, including a quasi-legal arrangement, whereby employers must comply with Codes of Practice that supplement the Act (Hodgins, Duncan, Purcell, Hogan, MacCurtain, McNamara, 2020).

Bullying, also called ‘mistreatment’ and ‘mobbing’, has several definitions that shed light on its various aspects (Ertureten, Cemalcilae, Aycan, 2013). Psychologically and sociologically it is defined as a pattern of verbal or non-verbal but not physical behaviour that occurs over an extended period of time, within an unequal power relationship where the behaviour leads to emotional and physical consequences (Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). Interestingly those who witnessed bullying also endured health problems. Many lost their self-esteem; sleep problems developed along with depression, lack of concentration, stomach problems, moodiness, and anxiety (Thomas, 2005).

### **2.8.6 Negative productivity effects of stress in teachers**

Some studies have found a negative correlation between job stress and job performance (Soriano, Kozusznik, Peiró, 2018). Individuals who have a high level of job stress have low job performance (Kazmi et al, 2008). Employees who have demanding jobs, low decision latitude, job strain and low social support tend to have more sicknesses absences thus lowering productivity (Sundquist, Ostergren, Sundquist, Johansson, 2003). The greater the job requirements, the more efforts employees make in meeting them and the greater the probability that they will work while sick to ensure full time presence (Hobfoll, 2001). Employees that had good relationships with supervisors and colleagues are usually successful and productive at work, even when job stress is severe (Cummins, 1990).

It could be argued that there is a need for study to address the attrition rate of teachers who are leaving the teaching profession, particularly within the first year of teaching (Gonzalez et al, 2008). Work by (Shannon, Ryan, Nathaniel, Von der Embse, Laura, Pendergast, Saeki, Segool, Schwing, 2017), found that high levels of teacher stress and high teacher turnover rates in American schools are due to measuring teacher quality via student performance. Work related stress is a significant labour force issue which can cause illness within the workforce, decrease economic productivity due to increased sick leave absence and contribute to the pressure on public finances arising for increased use of the public health systems (Kenny, 2015).

A study conducted by the UK’s Institute of Public Policy was based on an 8-year long study of 100 companies and concluded that "an employee's satisfaction with their work and a positive view of the organisation, combined with relatively extensive and sophisticated people management practices, are the most important predictors of the future productivity of companies" (Patterson & West, 2010).

School leaders must manage educational change at a time when the character and mission of schools is being redefined (Mulford, 2003). This high workload and productivity may explain the lack of support being given to some teachers to reduce stress experienced. (Hoel & Einarsen, 2011) found that 30% of sickness absence from work is directly caused by stress and implied that further costs are also associated with stress to employees such as loss of productivity and replacement costs.

There is also a strong business case to reduce stress for employees as 82% of employees face increased stress which is leading to reduced concentration, job satisfaction and productivity. Improving productivity while simultaneously overcoming illness can be a stressful situation for employees as being ill constitutes a threat to one's performance and employees that are exposed to this situation normally experience psychological stress (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

The American Psychological Association, (2007) reported that 60% of workers reported losing productivity due to stress at work in the past month. The study found that if left untreated, prolonged stress can raise the risk for developing chronic and costly diseases. Among them: heart disease, diabetes and even some cancers, which can collectively account for a vast amount of all healthcare costs. There is an inference from the literature that teacher stress can also affect, classroom effectiveness (Russell et al, 1987). Substantial attrition rates among teachers from some parts of the world, correlate with significant job-related stress that teachers experience and fail to manage (Wiley, 2000; Collie et al, 2012; Chaplain, 2008).

### **2.8.7 Presenteeism and stress**

Presenteeism is defined in terms of the lost productivity that occurs when employees come to work ill and perform below par because of that illness. As the interest between employee health and productivity has developed, so too has the need to develop instruments to measure lost health related work productivity (Lofland, Pizzi, Frick, 2004). There are many studies that support a link between job stress and presenteeism such as (Elstad & Vabo, 2008) and (Yang, Shen, Zhu, Liu, Dong, 2016). These studies have evidence that found that sickness absence and sickness presenteeism are associated with perceived job stress. Presenteeism has attracted increased attention among practitioners as well as researchers and much study has predominantly seen presenteeism as a negative factor in the workplace due to the documented links between presenteeism and productivity loss (Whitehouse, 2005).

There are difficulties in measuring work productivity (Ozminkoski, Goetzel, Chang, Long, 2004). (Goetzel et al, 2004) reported that despite the lack of “standard metric” for reporting presenteeism across different instruments, a number of instruments have been developed and reviewed and there is now general agreement that progress has been made in the science of measuring lost productivity. According to the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (UK), the reworking of data from a USA study resulted in a figure for the UK, that implied that the costs of presenteeism were likely to be 1.8 times as representative as absenteeism. It has been suggested that the productivity loss caused by presenteeism is higher than the loss caused by absenteeism (Johns, 2010).

### 2.8.8 Counterproductive work behaviour

In a study by (Bjerke, Hansen, Solbakken, Monsen 2011), participants with socially inhibited, non-assertive groups which comprised of about 40% of the respondents, shared common features, i.e., similar levels of interpersonal problems, high intensity of interpersonal problems, high levels of phobic anxiety and low levels of hostility as well as paranoid ideation.

As a result of stress, counterproductive work behaviour can occur, which consists of acts that harm or intend to harm organisations and their stakeholders (e.g.) clients, co-workers, customers and supervisors (Spector, Bauer, Fox, 2010; Chappell & Di Martino, 2008; Raver, 2013). Job stressors have been linked to the performance of counterproductive work behaviours including role ambiguity, role conflict, workload, organisational constraints and interpersonal conflict (Pawlak, 1998). An explanation for the relation between stressors and counterproductive work behaviour can be based on the ‘conservation of resources theory’ which occurs when people strive to protect and retain resources under stressful conditions (Hobfoll, 1989).

An alternative explanation for the relationship between stressors and counterproductive work behaviour in the literature was that stressors may provoke, individuals to engage in counterproductive work behaviour such as workplace aggression, as a form of retaliation or attempt to restore justice to an unfair situation (Hershcovis et al, 2007).

Another explanation for job stress having a significant association with counterproductive work behaviour is that employees who experience job stressors such as interpersonal conflict, leadership problems, organisational constraints, heavy workload and organisational injustice etc, might have perceived the situation as unfair and reacted in such

a way as to restore justice by reducing inputs or act in a counterproductive manner to rebalance the input-output ratio (Cohen-Charash, & Spector, 1999). Interpersonal conflict is a trigger that can predict interpersonal, co-worker targeted aggression (Aquino, Lewis, Bradfield 1999; Raver & Barling, 2008).

## 2.9 Work related interventions

### 2.9.1 Stress management

In a study by (Shumaker & Czajkowski, 1994), participants noted few formal mechanisms for stress management within the school environment. This study also reported that a lack of stress management interventions available for teachers may of itself cause teacher stress. It is well established that social support can reduce the impact of stressors on a variety of outcomes including psychological well-being, job satisfaction and physical illness risk (Swaen et al, 2004).

In order to alleviate the negative side effects of stress, many individuals and organisations implement some form of stress management intervention. A stress management intervention is broadly defined as “any purposeful action taken to reduce or alleviate the stress experience by organisational citizens in the execution of their work functions” (Le Ferve et al. 2003). Stress management is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of different methods designed principally to reduce stress and improve coping abilities (Skinner, 1985). Interventions to prevent stress can change the environment to reduce the potential for stress, help individuals to modify their appraisal of it, or help them to cope more effectively with stressors (Carson & Kuipers, 1998; Lambert, McCarthy, O’Donnell, Wang 2009).

The lack of evidence of stress interventions directed at stress management is not primarily caused by a shortage of studies, but by their considerable heterogeneity (Van der Hek & Plomp, 1997). Stress management intervention studies in the workplace have increased during the past two decades (Murphy, 1984); (Rahe, Taylor, Tolles, Newhall, Veach, Bryson, 2002). It is often assumed that there are two basic interventions of stress management in the workplace (Eriksen, Off, Ursin, 2000). The first is an organisation orientated approach which aims to identify and improve a stressful work environment, and the other approach is the individual orientated approach and aims to improve the coping abilities of individual employees (Shimazu, Okada, Sakamoto, Miura, 2003).

(Dewe & O Driscoll, 2002) established three classifications of stress management interventions in literature. They are primary interventions which focus on organisational best practices aimed at reducing, modifying or eliminating tensioned work demands that impair health and performance. Secondary interventions mainly enhance person-based approaches of coping with work stressors while tertiary interventions are therapeutic methods aimed at helping employees who already have formed signs and symptoms of illness from stress.

Researchers studying stress tend to rely on checklists that ask respondents to report the number of symptoms they are experiencing or the severity of events they have experienced (Shapiro, Shapiro, Schwartz, 2012). Another complication with research in this field is that stress assessment is complicated by the term stress itself as it is often used too simplistically, Negative connotations are usually ascribed to the term yet some stress responses are of positive benefit (Bartlett, 1998).

There was evidence to suggest that individual approaches to stress management rather than organisational approaches are more effective in managing mental health problems. For employees experiencing mental health problems, there was strong evidence that brief individual therapy particularly cognitive behavioural therapy was most effective (Seymour & Grove, 2005). (Hill et al, 2007) had similar findings on cognitive behavioural therapy and that it was important to consider not just employees health issues but their attitudes and values as well. Significant developments towards the management of psychosocial risks at policy level in the EU have been achieved since the introduction of the 1989 EC, Council framework directive 89/391/EEC on safety and health of workers at work (Leka et al, 2011).

Investigators have found that worksite stress management interventions are effective in reducing individual stress levels through various comprehensive studies (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). Cognitive behavioural therapy and stress management interventions have been found effective in reducing occupational stress and stress management studies clearly demonstrate that stress reducing interventions focusing on the individual were more successful than focusing on the organisation (Van der Klink, Blonk, Schene, Van Dijk 2001). A major policy study on employment conditions and health inequalities underlines both the importance of including psychosocial hazards in prevention programmes and mental health problems in workers compensation schemes (Benach, Muntaner, Santana, 2007).



### 2.9.2 Coping

How teachers manage conflict in the workplace is of considerable importance, not only to the personal professional efficacy and satisfaction of teachers, but also to the overall effectiveness of the school and its curriculum (Fields, 1998). Coping may be defined as “the efforts that people make (both behavioural and cognitive), to change their environment and manage their emotions in response to stressful situations” (Arnold et al, 2010). Once a stressful event is appraised, teachers engage in active or passive coping strategies or both. Active strategies take the form of behavioural, cognitive or emotional strategies. On the contrary passive coping strategies’ such as resignation, wishful thinking and avoidance are characterised by lack of direct engagement with the stressful event (Montgomery & Rubb, 2005).

Perception of adverse psychosocial factors in the workplace such as effort–reward imbalance, undesirable work events and organisational injustice are shown to have an elevated risk of subsequent mental health problems (Bonde, 2008). Teachers work stress and burnout is longitudinally associated with serious mental health problems, including suicidality, depression, and anxiety (Choi, 2018).

Active coping refers to cognitive and behavioural attempts to deal directly with problems and their effects. Passive coping refers to cognitive attempts to avoid actively confronting problems and/or to indulging in behaviours to reduce emotional tension (Van den Tooren, De Jonge, Vlerick, Daniels, Van de Ven, 2011) e.g. eating or smoking more. Most teachers used passive coping strategies to cope with stressors in their school. A substantial proportion of teachers describe their jobs as stressful (Borg, 1990). The effectiveness of coping is measured by its ability to change the level of stress, where the aim is to lower it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Sincero, 2012; Stoica & Buicu, 2010).

People’s ability to mobilise and successfully or unsuccessfully deal with stress factors is termed “coping”, Evidence suggests that high teacher stress is associated with psychological distress which may be mediated through different coping mechanisms and personality traits (Chan, 2007). Some studies underline the role of positive feelings as coping strategies. Literature on positive emotions related to stress evidences that positive emotions are adjustments to acute and chronic stress (Anitei & Chraif, 2015). Analyses of coping processes show strong variability in responses as a function of stressor type (Mattlin, Wethington, Kessler, 1988).

Both academic researchers and practitioners have noted that the absence of general principles for classification of efficient and inefficient coping strategies poses methodological and practical difficulties in their diagnostics and differentiation, thereby causing additional obstacles in the systematic study of this important phenomenon (Chang, D'zurilla, Sanna, 2004).

(Montgomery & Rubb, 2005) proposed a model of key constructs related to teacher stress and coping and their interrelationship after an extensive review of the literature. Their model advocates that teachers are involved in intra-individual processes that consist of the experiences and evaluations of external stressful events. Environmental factors have been found to influence the type of coping strategies used by individuals experiencing stressors, for example the presence of supportive colleagues and supervisors have been found to relate to help seeking and active problem-solving approaches being employed (Etzion, 1984).

Good coping skills include modifying thought processes, learning problem focusing strategies and emotional focused strategies (Admiral, Korthagen, Wobbles, 2000). Study on teacher stress notes that higher stress perception was associated with immature defensive coping responses (McCormick, 1997). The contemporary view on individual competence considers emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social abilities as integral parts of generalised intelligence (Libin, 2002).

Problem focused coping behaviour consist of confrontational and problem-solving strategies, such as defining the problem, generating alternative solutions, weighing alternatives in terms of their cost and benefits, selecting one of them, and acting. Emotional focused coping behaviour consists of positive reappraisal and comparisons as well as defensive strategies, such as avoidance, minimisation, and distancing (Admiral et al, 2000). Persons who are impulsive and have insufficient coping mechanisms have increased problematic behaviours in persons with high levels of impulsivity (McEvoy & Welker, 2000).

One study by (Bolger et al, 1991) found that the use of daily diaries for minor stressors has been a breakthrough for coping. These self-reported instruments that are completed each day over a period of several weeks and are designed to record day to day variation in stressful events and emotional functioning. This can help to eliminate retrospective recall problems by allowing respondents to record minor stressors near the time they occurred (Bolger & Schilling, 1991).

### 2.9.3 Can work related stress be eliminated

When interventions have been implemented for teachers, they have had little consistency in approach or type of treatment, often falling across diverse and eclectic areas (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Keashly & Neuman, 2010). More recently interventions which integrate behavioural approaches and cognitive approaches have become popular (Jeffcoat & Hayes, 2012). Knowledge based interventions for teacher stress include informational or psychosocial training for teachers and psychosocial education on stress risk (Cicotto, De Simone, Gu 2014). Using knowledge-based interventions alone to reduce teacher stress is important but may eventually cause frustration without rehearsal or attempts to generalise, especially if peers or administrators are reluctant to support teachers (Dede, Ketelhut, Whitehouse, Breit, McCloskey, 2009).

Behavioural interventions incorporate the practice of a defined skill or strategy to reduce teacher stress. Behavioural-based teacher stress interventions include meditation and relaxation practice (Kaspereen, 2012; Schnaider Levi, Mitnik, Zafrani, Goldman, Lev-Ari, 2017). These strategies give opportunities for practice and supportive feedback, a necessary component to any strategic educational change (Dede et al, 2009). Cognitive behavioural teacher stress interventions merge training and behavioural practice to give teachers both the knowledge and the skills they need to manage work-related stress. Combining training and practice feasibly generates more comprehensive opportunities for teacher stress management and serves as a foundation for innovative strategies to manage workplace stress (Riley, Park, Wilson, Sabo, Antoni, Braun, Cope, 2017).

Another approach to stress intervention is mindfulness (Riley et al, 2017). Mindfulness takes cognitive and behavioural strategies and focuses on the process of feeling and thinking rather than on thought content (Riley et al, 2017). Because mindfulness targets symptoms associated with stress but may not have the stigma associated with help-seeking for mental health, mindfulness may represent a positive approach in stress treatment (Flook, 2013).

Changes in the world of work has resulted in a rise in psychosocial risks associated with the way work is designed, organised and managed (Cox et al, 2000). Most organisations have difficulty incorporating psychosocial risks into their occupational health and safety management practices and the prevention of psychosocial risks is still challenging to address in workplaces (Leka, Wassenhove, Jain, 2015).

Psychosocial risks are acknowledged to be conceptually distinct from other more traditional occupational health and safety risks and the majority are invisible, difficult to measure, intangible, multi causal, subjective and contextual (Hohnen et al, 2014). One way of controlling psychosocial risks is through the application of occupational health and safety management systems. These systems can be certified according to the standard occupational health and safety assessment series, which has gained considerable worldwide acceptance in the past decades (Frick & Kempa, 2011).

However, the OHSAS standard does not distinguish between different types of occupational health and safety risks and it appears as if OHSAS 1800 treats psychosocial risks as linear or tame problems that can be identified and solved in the same mono-causal and technical-rational approach as that used for simple, visible and tangible risks (Jespersen et al, 2016). The present audit practice tends to focus on objectively measurable and directly observable issues, thus leading to a bias towards safety and a traditional OHS risks wherein compliance can be objectified. Consequently, psychosocial risk factors tend to be excluded (Hohnen & Hasle, 2011).

The importance of building on characteristics of psychosocial risks for the selection of the risk management approach is reflected in the “Guidance of the Management of Psychosocial Risks in the Workplace” Publicity Available specification 1010 (PAS 1010). This standard which was published by the British Standards Institute is expected to help solve the special problems of psychosocial risk management (Leka & Kortum, 2008).

The difference is that PAS 1010 distinguishes between different types of occupational health and safety risks, such as psychosocial risks which are acknowledge to be of a qualitatively different nature than more traditional risks. Because understanding the specific context is necessary to assess the psychosocial hazards and the risks they may pose, they cannot be managed in an objective and technical manner (Leka & Kortum, 2008). Neither the evaluation of psychosocial risk management nor how the psychosocial risk assessment should be carried out is not specified in PAS 1010.

The problem with ostensible valid conclusions in stress analysis and conclusions lies in the enormous difficulty of assessing and quantifying the two principal variables: job and stress. (Vartia & Leka, 2011) and (Leiter, Day, Gilin Oore, Spence Laschinger, 2012), noted that workplace bullying and incivility which can be associated with interpersonal conflict, cited that the key question is to how to address these problems. They note that formal

mechanisms only provide weak levels of protection for employees. (Pearson & Porath, 2005) notes that there can be an unwillingness to deal effectively with conflict which is evident in some studies.

(Hodgins et al, 2013) noted some success in their study of workplace incivility by a multi-component six-month intervention called, 'CREW', (Civility, Respect and Engagement in the Workplace). This is a facilitator led series of group exercises designed to allow participants to explore social relationships in their work group and, civil and uncivil communication which can lead to interpersonal conflict. Despite many interventions being available to reduce or eliminate stress in workplaces, solving workplace stress is perceived as a difficult issue. HR, while expected on the one hand to implement a policy that protects staff from issues such as bullying, are also expected to be the strategic partner of management and therefore be a neutral mediator of conflicts between workers and management. These two positions seem in conflict to each other (Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2006).

# Chapter 3 SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

## 3.1 Introduction to systematic reviews

Although the drive for systematic reviews has come predominantly from scientific study where the findings are based on hard quantitative data, there has also been some attention given to the use of systematic reviews with qualitative study (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The challenge for those who want to conduct a systematic review of qualitative study is how to compare, evaluate and synthesise findings based on methodologies that do not conform to a standard model such as the randomised controlled trial (Barroso et al, 2006; Denscombe, 2017).

Systematic reviews serve many critical roles. They can provide syntheses of the state of knowledge in a field, from which future research priorities can be identified; they can address questions that otherwise could not be answered by individual studies; they can identify problems in primary research that should be rectified in future studies (Page, McKenzie, Moher, 2021).

The ‘systematic review’ aims to provide a comprehensive, unbiased synthesis of many relevant studies in a single document (Eger, 2001). While it has many of the characteristics of a literature review, adhering to the general principle of summarising the knowledge from a body of literature, a systematic review differs in that it attempts to uncover “all” of the evidence relevant to a question and to focus on research that reports data rather than concepts or theory (Averis & Pearson, 2003).

### 3.1.1 Rationale and chronology of the systematic review

The rationale for conducting this systematic review is to source literature that is similar or closely related to the research question and then to compare and discuss this literature (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016). This systematic review endeavours to establish what is already known about the wide research on the causes and effects of teacher stress and IPC in the literature and then to identify how this thesis differs in its findings. The systematic review process will assist readers in identifying differences if any between this thesis and what is known in the literature (Snyder, 2019).

High levels of interpersonal conflict were noted in this thesis between teachers and other teachers. Negative interactions between teachers seemed to begin in many cases over small disagreements and resulted in long term conflict that could span entire teacher careers. IPC was therefore identified as a noteworthy search term to be included with other search terms when identifying the systematic review literature. Although IPC is noted in other studies in the educational literature, there is a paucity of literature pertaining to IPC among and between teaching staff which was a noteworthy finding in this thesis.

Systematic reviews are consistent in psychology-based literature and much of the literature review in this thesis is psychology based. The authors PhD supervisor in conjunction with the PhD graduate school noted that upon reflection, the size of the literature review chapter would be far too big if studies from the systematic review were not separated out. It was felt that having a systematic review would allow a focus to specifically analyse workplace stress and IPC in schools and extrapolate generalisations from these studies. Once the literature was collected and analysed, it was clear that the studies in the systematic review were of fundamental to benefit the thesis.

Systematic literature reviews including meta-analyses are invaluable scientific activities. The rationale for such reviews is well established. Systematic reviews establish whether scientific findings are consistent and can be generalised across populations, settings, and treatment variations, or whether findings vary significantly by particular subsets (Mulrow, 1994). The use of the systematic review as a research methodology in the social sciences is increasing, creating a need for social science librarians to become more familiar with the process (Riegelman & Kocher, 2018).

Systematic reviews critically appraise and formally synthesise the best existing evidence to provide a statement of conclusion that answers specific clinical questions and are common in psychology studies. Readers and reviewers, however, must recognise that the quality and strength of recommendations in a review are only as strong as the quality of studies that it analyses (Harris, J., Quatman C., Manning M., Siston R., Flanigan D., 2014).

It was felt that given the interdisciplinary nature of the research question, a specific focus on the literature pertaining to the research question would add a bounded rationale for the study. The authors PhD supervisor in consultation with the postgraduate school of TU Dublin believed that a systematic review would clarify that part of the literature specifically pertaining to the research question in this study.

After the literature review was complete, several areas of interest were highlighted and documented in the literature review section of this thesis. A subsequent systematic review was then undertaken to focus on studies that were proximate to the research question, this resulted in a much smaller number of studies that assessed the literature in this specific domain. A systematic review is a “process for assembling, arranging, and assessing existing literature in a research domain” (Paul, Lim, O’Cass, Hao, Bresciani, 2021).

### **3.1.2 Protocol and information sources**

To identify relevant literature, an extensive search of all relevant databases was conducted. Databases including PsycINFO, Psych LIT, Social Sciences Citation Index, Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar were used using a wide range of search terms such as stress, bullying, incivility, interpersonal conflict, and power in schools. The Technological University Dublin library was also extensively used to search for relevant published researchers working within the stress discipline literature to investigate the topic of the causes and effects of stress in second level teachers in Ireland. Books, study papers, journals, conference proceedings, government documents, theses and dissertations were all examined to discover information about the study topic.

The terms, “distress in teaching”, “teacher stress”, “causes of teacher stress”, “teacher stress in Ireland”, “bullying”, “incivility”, “conflict in schools” “Interpersonal conflict in schools” and a number of other combinations of these phrases and other relevant terms were used to search the topic. Studies were sourced that were closest in nature to this thesis and could assist in answering the research question which was “Is interpersonal conflict the primary cause of stress in second level teachers in Ireland?”

#### **3.1.2.1 Eligibility Criteria**

Certain limitations were set in so far that searchers were limited to articles in peer reviewed academic publications or academic books in English and searches were related to the education sector. There was no constraint on geographical location as studies in other jurisdictions seemed to have similar problems for the teaching fraternity. Using combinations of words and phrases that contained words like “toxic work environment”, “interpersonal, conflict in schools”, “stress in education”, “bullying in schools”, “incivility in schools”, “stress in teaching”, and “conflict and stress on secondary schools” were used as search criteria.



### 3.1.2.2 Search Terms, Exclusion and Inclusion criteria study

The process of selecting studies for systematic review and meta-analysis is complex, with many layers. It is arguably the most important and perhaps the most neglected aspect in the process of integrating research on a specific topic (Meline 2006). A search strategy for this thesis involved inclusion and exclusion criteria, identifying suitable search data bases and examining appropriate search terms.

Systematic review methods have been subject to considerable discussion and debate regarding the selection of studies to include or exclude from review. As (Rosenthal, 1991) advised, the choice of inclusion and exclusion criteria should logically follow from the review question and should be straightforward. However, the controversy centres on how broad or narrow the selection process should be.

Search terms were wide at first as initial analysis revealed many studies on understanding, prevalence and relationships of interpersonal conflict and evidence of conflict between teachers and students in school in other settings. A total of 2186 studies were identified which assisted this thesis in the formulation of the literature review.

This search led to the identification of 2,186 records of journals, books, and papers in electronic databases. In terms of exclusion, a total of 2163 studies were excluded as they did not directly inform the thesis and as the participants in the study needed to have experienced a particular condition to be considered for inclusion. After collecting all related publications in the search process, authors must specify inclusion/exclusion criteria to ensure all studies ultimately included in meta-analysis have similar, desired features (Grewal et al., 2018).

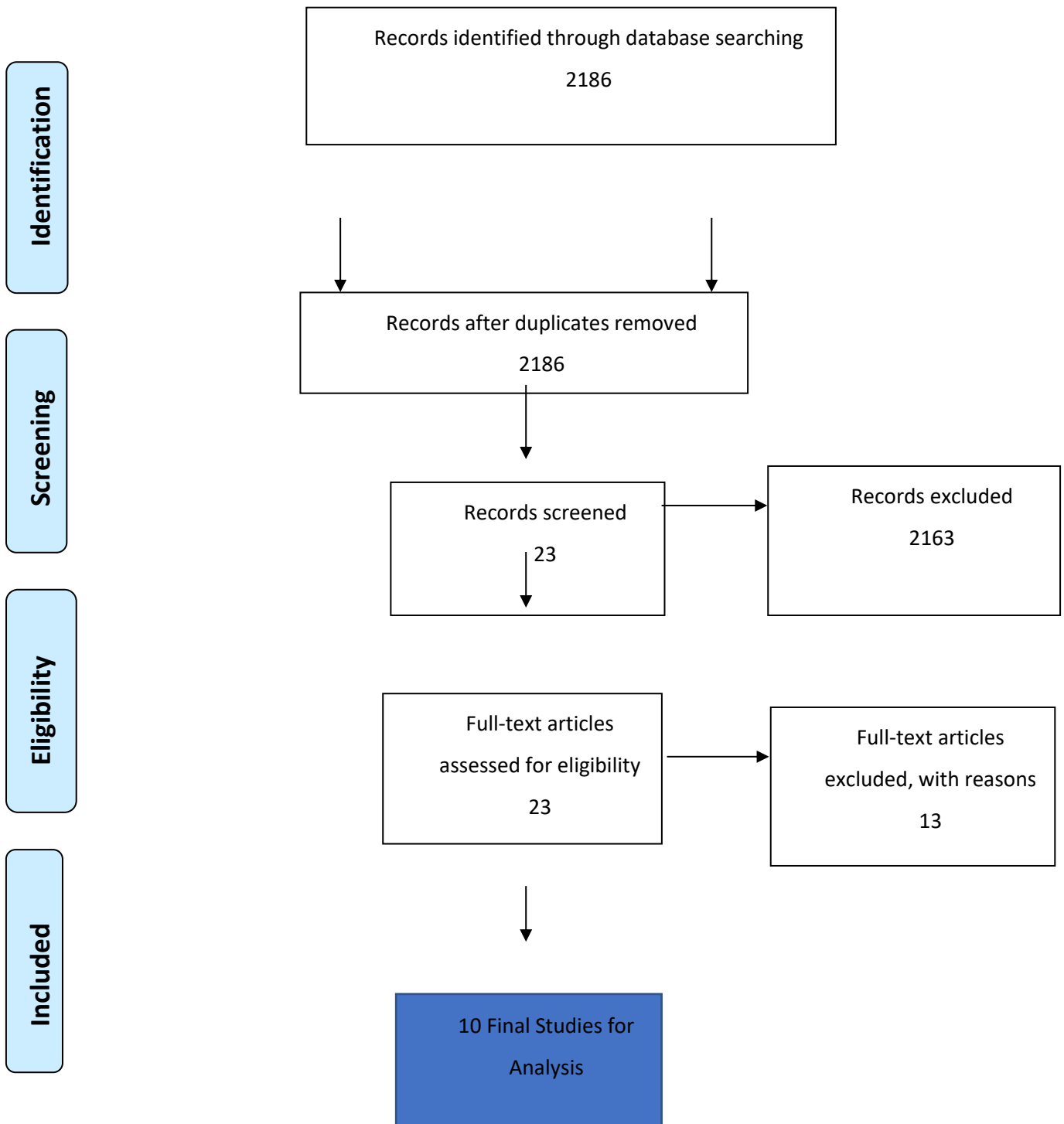
By far the largest types of study excluded from these 2186 publications were those that focused on stress outside the education sector, such as health. The education sector is a unique setting that forms the sector of interest for this thesis and publications on stress outside this sector may not accurately represent the unique setting of the school environment.

Certain studies were excluded from this review on the basis of being insignificant, for not being on the topic of concern, for not being related to the education sector, for having excessively poor grammar or for not being in the English language. Studies were excluded on the basis of having too few participants, (less than five). Studies were also excluded that

were perceived not to assist in answering the research question. There was no date limit set on the search as some studies on workplace stress and (IPC) were conducted many decades ago, it was felt that all such studies would be included to give a sense of history and perspective to the search.

Studies were included that showed the abstract on the topic of interpersonal conflict, (IPC), incivility, workplace stress and bullying from professional relationships within teaching that caused stress. The review was restricted to searches in the educational sector only. Closer analysis led to a final inclusion of ten studies for detailed appraisal and the exclusion of 13 papers. These 13 papers were excluded for various reasons such as the full text not being available, studies that focused on interpersonal conflict between teachers and students, or studies that had too few participants, (less than three). The final studies for analysis which constituted the systematic review was ten papers which are identified in Table 2 below.

**Table 2 - PRISMA Flow Diagram**



*Systematic Review studies*

*Table 3 Summary Listing of studies analysed in detail*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Type of Study</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Main Findings</b>	<b>Study Correlational</b>
(Fahie D. 2014)	Blackboard Bullies: Workplace bullying in primary schools,	Correlational	N= 24 participants were interviewed using semi structured interviews about their experiences of workplace bullying. Three representative case studies were examined in detail from the 24. Each of the three interview participants narrated detailed accounts of incidents in their professional lives which brought to the fore their experience of workplace bullying.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace bullying is highly prevalent in Ireland</li> <li>• There is a paucity of study on adult bullying in schools</li> <li>• The three participants selected for further analysis experienced physical deteriorations from bullying</li> <li>• It is possible that bullying may affect the operation of the school effectively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small overall sample and even smaller selection of 3 cases examined</li> <li>• Study only examined bullying between school management and teachers.</li> <li>• Solutions may be somewhat aspirational</li> </ul>
(Hodgins M., MacCurtain S., Mannix-McNamara P., 2013)	Workplace bullying and incivility; a systematic review of interventions	Systematic Review	N=11 A systematic review on 11 electronic databases which yielded 5,364 records and following a detailed review and quality assessment 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interventions will be best placed at an organisational level other than individual perpetrators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study only examined incivility and bullying and did not investigate other possible causes of teacher stress.</li> <li>• Interventions were only examined without an examination of other</li> </ul>

			<p>interventions to address workplace bullying or incivility.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most interventions on resolving bullying and incivility in the workplace were unsuccessful with only two studies being noted as effective and one study being partially effective.</li> <li>• The study notes that an integrated approach including job, organisational and societal levels are required to tackle workplace mistreatment.</li> </ul>	<p>factors such as personality, or coping strategies etc.</p>
<p>(Kyriacou C., 2001)</p>	<p>Teacher stress; directions for further study</p>	<p>Literature review</p>	<p>This study reviewed study findings on teacher stress in EU secondary schools and suggested five directions for future study.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools can reduce teacher stress with good communication, a sense of collegiality, management decisions, whole school policies, clearly defined rules, positive feedback, good resources, good support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study does not articulate the difficulties of resolving teacher stress.</li> <li>• The extent of the literature review is not specified</li> <li>• The study is 20 years old and the school environment has changed over this period of time.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study proposed five areas for future study, which are educational reform, coping of teachers, triggers of stress, assessing interventions and teacher student interactions.</li> </ul>	
(Buckley D., Abbott D., Franey J., 2017)	An Exploration of Irish Teachers Experiences of Stress	Correlational	N= Ten, the sample size of five primary and five secondary teachers. Each semi structured interview was approximately 1 hour long.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Five main themes emerged from the interviews, the stressed self, desire for control, significance of relationships, identity, and beneficial supports in the profession. Five teachers out of ten found colleagues a source of stress.</li> <li>The study also advises that school-based initiatives to help teachers with overall wellbeing would be helpful for teachers, such as recreational activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A small sample was examined of ten teachers, five from primary schools and five from secondary schools. This small sample may not fully represent the secondary teaching population</li> </ul>

<p>(Hodgins M., McNamara P. 2019)</p>	<p>An Enlightened Environment? Workplace Bullying and Incivility in Irish Higher Education</p>	<p>Correlational</p>	<p>N= 11 participants from academic staff from three Irish Universities. The study involved semi structured interviews and ranged from 60 to 80 minutes about the participants lived experiences of bullying and incivility in work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study acknowledged the evidence between bullying, incivility, ill health and poor organisational responses to resolve bullying and incivility issues.</li> <li>• A deeper understanding of the complex nature of workplace culture for an effective formulation of policy and procedures would be a significant cornerstone on which to base more effective and meaningful protection for staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This study examines 11 participants.</li> <li>• The study suggests policies and procedures that should be consistent but does not thoroughly examine other factors as a solution to bullying and incivility.</li> <li>• Study focuses on power and does not consider the multi- directional nature of bullying and incivility.</li> </ul>
<p>(Klein J., Bentolila A. 2018)</p>	<p>Principals bullying teachers at schools, Causes, examples and consequences</p>	<p>Correlational</p>	<p>N= 310. Teachers filling out seven questionnaires on bullying. The focus of the study was on the bullying relationship between principals and teachers. Teachers came from primary, junior and senior schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal bullying of teachers is evident in two areas of this study, firstly it impacts on teacher absence and secondly the extent of trust in bullying principals is reduced.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study only examined bullying by principals of teachers.</li> <li>• Study covered three types of schools, elementary, junior and secondary.</li> <li>• Methodology of Seven questionnaires may not examine the experiences of participants fully and is a small study sample.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management style was attributed as an important personal factor in bullying by principals.</li> </ul>	
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(Mannix Mac Namara P., Fitzpatrick K., MacCurtain S., O'Brien M., 2017),	Workplace bullying and redress procedures: experiences of teachers in Ireland	Correlational	N=22 The study adopted a phenomenological study design interviewing primary school teacher in Ireland who were self-selected after an advertisement in National Teacher Union magazine. The study examined the teachers experiences of workplace bullying and redress procedures. Teacher Union assistance was sought to petition members who had made complaints of bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advises the using of a separate and impartial, knowledgeable body to investigate and implement solutions for issues pertaining to the school.</li> <li>• Advised the removing of conflict of interest from principals investigating workplace bullying and the implementation of effective training programmes to raise the visibility and complexity of workplace bullying.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study examines the experiences of primary teachers which is not the focus of this thesis.</li> <li>• The study has little on the origins of bullying or effects on teachers.</li> <li>• The study acknowledges that solutions may be difficult to enforce and as such suggests few workable solutions</li> </ul>
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<p>(Foley C., 2013)</p>	<p>Investigation of stress and burnout in Irish second level teachers: A mixed methods approach</p>	<p>Correlational</p>	<p>N= 20 in a focus group and a cross sectional survey from an online questionnaire with 192 participants. The study employed convenience sampling to obtain participants. Teacher personality traits were assessed during a 44-item big five inventory. A 21-item revised school level environment questionnaire was used to assess teachers' perceptions of the school environment.</p> <p>Coping was measured using a 28-item brief COPE inventory and burnout was assessed using the three dimensions of the 22 item Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey. Physical symptoms were measured using the 12 item physical symptoms inventory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study identified the salient points, problematic relationships with principals and colleagues and the staff room caused stress, the importance of the role of management within the school. favouritism and staff politics can cause stress, a sex balance in the school reduces stress, support from colleagues and management was an important factor in mitigating stress. Students were also a source of stress for teachers, and outside the school environment, parents were a source of stress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The methodology chosen was multiple questionnaires and focus groups which may not be the best way of collecting data on stress and burnout.</li> <li>• The study had a small geographical area from which candidates were chosen.</li> </ul>
<p>(Hargraves A., Macmillan R., 1992)</p>	<p>Balkanized Secondary Schools and the Malaise of Modernity</p>	<p>Correlational</p>	<p>N= Two schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The paper explores the micropolitics of the secondary school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only two schools analysed from a group of ten.</li> </ul>

			Two schools were drawn from a study of ten Ontario secondary schools undergoing a provincially imposed mandate to destream.	<p>environment identifying the “ins” and the “not ins”. These are two groups that have either had or have not influence over decisions made by the school management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The paper also identified Balkanisation, this term was used to identify different groups of teachers within schools that shared resources and did not integrate with each other.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little analysis of detrimental effects on stakeholders within the school.</li> </ul>
(Saiti A. 2014)	Conflicts in schools, conflict management styles and the role of the school leader; A study of Greek school educators	Correlational	N=470 The study adopted a primary source data design by sending questionnaires to primary school teachers in Greece. The study examined the types of conflict in schools and the role leadership style had in reducing or eliminating these conflicts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict was evident between educators in this study and these conflicts arose for different reasons, the most common of which was poor communication</li> <li>• Effective leadership was important is resolving and reducing conflict in schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study examines the experiences of primary teachers which is not the focus of this thesis.</li> <li>• The study uses questionnaires with a structured set of pre set questions, thereby limiting the ability of the participant to fully describe the source of conflict and its meaning</li> </ul>

### 3.1.3 Synthesis of results

The ten studies selected as part of this systematic review collectively point to the following inferences. There is evidence that IPC is under researched as there is a paucity of articles on IPC in schools in the literature review. IPC related stress is possibly being interpreted as bullying and incivility as conflict is a natural part of human existence and may not be directed intentionally against colleagues (Sompa, 2015). There is therefore evidence to suggest a distinct possibility that IPC exists in schools and is a nested or stand-alone phenomenon which causes stress for teachers, (see section 6.2.1).

No single intervention or combination of interventions seems to have been effective in reducing stress for teachers. Teaching organisations do not have an impressive record at addressing workplace mistreatment (Hodgins et al, 2013). Formal mechanisms of interventions provide only weak levels of protection and even large organisations with dedicated H.R human resources functions fail to navigate the manipulations of the system (Leka, Griffiths Coz, 2003), (Klein & Martin, 2011). This systematic review has also noted no single intervention for teachers to successfully cope with IPC related stress in their school. Papers in the systematic review reported many negative adverse effects on teachers as a result of having experienced stress in their school environment, specifically, ill health, burnout, terminating of employment, long absences from work and fatigue. There is evidence from the systematic review that stress had a profoundly negative effect on teacher's lives and could result in many illnesses. The systematic review also identified that stress has many negative effects on family life (Wynne, Clarkin, Dolphin, 1991; Lepore's, 1992; Ransome, 2010).

The systematic review also noted the importance of school leadership in the operation of a harmonious school environment. This review highlighted how many interventions for bullying and incivility in schools were mostly ineffective but noted the importance of organisational interventions to reduce stress among teachers. Most importantly the systematic review acknowledged the lack of deep understanding of the complex nature of stress, human relationships and workplace misbehaviour in schools in these studies.

The research question of this thesis is “Is interpersonal conflict the primary cause of stress in second level teaching in Ireland?” The systematic review studies were chosen to assist the author as to what is known about the research question. Studies in the systematic review by (Hodgins et al 2013; Fahie 2014; Hodgins et al 2019 and Mc Namara et al 2017) note considerable evidence of both bullying and incivility among teachers.

The characteristics of interpersonal conflict as has been identified in this thesis however differ from both bullying and incivility. Unlike bullying and incivility, interpersonal conflict may not be repetitive (Leon-Perez et al 2015), may be unseen and dormant, may be unintentional and there may not be a feeling of threat by the victim of IPC as opposed to bullying and incivility (Devon, 2018).

There is evidence of many stressors in the systematic review but nothing specific to IPC. There may be a possibility that IPC is being described as bullying and incivility or that bullying and incivility evolve from interpersonal conflict among teaching staff and is disregarded or unrecognised by researchers. IPC seems to have a stand-alone nature from which bullying and incivility develop and are then more identifiable for researchers to consider. There is evidence from the findings of this thesis that the conditions for IPC to reoccur within the school environment exist. High levels of stress, a fear to report stress, conflict between colleagues, poor support from the school management and an inability to escape from colleagues whom teachers are in conflict with seem to provide an environment for the perpetuation of IPC.

The systematic review noted numerous factors which resulted in stressful events for teachers such as, micropolitics of the school, school management, bullying, incivility, lack of control, students, workload, and colleagues. The systematic review studies had a small sample size, were qualitative in nature and were well conducted. These studies identified many stressors for teachers but did not answer the research question adequately for the purposes of this thesis. The systematic review studies did however support many findings in this thesis. Stressors for teachers such as poor support from the school management, school micropolitics, colleagues and workload were noted within this thesis and the systematic review. The existence of stress among teaching colleagues in this thesis however seemed more common place than in the systematic review.

The consequences of not finding an effective remedy to teacher's stress could be costly, with many stakeholders within the school environment becoming ill or being absent from work. There seems to be little to resolve the high levels of IPC, incivility and bullying, noted in this thesis and the systematic review. There is a distinct possibility that the status quo of high levels of stress for teachers will remain, unless alternative and purposeful interventions are implemented at once. The identification of IPC among teaching colleagues is not evident in these studies. This is a worrying trend as studies show a lack of effective interventions for reducing stress for teachers and there seems nothing on the horizon to suggest that this situation will change in the near future.

# Chapter 4 METHODOLOGY

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by presenting the underpinning epistemological and ontological considerations necessary for the research question. The chapter will then examine the methodology and method chosen to obtain data to answer the research question. The chapter examines the sampling strategy used, the limitations of the methodology and bias. Finally, the chapter concludes with coding and data analysis. Methodology refers to the theoretical, political, and philosophical backgrounds to social study and their implications for study practice and for the use of study methods (Robson, 2011). Methods on the other hand, refers to techniques used to acquire and analyse data to create knowledge. Methodology is a strategy of enquiring that guides a set of procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

### 4.1.1 Researcher positionality

Having observed many teaching colleagues suffer from workplace stress and its many consequences over many years, I embarked on this study to better understand what causes teachers to become stressed at work and how workplace stress affects them. As much as possible I endeavoured to exclude my own bias from the research by firstly being cognisant of my own bias and then following a methodological approach that minimised bias as much as possible.

Based on a personal reflective analysis on the PhD journey that I undertook, I would now be conscious of the following. Interpersonal conflict (IPC) seems to be widespread in the in the self-selected sample in this thesis and therefore there is a possibility that this exists in the wider teaching community. The enormity of the problem seems to require further research. The frequency of challenging workplace behaviour reported by participants was also noteworthy. The depth of feeling of participants who had been affected negatively by workplace stress and IPC was also palpable and seems to be hidden in plain sight. Finally, the findings of this research would make the author query whether these stressors are present in other workplaces and jurisdictions.

Future researchers in this area of study should be aware and have an understanding of the complexities of human personalities and work environments and the many factors that influence workplace stress. Subsequent researchers would also benefit from some education and awareness of human psychology. The differences of participants experiences and how participants interpret the world should also be considered by the future researchers. An

ability to conduct interviews about sensitive research topics would also be appropriate for any future researchers to familiarise themselves with any potential problems that they may encounter in the interview process. My overriding hope for this study and other researchers work in this subject would be that interventions to reduce harm to individuals experiencing workplace stress can be found.

#### **4.1.2 Research question & Aims**

This research question of this thesis is, “Is interpersonal conflict the primary cause of stress among second level teachers in Ireland?” The aim of this thesis is to ascertain the prevalence of work-related stress from interpersonal conflict (IPC) in 25 members of the secondary teaching sector in Ireland by examining their lived experiences of stress in their school environment.

The objectives of this thesis are to formulate an appropriate design to consider the methods of data collection. To recruit 25 participants to gain knowledge of their experiences of stress within the secondary school environment. To analyse the findings of the data and to present conclusions and recommendations to build on the literature on stress in teaching and to analysis the most pertinent results of relevance to this thesis and an analysis of the conclusions and recommendations.

#### **4.1.3 Ontology**

As a branch of philosophy, ontology examines both the kinds and structures of objects, properties, events, processes and relationships in everyday reality (Smith, 2012). In order to answer the research question, it was necessary to consider the data required to be generated. For this to occur, fundamental issues on the very nature of evidence and data needed to be considered. This required an understanding of the ontological and epistemological status of the evidence and data necessary for the research question to be answered. Ontological considerations are important for this research question because individuals develop their own subjective meanings of their experiences, and meanings are varied and multiple (Seale, 1999).

The social world cannot be studied in the same way as the natural world. Technical rationality has been described as the “high hard ground” of practice and views knowledge as unproblematic and objective and problems well defined (Schohn, 1983). Ontology is that set of presuppositions that we make about the nature of the phenomena that we are studying. What that entails and how we study them. In this respect ontological assumptions are

unavoidable. We cannot study anything without them and they are of fundamental importance to the extent that they provide a set of foundational orientations that shape the ways in which that study will be undertaken (Buchanan & Bryman, 2009). Therefore, concerning the research question, an ontological understanding of the nature of reality is needed because this system of belief, reflects an interpretation of an individual about what constitutes a fact.

#### 4.1.4 Epistemology

“Epistemology” can be defined as the name of that branch of philosophy dedicated to the theory of knowledge. It concerns such questions as what is knowledge? do we have any? and how can we distinguish the genuine article from imposters (Siegel, 2014). A fundamental consideration is what data is to be obtained and from what methods. Epistemology as a philosophy to generate data begins with a fundamental level of qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approaches (Mc Manus, Mulhall, Ragab, Arisha, 2017). Interpretivism integrates human interest into a study and emphasises qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis (Richie, Spencer, O’Connor, 2003; Siegel, 2014).

An interpretivist approach was taken in this research. Interpretivism can be defined as people seeking understanding of the world in which they live and meaning is not automatically present in objects or social situations. It has to be constructed and created by individuals (Dyson & Brown, 2006). The paradigm of interpretivism is where social reality is regarded as a product of process by which social actors together negotiate the meanings for actions and situations (Blaikie, 1993). Human experience involves a process of interpretation rather than sensory, material apprehension of the external physical world. Human behaviour depends on how individuals interpret the conditions in which they find themselves (Petty, Thomson, Stew, 2012).

Stemming from an interest in thorough understanding of human behaviour, social scientists tend to use qualitative study aiming to accumulate a detailed account of human behaviour and beliefs (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). With the use of non-numerical data, qualitative study seeks to explore and describe the quality and nature of how people behave, experience and understand and linking people’s actions to their beliefs (Brown, 2005).



The procedures for data analysis in qualitative study involve an intimacy of working with the data which those used to conventional quantitative analysis involving statistical methods may find disconcerting (Mitchell, 2003; Howitt, 2010). Among the distinguishing features of qualitative study are its preference for data rich (thick) descriptions, the belief that data is constructed socially, and that reality is about interpretation and not about hypothesis testing (Howitt, 2010). In addition, there has been a relatively recent explosion of interest in qualitative psychology. This is a significant shift in a discipline which has hitherto emphasised the importance of quantitative psychology (Smith, 2008).

Qualitative study is decidedly part of the future in psychology and is likely to be better integrated into the mainstream of psychology than at any time previously (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2010; Conroy, 2010). Some argue that quantitative study overlooks characteristics of the everyday social world which may have an important bearing on the experiences of their study participants. Qualitative study tends to be more immersed in this social world, (Howitt, 2010).

A feature of qualitative study is that it does not attempt to control the multitude of factors involved in the phenomenon under investigation. Instead, it seeks to explore the whole in all its complexity. Interpreting such complexity is challenging for the researcher and several strategies are used to facilitate the process (Guba, 1981). Prolonged engagement and persistent observation are used to enable studies to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Collecting a variety of data from different perspectives to cross check interpretations, collecting data that enriches understanding of the context (Sandelowski, 1986). Qualitative study helps understand human experience and meaning within a given context using text rather than numbers, interpreting experience and meaning to generate understanding and recognising the role of the researcher in the construction of knowledge (Petty et al, 2012). An analysis of the systematic review identified that one way of collecting data on stress was interviews. There were also other ways identified included questionnaires, focus groups, observations, various self-reported stress and coping scales and biomedical indicator equipment (Mazzola, Schonfeld, Spector, 2011). The use of biomedical equipment to assess stress hormone levels was considered unrealistic at an early stage of the study. The wearing of an apparatus to monitor stress levels or stress hormone levels seemed unacceptable to possible participants. The idea was suggested to some possible

participants before a methodology was decided upon and monitoring stress by taking any kind of sample or monitoring device was unacceptable to them.

#### 4.1.5 Choice of IPA

A methodology considered at the design stage was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), because of its stated ability to recognise that different people perceive the world in very different ways, dependent on their personalities, prior life experiences and motivations (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA attempts to explore, understand and make sense of the subjective meanings of events, experiences and states of the individual participants themselves.

The use of non-numerical data study seeks to explore and describe the 'quality' and 'nature' of how people behave, experience and understand (Brown, 1996). IPA is a relatively recent qualitative methodology developed specifically for psychology (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). IPA has a theoretical commitment to the person as a cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people's talk and their thinking and emotional state (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In terms of its theoretical position, IPA aims to explore in detail participants' personal lived experience and how participants make sense of that personal experience (Smith, 2004).

It is phenomenological (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) in its concern with individuals' perceptions of objects or events, but IPA also recognises the central role for the analyst in making sense of that personal experience and is thus, strongly connected to the interpretative or hermeneutic tradition (Palmer, 1969). This made IPA an ideal qualitative approach for exploring participants lived experiences of workplace stress within their work environment and the individual meaning and value that these experiences had for the participants.

IPA uses both a hermeneutic and idiographic approach. The hermeneutic part involves each participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world. IPA is also strongly idiographic, starting with the detailed examination of one case until some degree of closure or gestalt has been achieved, then moving to a detailed analysis of the second case, and so on through the corpus of cases. Only when that has been achieved, is there an attempt to conduct a cross-case analysis as the tables of themes for each individual are interrogated for convergence and divergence (Smith, 2004).

The orientation of an interpretative approach allows researchers to treat social action and human activity as text. In other words, human action may be a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning. Interviews and observational data then can be transcribed into written text for analysis, (Cannell & Kahn, 1968; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Researchers with a general interpretative orientation are likely to organise or reduce data to uncover patterns of human activity, action and meaning (Berg, 2009). So, in terms of the research question, IPA seemed well placed to generate data to answer the research question.

Given the methods available, IPA seemed the most promising. It was therefore decided that interpretative phenomenological analysis would be the most effective methodology to choose for gaining teachers experiences of stress in schools. Qualitative study methods are particularly suitable for study into sensitive issues in general (Connolly & Reilly, 2007). Of the qualitative methods available, IPA stood out as the most appropriate due to its ability to capture the required real-world experiences of a very sensitive subject, stress caused by IPC in Irish Secondary schools.

Interpretive study is predicted on the desire for a deeper understanding of how humans experience the world through language, local and historical situations and the intersubjective actions of the people involved (Moss, 1994). Therefore, interviewing teachers about their experiences of stress was seen as a qualitative process in this thesis. An opportunity to gain insight into teachers' descriptions of their own, individual experiences in the profession.

This thesis used phenomenology to evaluate participant's experiences of stress in their workplaces. The focus of this methodology is on understanding lived experiences of individuals by exploring the meaning of a phenomenon. From this descriptive data, further interpretation and analysis enables the study to uncover a description of the "essence", the study puts to one side their own views of the phenomenon, referred to as bracketing, in order to deepen their understanding (Petty et al, 2012; Van Manen, 2016).

Its credentials as an alternative to positivism are further reinforced by the fact that phenomenological study deals with people's perceptions or meanings, people's attitudes and beliefs and people's feelings and emotions (Denscombe, 2017). This led to a decision that the investigation of stress in teachers was best analysed by interviewing teachers about their personal experiences of stress in their workplace, rather than a positivist approach being taken to analyse stress in participants

The phenomenological approach has proven useful for study in areas such as health, education and business who want to understand the thinking of patients, students and employees (De Chesnay, 2015). It gives a clue as to why phenomenology is associated with humanistic study using qualitative methodologies (Denscombe, 2017). Phenomenology is also characterised by a particular interest in the basics of social existence. This stems from a philosophical concern with the nature of being in the world (Heidegger, 1962).

The purpose of phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a given situation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Phenomenology is concerned, first and foremost, with human experience, something denoted by the term phenomenology itself. A phenomenon is something that stands in need of explanation; something of which we are aware but something as yet remains known to us only in terms of how it appears to us directly through our senses. Phenomenology concentrates its efforts on getting a clear picture of things as directly experienced by people (Denscombe, 2017). This design was felt to be the most effective when method of collecting data from the participants in this thesis.

Therefore, the reason IPA was chosen for this thesis was because a phenomenological approach not only encourages the researcher to provide a detailed description of experiences, it also advocates the need to do so with a minimum reliance on the researchers own beliefs, expectations and predispositions about the phenomena under investigation. IPA brackets off predispositions and adopt the stance of the stranger.

The literature showed alternative ways of gathering data for analysis on peoples lived experiences such as questionnaires, focus groups, case studies, observations, surveys and socio-physiological methods such as measuring hormone levels of measuring heart rates, etc. This topic is discussed in the epistemology section of this thesis. With careful consideration of the alternatives, interpretative phenomenological analysis appeared as the

most relevant method of collecting data for a true representation of the lived experiences of the participants in thesis.

Interviewing participants about their experiences of stress in schools was believed to facilitate this approach most effectively as it detailed their personal experiences and therefore were used to generate data which was relevant to answer the research question. There were a number of possible methods that could have been chosen, including questionnaires, and focus groups. The reasons that these methods were not chosen will now be presented.

## 4.2 Data collection methods

### 4.2.1 Sensitive research

(Campbell 2002) and (Johnson & Clarke 2003) have documented challenges faced by researchers interacting with participants in qualitative research. They include role conflicts, emotional distress, accessing participants and the impacts of undertaking in-depth interviews on sensitive topics. There is a growing recognition that undertaking qualitative research can pose many challenges both for researchers and participants, (Birch & Miller, 2000).

Concern for participants has been a focus of debate in the social sciences for some time (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000b). (Morse and Field, 1995: 78), note that data collection can be an intense experience, especially if the topic that one has chosen has to do with the illness experience or other stressful human experiences. The stories that the qualitative researcher obtains in interviews will be stories of intense suffering, social injustices, or other things that will shock the researcher.

The author recognises the deeply sensitive nature of this research topic and the topics ability to cause emotional distress to researchers and participants. Therefore, a participation information leaflet was sent to each participant some time before any interview took place. The risks of participating in the study were identified in this leaflet and these risks were reiterated before any interview began. The participant was given the option to terminate or suspend the interview at any time and at all times their confidentiality was assured. Participants were also advised that they could discuss the interview after the interview was terminated if they needed to do so.

(Corbin & Morse, 2003) reported that no evidence has emerged of participants having suffered negative long-term effects or having been referred for counselling as a result of being interviewed, and that anecdotal evidence suggests that interviews are more beneficial than harmful. That noted however, participants should be afforded the opportunity for feedback and discussion of their feelings on completion of an interview (Murray, 2003). Many of the risks inherent in sensitive research have been raised by a range of different writers (Cannon, 1992). This study endeavoured to acknowledge the highly sensitive nature of the research topic and took all precautions to prevent any harm or discomfort to participants.

#### 4.2.2 Interviews

In this thesis it was decided to use semi structured interviews to obtain data from participants. The term semi-structured interview covers a wide range of instances, it typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview guide but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference than the questions found in a structured interview schedule. Also, the interviewer has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what significant replies are (Rapley, 2001; Kvale, 2003; Dornyei & Skehan, 2003; Bryman, 2016).

Face to face interviews offer important advantages over other types of questioning, as there is the potential for interviewers to notice and correct respondents' misunderstandings, to probe inadequate or vague responses, and to allay concerns is important in obtaining complete and meaningful responses (Maruyama & Carey, 2014). Interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method of obtaining data from participants on a potentially sensitive subject. Sensitive research is difficult to define but has been associated with taboo topics or those "laden with emotion or which inspire feelings of awe or dread" (Lee, 1993; p. 6). For sensitive topics, many researchers choose a qualitative design using in-depth interviews (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Face-to-face interviews are an ideal method of data collection when exploring sensitive topics (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson, Wilkes, 2011; Taylor, Martin, Dal Grande, Swannell, Fullerton, Hazell, Harrison, 2011).

Research cannot provide the mirror reflection of the social world that positivists strive for, but it can provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds. In fact, it is only in the context of non-positivistic interviews, which recognise and build on their interactive components rather than trying to control and reduce them, that

“intersubjective depth” can be achieved and, with this, the achievement of knowledge of social worlds (Miller & Glasser, 1997).

The interview provides an efficient way to gain a range of rich data but requires skilful facilitation to manage the dynamics of the group and ensure all voices are heard (Petty et al, 2012). The semi structured interview was the form of interview chosen for the purpose of this thesis as it seemed to give scope for the participant to elaborate, if necessary, on their answers. Qualitative procedures depend on text, have distinct steps in collecting and analysing data and draw on varied tactics of questioning. Qualitative study stresses a model of investigation that provides and in depth understanding of intricate issues and focuses on an understanding of the narratives and observations (Creswell, 2009).

Initially two pilot interviews were undertaken, this assisted the author observe that the questions adequately covered the research topic. This also assisted tracking any initial trends from participants lived experiences of workplace stress in schools. It became apparent in these two pilot interviews that conflict with other teachers in the school environment was a noteworthy stressor. An important feature of these two pilot studies showed that IPC seemed to begin over trivial matters and escalated over time. In many instances this conflict eventually manifested into long term disputes among teachers that could last an entire career.

These initial findings resulted in a genesis that IPC may be the primary cause of workplace stress for teachers in schools. As further interviews were conducted IPC established itself as a highly prevalent cause of workplace stress for teachers. The literature seems to show a paucity of research on IPC among teachers in schools instead emphasising IPC among teachers and students and paying little attention to conflict between the teaching staff. The pilot studies seemed to produced data that was dissimilar to the main body of literature in the subject area. The pilot studies also seemed to show that IPC was exacerbated between teachers, as they were unable to escape from it. The pilots also showed that teachers could not report IPC for fear of perceived negative effects for their career. It therefore became evident that IPC was the primary cause of workplace stress for teachers.

#### 4.2.3 Interview method adopted

The semi-structured interview nature of interviews allows the researchers to explore, probe and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that subject (Patton, 2001). Sometimes during an interview, you will notice that the interviewee answers only in single word responses or in very short statements. To create more complete and detailed interviews, interviewers must use various strategies and devices from their repertoire (Berg, 2009).

Some basic techniques for interviews were employed during these interviews which are outlined as follows. The technique of uncomfortable silence involves consciously creating a long, silent pause after asking the interviewee a question, even if the interviewee only a word or a cryptic response (Kvale 1996). Kvale suggests that by allowing pauses in the conversation the subjects have ample time to associate and reflect and the break the silence themselves with appropriate information. A technique in the interview process that was not used was the technique of echoing.

‘Echoing’ is the tendency when interviewing to try and communicate that the interviewee understands what the interviewee is talking about. Some sources will even recommend that the interviewer periodically state “I know what you mean” or “that happened to me” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Barbour & Schostak, 2005). This study did not employ echoing to make interviewees that seemed nervous settle down and feel more relaxed. (Berg, 2009) argues that the process of echoing can be disastrous, especially for a new interviewer because it is unlikely even an experienced interviewer will make a short statement and leave it at that. The greater probability will be and to a large extent the more natural conversational response, the interviewer will discuss in detail his or her similar experiences.

Interviewing, as well as other qualitative approaches to social science study, differs from quantitative methods in the sense of its ability to analyse the resulting data making an allowance for participants' social life (Petty et al, 2012). In the field of social science study, the usefulness of interviews has long been recognised. That is, as qualitative researchers tend to provide detailed descriptions of individuals and events in their natural settings, interviewing has usually been thought of as a key factor in study design (Weiss, 1994).

An interview is not a simple tool with which to mine information. It is rather a place where views may clash, deceive, seduce, enchant” (Schostak, 2006). Interviewing is a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting (Cohen et al, 2007). Interviews are used extensively in qualitative study as a method of data



collection (Robson, 2011). (Schostak, 2006) adds that an interview is an extendable conversation between partners that aims at having in-depth information about a certain topic or subject, and through which a phenomenon could be interpreted in terms of the meaning's interviewees bring to it. Accumulating such meanings can be done in various ways, of which one-on-one interviews are the most common.

Interviewing should be adopted as a tool for social study as it facilitates obtaining direct explanations for human actions through a comprehensive speech interaction, (Berg, 2007). According to (Dornyei, 2007), a good qualitative interview has two key features: firstly, that it flows naturally, and secondly it is rich in detail. It is necessary for interviewers to maintain their interviewee's motivation by keeping boredom at bay (Berg, 2007). An interviewer would be expected to spend at least half an hour to unravel the investigated phenomenon (Schostak, 2002). It is worthwhile doing interviews because it offers studies the opportunity to uncover information that is probably not accessible using techniques such as questionnaires and observations (Blaxter, Hughes, Tight, 2006).

(Babbie & Mouton, 2011) define a qualitative interview as “an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order”. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) defined the interview as a purposeful conversation. (Kvale, 1996), metaphorically defines an interviewer as a miner or a traveller. The first term implies that the interviewee has information that must be mined by the interviewer; while the traveller model implies that the interviewer (wanders through the landscape and enters into a conversation people and explores the many domains of the country).

In semi-structured interviews the researcher has a list of fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as the interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of free leeway in how to reply (Bryman, 2004). The strength of the semi-structured interview lies in that they are flexible (Hofisi et al, 2014). Face-to-face interviews offer the possibility of modifying responses and investigating underlying responses (Robson, 2002). Face-to-face interviews offer the possibility of modifying one's enquiry following up interesting responses and investigating underlying responses. Nonverbal cues observed in face-to-face interviews also illustrate meanings (Robson, 2002).

Interviewers become part of the “investigating picture” by asking questions and responding to the respondent and sometimes even sharing their experiences with interviewees; working with the interview data, selecting from it, interpreting, describing and analysing the data, regardless of their discipline and dedication in keeping the interview data as the product of the respondent (Hofisi et al, 2014).

Interviewing reliability is elusive, and even adds that no study reports actual reliability data. In sum, study should follow techniques that would help maintaining the validity and reliability of interviewing (Richardson, 2006). These techniques include avoiding asking leading questions taking notes, not just depending on tape recorders conducting a pilot interview and giving the interviewee a chance to sum up to clarify the points they have made (Creswell, 2009).

Once the interview had been conducted, the interview response data that was recorded as well as field notes and observations were assessed. This was done within 24 hours of the termination of the interview. The data was accurately transcribed and stored in a word processing document to be analysed qualitatively for reoccurring common themes. As interviews are interactive, interviewers can press for complete, clear answers and can probe into any emerging topics (Patton, 2001). Hence, interviewing is expected to broaden the scope of understanding investigated phenomena, as it is a more naturalistic and less structured data collection tool (Kvale, 1996; Dornyei, 2007).

Each question in each interview was examined for similar themes, phrases or words that linked the 25 participants. These were itemised and tallied to observe which themes were the most common or statistically significant. Analysis is essentially about searching for patterns and themes; that is, the trends that emerge from finding. Following hours interviewing or observing people, it is likely to come away with some possible explanations of how and why people are saying what they are saying (Dale-Bloomberg, & Volpe, 2008).

#### **4.2.4 Bias**

Understanding study bias is important for several reasons. Firstly, bias exists in all studies, across study designs and is difficult to eliminate. Secondly, bias can occur at each stage of the study process, thirdly, bias impacts on the validity and reliability of study findings and misinterpretation of data can have important consequences for practice (Smith & Noble, 2017). The veracity of the teacher’s responses to themes such as IPC, workspace and

reporting of stress in this thesis could be taken as an indicator of experiences of participants and therefore reduce the possibility of bias.

To avoid bias as much as possible in this thesis the 25 interviews were transcribed verbatim to avoid any mistakes or misrepresentations from being made. All interviews were included, even though some interviews were limited in the data they held. Indirect questions were also asked to participants, these indirect questions gave more scope to the participants to express their own viewpoints and not be limited to structured answers. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they wished to add anything else to the interview or if they had anything else to contribute, this was done to make sure that participant had every opportunity to express their view on the topic and reduce bias.

Bias exists in all study designs, and although researchers should attempt to minimise bias, identifying potential sources of bias enables greater critical evaluation of the study findings and conclusions (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). Indeed, researchers bring to each study their experiences, ideas, prejudices and personal philosophies, which if accounted for in advance of the study, enhance the transparency of possible study bias (Simundic, 2013).

Trustworthiness refers to the confidence or trust one can have of a study and its findings (Robson, 2011), and it is in which findings reflect the focus of the study. Qualitative researchers recognise that their own experiences and subjectivity influence their interpretations, and this is made known to the reader through a process of reflectivity (Guba, 1981). Therefore, participants were invited to review the results of their interviews, this was done by asking participants who provided the data whether their interpretations seemed to be representative of their beliefs at the end of interviews. The limitations and bias will also be discussed in the discussion chapter.

## **4.3 Carrying out the research**

### **4.3.1 Recruitment of participants**

Once the methodology had been devised to answer the research question, a design was required to generate the data using the methods chosen. The initial target was for recruitment was in the region of 20-30 teachers as per previous qualitative studies noted in the literature (Mason, 2010; Alder & Alder, 2012). The number of interviews would be determined by responses and ethical approval considerations.

This thesis interviewed 25 secondary teachers from the Dublin region about their experiences of stress in their places of work. The participants were from both secondary schools and post leaving certificate colleges, (PLC)s that are classified as secondary schools by the Department of education. This study recruited 12 participants from secondary schools and 13 teachers from post leaving certificate colleges, (PLC)s. The level of teaching experience that these teachers attained varied. Five teachers had 5 years of less experience, fourteen teachers had between 6- and 10-years teaching experience and 6 teachers had between eleven- and fifteen-years' experience.

These interviews took place over a 14-month period from April 2017 until August 2019, in various locations in Dublin. The interviews lasted approximately 35 minutes and were very revealing at determining the experiences of stress that these teachers experienced in their schools. All 25 interviews were conducted in various locations throughout Dublin with teachers from the secondary school sector. A risk assessment was conducted prior to any interview taking place to comply with ethical requirements.

#### **4.3.2 The Sampling technique used**

A number of methods are available for sample selection, they are random, systematic, cluster, stratified and convenience. Snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling, is a distinct method of convenience sampling which has proven to be especially useful in conducting research in marginalised populations. The method is commonly used to locate, access and involve people from specific populations in cases where the researcher anticipates difficulties in creating a representative sample of the research population, (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Snowball sampling is a type of convenience sample and is a technique in which the study initially samples a small group of people relevant to the study question, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the study (Bryman, 2016). Snowball sampling is one of the most popular methods of sampling in qualitative research, central to which are the characteristics of networking and referral. The researchers usually start with a small number of initial contacts (seeds), who fit the research criteria and are invited to become participants within the research (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019).

The data collection in this study began with two participants being invited to participate in the interview process, these two participants were asked if they knew of other participants who would like to participate in this study, thus the self-selection process began which produced 25 teachers who had experienced workplace stress in the teaching profession.

Snowball sampling is frequently presented as a strategy to be employed where probability is impossible or not feasible. Probability sampling is a sampling technique in which samples from a larger population are chosen using a method based on probability (Noy, 2008). Snowballing is sometimes the best way to locate subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in the study. Snowball samples are particularly popular among studies interested in studying various classes of deviance, sensitive topics or difficult to reach populations (Lee, 1993).

Snowball sampling techniques offer real benefits for studies which seek to access difficult to reach or hidden populations. These are often obscured from the view of social studies and policy makers who are keen to obtain evidence of the experiences of some of the more marginal excluded groups (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). The sampling method was used to facilitate the selection of candidates from a population that was perceived difficult to reach and to examine characteristics about this population. (Valdez & Kaplan, 1999) suggested that the snowball sampling method is the most effective method to access hidden or hard to reach populations. (Cohen & Arieli, 2011), note that the effectiveness of snowball sampling has been recognised as significant in a variety of cases, mainly regarding marginalised populations. Their study claims that in conflict environments, the entire population is marginalised to some degree, making it 'hidden' from and 'hard to reach' for the research populations, which in a non-conflict context would not have been difficult to do.

In essence, representativity is the central limitation of snowball sampling. Convenience sampling, by definition, is usually not random or representative, so it often results in selection bias and external and internal validity limitations (Valdez & Kaplan, 1999). A problematic aspect of relying on referrals is the like likelihood of excluding individuals who do not belong to the specific network being accessed (Van Meter, 1990). (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) claim that the problem of selection bias may be partially addressed by the generation of a large sample and by the replication of results to strengthen generalisation.

There is a limitation in this sampling strategy because representativeness can be compromised in a snowball sampling methodology. Snowball sampling is not random, so it often results in selection bias (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). The sampling strategy did however produce 25 participants that formed the basis of this thesis and 25 participants may be an accepted number of participants to give an inference as to the condition of a population. To locate and interview 25 teachers who had experienced stress in schools could prove very difficult for a lone researcher.

Stress for teachers could be a sensitive topic to discuss with many multi-faceted and negative experiences encountered by teachers that they may have difficulty reciting. To this end a snowball strategy was thought to be the most effective way to source these participants. To this end good methodological practice was followed. It is believed the methodology of this thesis is of good quality and supports the findings and conclusions of this thesis. Snowball sampling was chosen to select a sample of participants for this thesis as it was felt that this sampling method was best suited for recruiting participants from a hidden population such as people experiencing work related stress.

#### **4.3.3 Limitations and bias of IPA**

A useful description of qualitative study is that qualitative study begins with assumptions, a world view, the possible use of a theoretical lens and the study of problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Conway, 2003). To study this problem, qualitative studies use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry; the collection of data in a natural setting, sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis is inductive and establishes patterns or themes.

The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher and a complex description and interpretation of the problem and it extends the literature or signals a call for action (Creswell, 2007). Bias is important to consider because of the possible effect on the accuracy of the data used to answer the research question.

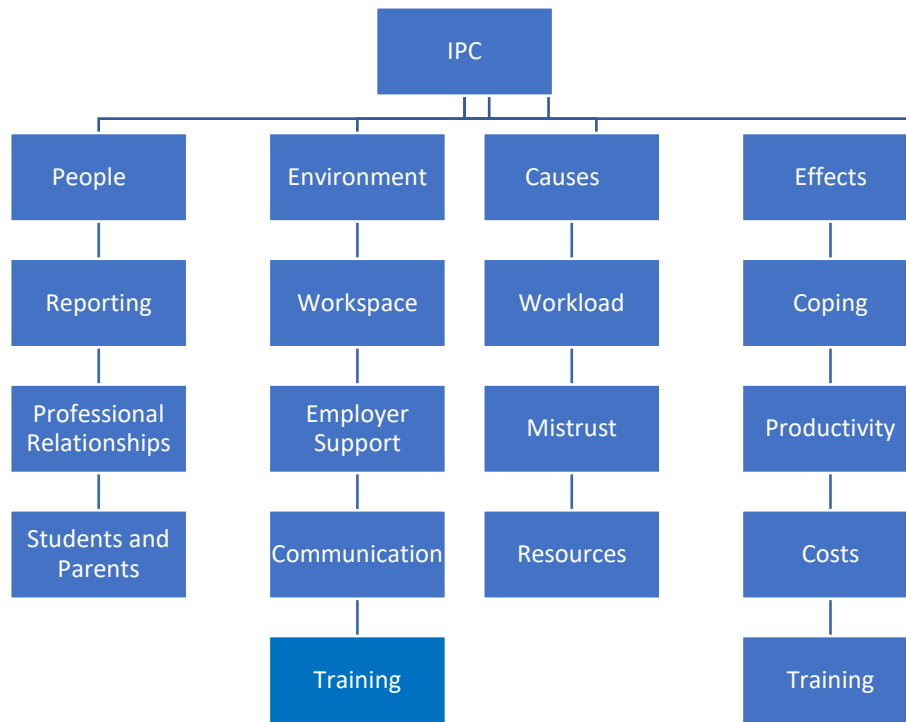
The final objective of this data is to conclude what are the main findings of the data and how severely they affect the teachers in this thesis. These conclusions will be analysed and compared to the literature review. It is also intended to put forward recommendations as to the most efficient and effective way to reduce and tackle stress in the teaching sector. These recommendations were decided after the interviews have been concluded and the data analysed.

#### **4.4 Data analysis plan**

From the thesis data obtained in this research, where several participants mentioned a particular phrase, word or term, a colour was assigned. Different colour highlighters represented the frequency of this phrase, word or term. From this inquiry the questions from the field work were broken down into numerically significant data which could be further analysed (Okely, 1994).

This thesis noted high levels of IPC between teaching colleagues which caused noteworthy stress for participants. This IPC in many cases defined the teacher's relationship with their teaching colleagues and with the school. IPC was easily begun and could last a whole career. This prominence of IPC resulted in a study question being formulated which was "Is interpersonal conflict the primary cause of stress within second level teachers in Ireland?" A diagram, (Table 3A) of the central role of IPC is developed below to illustrate the relationship IPC has within this study.

**Table 3A Identifies the central role of IPC in this study**



Qualitative studies utilise statistical tests of significance to study the frequency of responses. Typically, these tests of significance are reported with preestablished levels of confidence (Patton, 2001). Qualitative research should not seek statistical significance that characterises quantitative study. In qualitative research, what is meant by significant is that something is important, meaningful or potentially useful given what we are trying to find out. Qualitative findings are judged by their substantive significance (Patton, 2001).

**4.4.1 Proposed approach to the analysis of findings**

Data analysis in qualitative study remains somewhat mysterious, the problem lies in the fact that there are no agreed-on canons for qualitative analysis in the sense of shared ground rules (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Studies in the spirit of conducting discovery-oriented inquiries usually create study-specific questions for their interviews instead of utilising pre-established questionnaires or survey instruments (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Investigators become the instruments through which data for their studies are collected or generated (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003).



Smith & Osborn, (2008) provides an eight-step cycle of analysis for interpretative phenomenological analysis, which was followed in this thesis. The data was read in detail and initial notes were made, this phase involved reading the data and noting ideas or phrases into the NVivo programme. The data was then initially coded, (open coding). This initial coding of thesis data helped familiarisation with the individual interviews and get a sense of the data that had been collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During initial coding, studies repeatedly read their data and code as much of it as possible (Warren & Karner, 2015). Step three involved developing subordinate categories under each code. step four involved breaking down the subordinate categories into sub categories for more in depth understanding of data. The next step developed superordinate themes which consolidated codes from preceding cycles into more abstract and literature-based set of subordinate themes thereby creating a final framework.

step six involved writing analytical memos against the superordinate themes to accurately summarise the content of each category and propose empirical findings against each finding. Step seven saw validation and revisiting the analytical memos to self-audit proposed findings by seeking evidence in the data beyond textual quotes to support the findings. and the final step synthesised analytical memos into coherent and cohesive findings offering a coherent well supported findings chapter.

There is no formula for determining the significance of findings or for interpreting them and there are no ways of interpreting a studies analytical thinking. Because each is unique, each analytical approach is unique as well (Dale-Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). “In short, no absolute rules exist except perhaps this: “Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveals given the purpose of the study” (Patton, 2001). In qualitative study, what we mean by significant is that something is important, meaningful, or potentially useful given what they are trying to find out. Qualitative findings are judged by their substantive significance (Patton, 2001). IPC, fear of reporting stress, workspace and mistrust of the school management were all noteworthy findings in this research that contributed to stressful experiences for participants in education.

## 4.5 Coding and analysis

### 4.5.1 Introduction

Upon completion of each interview, the results were transcribed on to paper from listening to the recordings of the interview transcripts. This was done within twenty-four hours of the interview taking place and then deleted for confidentiality. The interview transcripts were systematically read and re-read by the author and any identifying features were removed. Significant statements or text segments were highlighted and grouped together to develop clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2007).

No names of participants were used in any field notes or transcriptions, the interviews were identified by giving the interview a number and using the initials of the person's name. After prolonged interaction in the field, researchers focus their attention on the difficult process of analysing the myriad information collected there. The multipronged process of analysis requires that the researcher make sense of the data; break it down, study its components, investigate its importance and interpret its meanings (Bailey, 2007).

### 4.5.2 Coding

The methodology adopted in this study is based on the principals of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). There is no one definitive method of data analysis in IPA, rather it adopts flexible strategies towards analytic development (Smith, 2008). There are many ways of coding and coding is undertaken in qualitative study for a variety of purposes, (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olsen, Spiers, 2002; Saldana, 2012; Saldana, 2015).

The analysis process should be reflexive, and include the researchers interactional experience with interviews (Creswell, 2009).

There is no fixed method of analysing interview data in the literature, yet, researchers should cautiously deal with it as it affects not only the quality of an interview, but the validity, reliability of the whole study (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2009). Eight cycles of analysis were conducted across the iterative process of data analysis, (Bazeley, 2009). These cycles involved three separate cycles of coding, two cycles of managing codes, one for initial categorisation of open codes and one data reduction through consolidating codes into more abstract theoretical framework and one which uses writing itself as a tool to prompt deeper thinking of the data.

#### 4.5.3 Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data analysis software and NVivo, has become increasingly flexible in adapting to the demands of modern study projects. Using software in the data analysis process has been thought by some to add rigour to qualitative study (Richards & Richards, 1994; Bezeley 2007; Zamawe 2015). Before any data was downloaded on to the NVivo programme, a conceptual map was drawn up of the interview findings to illustrate the concerns of the participants, this was done by highlighting key words from each question from the participant interviews. Visualisation techniques for example, (concept maps) and thought experiments can help clarify what might be useful questions and can be useful when formulating data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

A case file was then made in the NVivo programme for each of the 25 interview participants and each case file had eight questions from each interview downloaded and what each participant said verbatim under each question. There now existed 25 case files on the NVivo programme, each of the 25 files was called by the first name of each interview participant. From these 25 case files the process of creating codes begun, initial coding was created by analysing each interview question and creating a code for the most common words or themes which came up for each question. This process of reading and initial coding resulted in 18 codes being created. These coded represented the most numerous phrases, comments, and concerns of the interview participants.

(Smith & Osborn, 2008) provides an eight-step cycle of analysis for interpretative phenomenological analysis, the steps are as follows, step one: Reading and initial noting, this phase involves reading the data and noting ideas into the NVivo programme. Step two: Open coding, step three, developing subordinate categories, step four, coding on, step five, developing superordinate themes, step six, writing analytical memos against the superordinate themes, step seven, validation and step eight, synthesising analytical memos into coherent, cohesive and well supported findings. Table 3B below elaborates on the NVivo coding framework and clarifies on the analytical and coding process that was engaged in as part of this study.

***Table 3B***

<b>IPA analytical process (Smith et al, 2009)</b>	<b>NVivo process</b>
step one & two: Immersion in data and initial noting. Focus on the sense of meaning participants make of their experiences/ Initial noting examines language use and semantic content producing detailed descriptive notes and comments on the data.	Open coding: Participants own word are used to summarise the sense of meaning. Open codes (nodes in NVivo) are created for each participant. Codes make a first pass at reducing the original data to descriptive phases or notes
Step three: Developing emerging themes by reducing the volume of data while retaining its complexity but highlighting patterns and complexity.	Category creation: A new category folder for the participants transcript in NVivo holds a copy of the set of open codes. Codes are reviewed in each category folder into broad categories. These are merged and renamed ensuring the new names accurately reflect the content.
Step four: Searching for connections across emergent themes. This step maps how the themes fit together	Category Development: Creating subordinate categories for clusters of codes. This considers how codes are linked or reduced further into themes. New names are created for each category of themes that reflect both the descriptive and the interpretative to create subordinate themes. The aim is to reduce the data down to a small number of themes
Step five: Repeating all the previous steps for each participant without as far as possible reference to the transcripts. (Brackets ideas emerging from one case to the next).	Next Transcript: A new open codes folder is created in NVivo in which to store new codes created for each participants transcript separate from other transcripts. Each transcript is treated as new analysis.
Step six to eight: Looking for patterns across cases, looking at themes across participants to detect patterns. Looking for connections. This process can result in moving towards a more theoretical level of analysis as individual themes or subordinate themes may also reflect high order concepts. Recurrence of themes across cases is also considered.	Consolidating and Matrix coding: Emergent themes are transcribed and copied into a common ‘Themes’ folder where they are all merged together. A specific type of coding query in NVivo (Matrix coding) produces a table which shows participants in columns and themes in rows.

In the design of the data analysis steps as outlined above, consideration was given to the aim of the study and its underlying philosophical foundation. King, (2004), states that tensions exist “between the need to be open to the data and the need to impose some shape and structure on the analytical process”, (p167). The objective is to design and undertake a

systematic and disciplined data analysis process that encourages completeness and impartiality, (Lillis, 1999).

The interview recordings were listened to again to familiarise and check if the recordings were what was transcribed for each interview candidate. (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009), acknowledges that analysis is an “iterative process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript”. Repeated listening to the audio recordings and numerous reading and re-reading of transcripts ensured a growing familiarity with the text and leads to richer and deeper understanding of how participants view phenomena. High levels of IPC among colleagues were noted by participants in this thesis which resulted in stress and illness for teachers.

Four subordinate themes were created from the initial coding which were, People, Coping, Stress Causes and Stress Effects. Each parent node had three or four child nodes to further sub divide the node into different categories. Finally superordinate themes were created, these themes originate from the subordinate themes but are less descriptive and more analytical. These final superordinate themes also had child nodes under each parent nodes to categorise different themes under a main theme that were related, the four superordinate themes created which were People, Environment, Stress causes and Stress effects.

The creation of these superordinate themes allowed this thesis to continue by using the NVivo programme to create queries, case classifications and relationships between the case files and the demographic data that were inputted into the programme. This facilitated the examination of the data to obtain findings that were significant from the study of the data. The importance of interpretation in qualitative study is important not only because interpretation adds a new dimension of understanding, but because the process of interpretation challenges the qualitative study and takes for granted assumptions and beliefs about the process and phenomena they have investigated (Wolcott. 1994).

#### **4.5.4 Ethics**

All interviewees for this thesis were given a minimum of one week to read a participation information leaflet (PIL), prior to any interview taking place. This gave the participant time to read over the leaflet and examine any questions that might be asked at the interview. Immediately before the interview commenced, the participation information leaflet was signed by both the author and interviewee and was dated.

Study that is likely to harm participants is regarded by most people as unacceptable. It is worthwhile to consider what is harm? Harm can entail several facets; physical harm; harm to participant's development; loss of self-esteem; stress; and inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts (Diener & Crandall, 1978). The importance attached to study ethics is evident in the fact that social studies will normally need to get prior approval for their investigation from the ethics committee. Those conducting investigations as part of any academic qualification will normally be required to have their plans vetted by an ethics committee within their university before they can start investigations (Denscombe, 2017).

Ethical permission was given by the Ethics Department of Technical University Dublin for this study in October 2016. As interviews are considered an intrusion into respondents' private lives regarding time allotted and level of sensitivity of questions asked, a high standard of ethical considerations should be maintained. Ethical issues should be considered at all stages of the interview process. That is participants should provide their informed consent before participating in the interview (Cohen et al, 2007). Studies must ensure the rights, privacy and welfare of the people and communities that form the focus of their results (Berg, 2009).

The participation information leaflet and questions for this study were accepted by the ethics department of Technological University Dublin (TUD) and approved. To protect the participants rights and to avoid causing them any harm, studies should assure that the collected data will be strictly confidential and anonymous, more importantly, however participants should be told that their participation in the interview is entirely voluntary, and that they can withdraw at any time (Alshenqeeti, 2014). A grant of approval from the ethics Department of TU Dublin was received in October 2016, (approval number REC 20-247), and data collection commenced shortly after this time. The data collection was cognitive of the requirements of the ethics department of TU Dublin and followed these requirements in the data collection process.

A detailed risk assessment took place in each venue to ascertain the safety of the environment before any interview commenced, this was to comply with ethical requirements. All venues were found to be safe and each interview was conducted in what was deemed to be a safe environment. A template of the risk assessment can be found in the Appendix. This was a requirement of the ethics department in Technological University

Dublin. This thesis found that individuals were more than willing to be interviewed about their experiences of stress.

Organisations, both in the private and public sector seemed less willing to participate in this thesis. For this thesis 14 organisations were both telephoned and written to for the purpose of inquiring about the possibility of investigating work-related stress among their employees. Only two organisations replied and upon further investigation and meetings with these two organisations, it proved unviable to continue study with either organisation.

#### **4.5.5 Conclusion**

Ontological, epistemological and pragmatic consideration pointed to a qualitative study with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), as the chosen method. Once ethical approval had been granted the design consisted of recruiting 25 teachers and semi structured interviews were conducted. NVivo was then used to analyse the data for themes and codes. The data from this process will be presented in the next chapter.

# Chapter 5 FINDINGS

## 5.0 Introduction

The findings of this chapter will be presented in order of relevance to the research question. The research question formulated for this thesis was “Is interpersonal conflict the primary cause of stress in second level teaching?” Evidence will be presented in this chapter illustrating high levels of interpersonal conflict (IPC), as the primary cause of stress among the teachers recruited. Evidence will also be presented of a fear to report IPC related stress as well as reduced productivity from IPC related stress.

## 5.1 People

This thesis is essentially about the study of people in a teaching environment. The sociological narrative style as exemplified by (Fahie, 2014) and (McNamara et al 2017) is a feature of this thesis and best illustrates the suffering of the participants. The narratives incorporated into this findings chapter exemplifies the extent and experience of this suffering. The quantitative and sociological presentation of this chapter was far more revealing and reflected much better the experiences and deep suffering of the participants.

Interpersonal conflict (IPC) was found to be easily started and could be difficult to resolve. IPC among teaching colleagues could also cause high levels of mistrust which could permeate the school environment and effect the school climate and functioning of the school. There were also strained relationships between teaching colleagues and the school management reported. There was considerable overlap among stressors as one stressor causing tension for a teacher could influence other stressors within the school environment.

### 5.1.0 Reporting stress to the school management

This thesis noted that 24 out of 25 teachers identified a fear of reporting stress to the school management. These teachers believed that reporting stress officially, would have many and varied negative side effects and consequences. Teachers viewed that reporting stress, may be interpreted as weak and as a result these teachers would not be trusted with possible future responsibility. There was also a fear that their future career would be affected by a declaration of stress, that the declaration would be remembered and be a “black mark” against any future career progression.



Teachers described the school management in different ways; teachers described the school management as “Management”, “The Department”, “Head Office”, “Authority”, “the school management” “the Vice Principal” or “the principal”. A high number of teachers, 24 out of 25 that felt they would not be treated fairly or consistently if they made an official declaration of stress, and all teachers knew of individuals that had had negative interactions with the school management as a result of declaring stress to them either officially or unofficially. One teacher noted the following on reporting of stress, *“Impossible to do, the school management would be really concerned and do nothing, anyone who ever declared stress was ignored or distrusted”*. Another participant noted *“I would never go to speak to my employer about stress, I would get a bad name, they will think I am not appropriate for the job, they might move me and I do not want this. It would be looked upon as a weakness, as surrender. I did not want to be seen like this. You cannot even mention stress to an employer, you simply cannot trust them”*.

The 25 interviewed teachers were asked how they felt about declaring stress to their employer, the following phrases were used below to describe the scale of negative consequences of declaring such stress to their employer.

*“H R bomb”, “you would be mad to report stress”, “you would be looking for trouble to report stress”, “you cannot cope”, “not feeling comfortable about declaring stress”, “the employers solutions might be terrible”, “cautious”, “thinking that you are not able for a new task”, “your image would be destroyed”, “feeling nervous of an accusation”, “the employer being fearful of legal action”, “the declaration would not be treated like any other illness”, “reluctant”, “not doing my job properly”, “judged badly”, “very reluctant”, “viewed as weakness”, “you did not manage yourself”, “being pigeon holed”, “the employer would not care”, “feel very nervous”, “ I would never declare stress”, “I would leave”, “they would not like it”, “there is negative stigma around mental health”, “a wasted exercise”, “you would be perceived as that you cannot cope”. “tricky”, “they would not like to hear about it”, “very difficult to declare”, “it would be sink or swim”, “I would never speak to an employer about stress”, “they would not be happy”, “perceived as weakness as a surrender”, “it would end my career”, “they would not listen”, “a last resort”, “impossible to do”, “a declaration would be ignored or mistrusted”, “I have too much to lose”, “would not be looked favourably upon”, “you do not react well under pressure”*.

Only one teacher out of 25 interviewed in this thesis felt there would be no adverse effects if they declared stress to their employer. One of the 24 teachers interviewed noted that there was no point in declaring stress to their employer as it would reflect negatively upon them, *“They would half listen and then claim that they are more stressed than you. It might look like if you are not coping it would affect future roles within the organisation, they would consider someone else”*.

#### 5.1.1 Marys story

Mary’s story is a good example of how reporting stress could define your relationship within the organisation. Mary had worked as secondary school teacher for many years very successfully. She applied and was successful in obtaining a deputy principals position in another school. The other school had a long history of tension and interpersonal conflict. She left her old job and began working in the new school as a deputy principal. On her first day in the new school, she brought a bunch of flowers in to present to the deputy principal she was replacing.

When she presented the flowers to the outgoing deputy principal, the flowers were rejected. Mary was told that she should not have got the job, that people had applied for the deputy principal position within the school and one of them should have got it. Mary was told that she would never be accepted in the school by the teachers as she was an outsider.

Mary began working in the school and on the first day she was told by the principal whom she had a good working relationship with, that the staff did not like authority. Mary was told that things were going to be rough for her as there was an expectation that someone within the school would get the deputy principal’s position.

Over the next few months Mary was subjected to a campaign of interpersonal conflict, incivility and bullying. Teachers would arrive at her office in groups to complain about very minor things such as one of the photocopiers being faulty. Teachers would stop talking when Mary entered the staff room. Mary caught a teacher going through her rubbish bin, when Mary questioned why, Mary was told that she was being monitored.

This IPC behaviour went on for months, the principal of the school told Mary that there was very little she could do. Eventually Mary started to become ill, she could not sleep properly, had numerous headaches and was generally feeling very tired from the bullying and incivility that she had to endure on a daily basis.

With much reluctance Mary decided to take sick leave, Mary's doctor put work related stress and fatigue on her sick note. Once Mary submitted this sick note to the H.R. department, her life was never the same within the organisation. The H.R. department who had been cordial and communicative up to then now treated her like a pariah. The whole tone of the communication between H.R. and Mary changed, it became more formal, unempathetic and HR would not respond to many of Mary's communications.

Mary felt she was being outcasted by the organisation, she described informing H.R. that she was stressed as the "H.R. bomb". As time passed Mary became seriously ill with cancer, an illness she absolutely believed was caused by the stress experienced within the school and the reaction of H.R. to her stress declaration. From then on Mary believed that the organisation just wanted her to leave, they insisted Mary attend another medical practice for a second opinion and any correspondence to Mary was without any sympathy or empathy.

Mary said, "I could not believe what happened, people in H.R. that I had known for years would not speak to me, I was like the enemy to them. I felt like an outcast, they were uncaring, they did not want to know of my experiences in the school, they just wanted me out". Mary felt that the purpose of H.R. was to protect the organisation and nothing else. Eventually after some persuasion from H.R. Mary resigned her position. She believed that reporting stress made her position within the organisation untenable and instantly ended her career. She had surgery for her illness and is now living a healthy life away from teaching, but is still attending hospital for ongoing treatment several years later.

### 5.1.2 Professional relationships

IPC was a noteworthy finding in this thesis, this IPC which was caused by teaching colleagues seemed to contribute to teacher stress. Interpersonal conflict (IPC), was an important factor in teacher experiences. The IPC was caused mainly by colleagues with whom they worked with. Over time some IPC events had escalated into much more serious encounters. One teacher explained that *“I had a small disagreement with a teaching colleague long long ago, it was something tiny, but we have not spoken in years, I cannot stand the sight of them”*.

Although colleagues could be a source of strength and encouragement for most of the participants, 22 of the 25 teachers viewed work colleagues in a negative way. Teachers reported several issues with colleagues such as a lack of trust, personality clashes, poor expectations from fellow colleagues, physical threats received from colleagues, colleagues set their ways and unwilling to change, an inability to escape from difficult colleagues due to work space restrictions, petty quarrels that escalated over time and an institutionalisation of work colleagues making them bitter and difficult to cope with.

A feature of IPC is that it could be easily started and could be very difficult to resolve, lasting an entire teaching career. One participant reported *“There are people in this school I have not spoken to in years, it started over something small, so small I cannot remember what it was and we both have just avoided each other for years, it defined my relationship with the person”*. This quote seems to illustrate the ease at which IPC can occur within schools.

Another interviewee that experienced a notable amount of IPC with colleagues reported *“Colleagues were directing negativity towards each other; colleagues were ganging up on certain other colleagues. There was a lot of friction between teachers, some unbelievable stuff happened, the longer the teachers were there, the worse they were”*.

The IPC issues between teaching colleagues reported in this thesis often escalated, resulting in multi-faceted and significant problems for all parties concerned; some teachers admitted that they would avoid rooms or corridors that certain colleagues were residing in order to avoid further conflict. This thesis noted that 16 out of 25 teachers would finish a class early in order to avoid IPC with a teaching colleague. These teachers wanted to avoid a face-to-face confrontation. IPC also made its way to the staff room, where certain staff had specific

seating arrangements. To sit in someone's seat or drink from someone's cup was considered highly disrespectful.

This thesis has shown that IPC between colleagues on occasions involved long periods of time invested in analysing the conflict and thus perpetuated a sense of stress and mistrust among teachers. This resulted in an inability by teachers to be able to successfully terminate IPC as there was a lack of conflict resolution resources available within the school. There is an inference from this thesis that once IPC had begun between colleagues that it was difficult to resolve and may affect the whole school environment.

It was noted by 15 of the 25 teachers that the school management were more interested in managing teachers to ensure routine tasks were completed, rather than encouraging teachers to improve pedagogic practices. Teachers believed that the school management was only interested in managing the school with surveillance. This mistrust that existed between the school management and teachers seemed to permeate the school environment and was an everyday occurrence. There is an inference that this conflict seemed to affect many interactions throughout the school negatively. This thesis also noted that mistrust can permeate the school environment and guide the way day to day activities could be accomplished within the school.

A finding from this thesis noted that four of the 25 teachers identified a reluctance to inform teacher unions of IPC for fear of escalating the conflict. These teachers had both management and teaching responsibilities. These teachers believed that teacher unions would simply see the employer as having a "Duty of Care" to resolve the conflict. These four teachers identified teacher unions as a critical bystander who if brought into the conflict would have the sole aim of ensuring that the resolution process was implemented correctly rather than being a supportive and collaborative partner in the resolution of the conflict.

A defining feature of bullying is a power imbalance, many relationships between colleagues in this thesis could not be described as having a power imbalance as parties had similar teaching positions within the school. Bullying is the result of a power imbalance between the target and the perpetrator, due to this power imbalance, the target is unable to defend themselves, against this treatment (Zapt & Gross, 2001). Interpersonal conflict might include a power imbalance, but this imbalance is not regarded as typical or deemed necessary for a situation to be labelled as an interpersonal conflict (Baillien, Escartín, Gross,

Zapf, 2017). The lack of an imbalance of power between colleagues in this thesis would seem to negate bullying as an appropriate definition for IPC identified between these teaching colleagues.

Teachers interviewed for this research did not necessarily feel threatened by this conflict and if notified that their behaviour was causing stress to others would amend their behaviour. They also explained that conflict could be a positive thing in some instances. One participant noted *“there is a colleague that I do not like, that I avoid and that irritates me but although I do not like her, I do recognise that they are a good teacher, they just get on my nerves. I spend a lot of my time trying to be better than her”*. Positive outcomes from conflict have also been noted by other authors such as (Williams, 2011).

### 5.1.3 Ann’s story

An example of IPC can be seen in Ann’s story. Ann worked in a large secondary school for some years. The first year was a good year for her, she could not have imagined that her whole career would be defined by a simple mobile phone charging point in a staffroom. Ann had a very good relationship with many teachers in the school and she described herself as a ‘social butterfly’. She liked to talk and interact with everyone in the school yet she had noticed over the years that a couple of teachers did not interact with her and only seemed to grunt at her when she greeted them each morning.

One day she was having her lunch in the staffroom and needed to charge her phone. There was only one charging point that was available for staff and this was being used by another teacher. Ann noticed that the other teacher’s phone was fully charged so proceeded to unplug the teacher’s phone and plugged in her own phone to charge.

She then sat down and had her lunch with her colleagues, after some time the history teacher came into the staffroom and seemed very irate that his phone had been unplugged from charging. Ann explained that she had noticed his phone was fully charged and that she unplugged his phone and plugged in her own phone to charge. The history teacher leaned over to her very closely when no one was looking and told her in a very sinister way to never ever touch his phone again or there would be trouble.

Ann was shocked and upset, she notified the principal only to be told to stay away from the history teacher. The principal went on to describe the history teacher as being ‘a bit weird’ and that they had been working in the school for years and had a track record of this kind of behaviour. Ann was approached a couple of days later by the history teacher, he told her

that he had found out that she had been talking to the principal about him and proceeded to call her names, Ann was very upset. From that point on the history teacher would pass negative comments whenever he met Ann in the corridor or in the staffroom. He would make sure no one was looking when he made the negative comments. The conflict over the phone charger had led to incivility and now she felt that she was being bullied horribly.

Eventually, Ann could not stand it anymore, she made an official complaint to the principal in writing about the history teachers bullying. To her horror she had to attend a meeting with the principal and the history teacher to sort things out. Ann believed the meeting to be a disaster, the history teacher accused her of being the bully and she had little evidence to prove or disprove anything. Ann felt exhausted after the meeting, she felt that her reputation had been seriously negatively affected within the school.

From then on, Ann began to withdraw into herself within the school environment, she would not go into the staffroom and stayed in her class all day, only leaving when she had to go home. The initial IPC incident over a phone charging point had developed and escalated over time to make her life in the school miserable. She would feel extremely stressed that she would meet the history teacher in the corridor and he would say something negative to her. The principal did not want to know, he even told Ann that he did not want to hear anything more about the issue as there was nothing he could do. The principal told Ann that the history teacher was going to retire in a year and she would be ok then.

Ann lived a life of withdrawal and misery teaching in the school for the next year until the history teacher retired. Ann felt that her career had been defined within the school as she believed that the principal would not trust her in a position of responsibility. She believed that there was an implication by the principal that she must have contributed to the problem of conflict in some way and that there was a pair of them in it.

Ann believed that her whole teaching career was negatively affected by one IPC incident. She could not believe how easily the conflict had begun and how such a simple conflict could lead to bullying and her withdrawal from school activities. Ann believed that she had no help, and that there was no solution to deal with obviously dysfunctional teachers within the school. After the history teacher retired her life within the school returned to some normality but she believed her progression to management would never happen after these negative interactions.

#### 5.1.4 Employer relationships

Impartiality was also perceived to be an issue in the event of a teacher making a formal complaint to head office or human resources. It was felt that confidentiality could be overlooked in this process and a formal complaint made by a teacher could be made public through rumour from one individual knowing another.

Formal complaints also led to the taking of sides further entrenching disputes. Other studies have found similar findings about impartiality such as (Klein & Martin, 2011) who found human resources to not be impartial in workplace settings, and (Hodgins, Lewis, MacCurtain, McNamara, Hogan, Pursell, 2019) who found human resources had failed to protect employees. The findings of this thesis noted that 22 out of 25 teachers, reported that conflict resolution mechanisms were scant at best and those conflict resolutions that were available to teachers were under-utilised or actively not utilised. These 22 teachers also noted a general lack of knowledge by teachers of the processes or steps involved in conflict resolution in their school.

In all cases in this thesis the only persons whom teachers could approach in order to resolve an IPC problem was the principal or vice principal of the school and 22 of the 25 teachers felt uncomfortable about this approach of reporting IPC. There was a perception from teachers that the person to whom they could report IPC was not well trained or had lack of leadership qualities to effectively deal with interpersonal issues. Impartiality was also seen as being compromised by teachers in the process of conflict resolution as the principal or vice principal may prefer a certain teacher over another and therefore there would not be a fair or equitable solution for both teachers in a dispute.

The findings suggest that teachers feel that some school managers had “favourite” teachers that were an extension of their power in the school and these teachers always supported the school management on any decision they would make. An allegation of IPC or bullying against such teachers was treated as an allegation against the principal or deputy principal. This finding would support (Kelman’s, 2005) work where he suggests that compliance is evident when an individual accepts influence from another person, or group to attain a favourable reaction, approval, or to avoid punishment. In bullying cultures, bullying could



be typified by employees who support bullying behaviours; therefore, they develop a closer working relationship with the bully (Zapf & Einarsen 2011; McNamara, et al, 2018).

This thesis also found that 12 out of 25 teachers had IPC issues with their employer. They also believed they had been managed in an inappropriate way and felt that their employer could be more sympathetic towards employees. They had witnessed examples of other colleagues or themselves being treated in an unsympathetic or unempathetic way. This had resulted in IPC between the teacher and the school management. There is an inference that once IPC had begun between a teacher and the school management that this was difficult to resolve and, in many cases, IPC spread throughout the school environment as both sides tried to recruit allies to assist them in resolving the IPC and bolstering support for their position.

School management personnel were also a notable source of stress for nine out of 25 teachers in this thesis. The perceived pernicious influence of the school management manifested itself in several ways. Teachers cited the school management as being unfair, not listening, showing a lack of understanding and not treating all staff the same. These teachers believed that school management personnel could show preferential treatment to certain staff members. These teachers felt that the school management personnel would not treat them fairly or consistently in everyday issues and this led to mistrust, anxiety, and stress.

This research found that six teachers out of 25 had both a teaching and school management responsibility. These teachers had their teaching role to fulfil and their school management role. Aside from teaching, their school management role saw them undertake management duties such as setting timetables, dealing with teacher queries, and various tasks associated with students and parents. These teachers all noted added workplace stress from balancing the dual role of these two positions.

One teacher who had a school management and teaching role noted that, *“Dealing with colleagues is extremely stressful in a management role. Dealing with staff, sorting arguments between staff is seen as part of my school management role. Then I have to teach also, this is a very stressful place to be in”*. Some teachers, as part of their school management role had the responsibility of maintenance and care of buildings and property. These three teachers had very little or no experience of construction or property

maintenance but were expected to know about the maintenance of these buildings. This lack of knowledge caused considerable stress for them. Teachers with school management and teaching roles reported a lack of training to help them with these dual roles and a lack of support from their employer when they expressed concern to their employer about coping with these dual roles.

There is potentially an inability to resolve these IPC difficulties and a tendency for teachers to try and distance themselves from individuals they have had IPC with. The data collected for this thesis, suggests a lack of viable conflict resolution opportunities within schools that teachers can avail of to reduce or eliminate stress with other colleagues and the school management.

#### 5.1.5 Students and parents

Three out of 25 teachers, reported poor relations with students because of interpersonal conflict with work colleagues. Stress from interactions with work colleagues in schools led to teachers becoming irate with students. One such teacher said in interview. *“Sometimes you may have to shout at students because of being stressed and the student would be against you. You were a bit stressed in work, because of colleagues, and you took it out on the students”*. These three teachers did not intentionally have confrontational experiences with students but because of prior IPC with professional colleagues, they carried over this conflict into the classroom. These disagreements lasted in some cases for a long time and the teacher would have to endure the entire semester on bad terms with the student.

This thesis noted that only two teachers out of 25 reported student behaviour as a notable stressor and these two teachers also cited parents as stressors, particularly at teacher meetings when the parents became confrontational. This confrontation occurred most often among the parents of weaker students. Some interviewees believed that the parents blamed the teacher on the poor student performance. Although this only accounted for a small percentage of the interviewees, these interviewees cited high levels of stress by the confrontational attitudes of parents at parent teacher meetings and difficult students in the classroom environment. However, it was noteworthy that students and parents were a much smaller cause of stress to teachers when compared to colleagues.

## **5.2 Environment**

### **5.2.1 Employer support**

This thesis noted that nine teachers out of 25 teachers believed that there should be more systems or procedures in place in their employment to support staff with issues effecting their employment such as dysfunctional colleagues, bullying, etc. They viewed these situations as being side stepped and ignored or not tackled. This lack of confrontation of difficult matters aggravated these issues, these teachers felt that these employment issues festered and became worse over time as a consequence of poor employer support.

### **5.2.2 Training**

This thesis found that eight out of 25 teachers cited the desire and requirement for more training from the school management to cope with stress. Courses in stress management, coping with stress, IPC and mindfulness were suggested by these teachers. It was felt that there was a lack of some forms of continuous professional development to deal with the stressors in teaching. These teachers specifically cited the need for training for dealing with difficult colleagues as they did not know how to engage with difficult behaviours. These same eight respondents referred to the need for an external availability source of advice that could be utilised. They had a fear to approach colleagues or the school management for advice as impartiality could be compromised.

Of these eight teachers, three cited the need for extra training as a result of being given positions of special responsibility or being promoted within the school. They felt that their new role as a result of promotion was more difficult and complex and necessitated the need for additional training. These three teachers received no additional training of any kind after they had been promoted and as a result experienced stress.

### **5.2.3 Workspace**

Six teachers out of 25 referred to a need to have an appropriate workspace. There was a need by them to be away from colleagues, or be in a quiet space that they could be alone and reflect in peace. These respondents tended to stay in their own classrooms during breaks or go off site, they would stay away from canteens or the staff room in case difficult interactions with other staff members arose.

These teachers suggested that more than one staff room would be a good idea, or the sub division of the staff room with cubicles so each staff member had their own space. Other suggestions included an alternative space off site for relaxation or staggered break times for staff. It was felt by these teachers that workspace was a key contributor to stress in the work place and alternatives should be provided to give colleagues choices with regards to where they would like to spend their time during break periods. One of the teachers noted, *“if there were different places to go within the building to relax and not one staff room, or if the staff room was divided into sections, this would be a great help for staff”*.

#### 5.2.4 Joanna’s story

An example of stress caused by shared workspaces as described above can be considered by the analysis of Joanna’s story. Joanna had worked as a secondary school teacher for a number of years. She had never had difficulty with any other teaching colleague. The principal of the school had said that some teachers (like Joanna) were required to share desks. This meant that Joanna would be sharing a desk with the woodwork teacher.

Initially Joanna and the woodwork teacher both got on well, but after a while she noticed that he left the desk very untidy. There were wood shavings on the chair, the computer would not be logged off, and his cup of tea was left on the desk. This irritated Joanna, and after the situation persisted, she had no choice but to mention the issue to the woodwork teacher to leave the desk tidy when he had finished.

From this moment on, their relationship changed, even though she had been very polite in her remarks. The woodwork teacher began to ignore Joanna in the corridor and in the staff room. Over time this led to incivility between them, they would not greet each other anymore, they would leave rude notes for each other on the shared desk as a way of communicating.

This incivility went on for some time until one day there was a row in the staff room between them. They both started shouting at each other and some bad language was used. Over time, different teachers in the school allied themselves to either Joanna’s side or the woodwork teachers’ side as the dispute escalated. The principal’s solution to this dispute was to separate Joanna and the woodwork teacher. They were given classes at opposite ends of the school and Joanna no longer had to share a desk with him.

However, Joanna began to endure continued incivility and bullying from the woodwork teacher. She was unable to avoid him as the school only had one staff room and they frequently passed each other in corridors every day. Joanna also began experiencing incivility from teaching colleagues who were his supporters.

The situation for Joanna became untenable, she decided to go on long term sick leave. She refused to report many bullying incidents to the principal as she feared being labelled a troublemaker. The sharing of her workspace was cited by Joanna as the reason why this dispute began and the inability to escape from this conflict within the school environment led to incivility and bullying over a long period of time which effectively ended her career as a teacher, a career she really enjoyed.

#### 5.2.5 Poor communication

Communication was cited by five out of 25 teachers as a stressor. Poor communication by management and inaccurate or unclear instructions to teachers resulted in uncertainty and contributed to work related stress. Requests for clearer instructions and communication from managers, did not materialise. Those affected felt the situation caused a stagnation whereby no action could be taken for fear of doing the ‘wrong thing’.

Lack of communication from school managers manifested in other ways also. Staff turnover in the form of new staff commencing work in the school and other staff leaving the school without adequate communication to the entire staff. There was also a lack of clear communication with regards to the staff roles. In addition, a lack of communication about the school’s policies and procedures and the workings of the management structure within the school were some of the examples given by five teachers interviewed. One teacher said of communication as follows *“I think, communication is important, you just want someone to listen to you and be able to help, stress is inevitable. When there is a problem, being able to communicate that and be given the space and time to go through it with the school management is important”*.

## 5.3 Stress causes

### 5.3.1 Mistrust

This thesis noted that 15 teachers out of 25 cited the school management as a notable source of stress. They cited a lack of trust in the school management to be able to effectively judge many situations pertaining to the school. One teacher noted that *“You want to be around people in the school that are like minded and have similar goals to you, you cannot trust some people in this school. We tend to stay in our own groups”* Mistrust in schools seems to result in teachers fragmenting into likeminded groups that support each other. Teachers also believed that the school management actively worked against teaching colleagues on occasions to make them leave their position. This mistrust was expressed by one teacher as *“not feeling they would get a fair hearing”* on many issues related to their employment in the school. One participant said that *“There is a lack of trust with management. I felt not listened to. The school manager was not very approachable.”*

These 15 teachers out of 25 in this thesis felt they would not be trusted by the school management and would not get a fair hearing on issues in the school environment. They also felt over analysed in their workplace and on occasions, felt they were being actively worked against by colleagues and the school management. There was also a feeling that there was lack of will to deal with dysfunctional staff, thereby putting extra pressure on productive staff.

Teachers described dysfunctional staff as ‘underperforming’, ‘combative’ and ‘vexatious’. An inability of these staff to be challenged by the school management led to an increase of mistrust of the school management. There were high expectations of certain staff and no expectations of other dysfunctional staff which resulted in an uneven workload and a high level of mistrust among teachers. One of these 15 participants noted the following about school administration, *“My employments, biggest obstacle is the school management, they don’t want to help, they interfere a lot. I effectively went on strike because the management would not stop stressing me, no one trusts them to be fair”*.

### 5.3.2 Jack's story

It is worthwhile considering Jack's story regarding the issue of mistrust and how he experienced this within his school. Jack was a second level teacher for some years. When he started teaching, he really enjoyed his job. Over his career he noticed that there were many different individual teacher groups within the school. These groups sat together, shared resources with each other, associated with each other and did not interact easily with other non-member groups within the school. In the staff room, he was advised that he could not sit in a particular chair as the space belonged to a certain person that was part of the computer teachers' group.

Jack had also noticed that all staff were not treated equally, certain teachers could get a lot of time off for routine things such as getting their hair done, getting their car fixed. Other teachers would be ruled to the letter of the law when requesting even the most trivial things. Jack noticed that there were particular groups of teachers and individual teachers that seemed to have more influence over the school management. These teachers would seem to know every direction and decision that the school management was going to make before it was made.

As a consequence of the micropolitics and favoritism within the school, there was a sense of mistrust among many teachers that they would not be treated fairly or consistently while others would be treated favourably. Over time Jack noticed that the inconsistencies about how staff were treated became more transparent. One day, he requested two hours off as his son had been involved in a minor accident in his school. The principal reluctantly gave him the time off but made it clear to him that the time off would have to be made up.

Just minutes before Jack overheard another female teacher been given time off by the principal to get her hair cut for Christmas without any expectation of time been paid back.

This created a deep sense of mistrust in Jack. He was very annoyed at the blatant favoritism and inconsistency of the school managements decisions when interacting with staff. He was very stressed and annoyed for some time about it. He eventually confronted the principal about the inconsistencies and favoritism, the principal denied everything. Jack was told to "mind his own business" and was reminded of his temporary and delicate employment status within the school as he was not a permanent member of staff and could be dismissed at any time.

After this conflict with the principal, incivility and bullying began. The principal would constantly criticise him for the smallest thing. Jack was told by other teachers that he was wrong to confront the principal, that others had confronted him before over such things and their life had been made impossible within the school. Many staff had a deep sense of mistrust about how they would be treated compared to staff that had influence over or were friends of the principal. This mistrust defined the school into a two-tier establishment between the “favourites and the “non-favourites”, those who were favoured by the principal and could do no wrong and those who were not favoured and were ruled to the letter of the law.

According to Jack, the goal of the average teacher in the school was not to be a good teacher but to do whatever it took to be favoured by the principal and to have an easy life within the school. To be a non-favourite could have a whole range of negative implications such as a bad timetable, conflict, incivility, bullying, burnout and eventual resignation. In short Jack cited that there was no future for a teacher in the school if they had a separate opinion from or disagreed with the principal in any way. The principal would see to it that you were ‘blackballed’ from the school. Eventually, the situation was resolved for Jack when the principal retired, Jack noticed that the new principal had been treating all teachers with equality and dignity and the levels of mistrust in the school had dissipated considerably.

### 5.3.3 Resources

This thesis reported that ten teachers out of 25 cited the lack of resources as an important stressor in their workplace. Lack of access to working photocopiers, technology that was not operative, lack of stationery and lack of technical support to assist them, for example. These ten teachers also referred for the need for more staff, as staff shortages had occurred over the past years because of the economic austerity. Teachers divided resources into material items such as computers, stationery etc and personnel resources such as special needs assistants and teachers of certain subjects. One teacher described the lack of resources as follows, *“I think a big thing is lack of resources, or if something technical is broken like a printer or computer, it can be very stressful, it can upset your whole day in the school”*.



Resources could be a source of conflict within the school. Lack of resources could persist for some time without being replaced or repaired, which resulted in teachers being very frustrated as they had to make alternative arrangements to teach effectively. This sense of frustration and stress could permeate the whole school and there was a fear by teachers that resources could become unavailable at any time, thus causing disruption to their teaching environment unexpectedly.

These ten teachers also referred to the uneven distribution of workload within the school. Some teachers had a large amount of responsibility and workload, while other colleagues had few responsibilities and smaller workloads. These teachers referred to favouritism, and how the school management expected more from certain people and less from more difficult colleagues. They believed that the changing nature of students required more “one on one” attention for students and felt under resourced to be able to facilitate this. They noted that the school management could use resources to effectively control and bully teachers. One participant noted that the school management could be a “gate keeper”, that controlled the distribution of necessary teaching resources. Teaching resources could be distributed freely to compliant teachers and made unavailable to teachers in conflict with the school management.

#### 5.3.4 Marian’s story

Resources as a source of stress can be highlighted by Marian’s story. Marian had worked a secondary teacher for only a short period of time. Ever since she was a child, she dreamed about becoming a teacher. She graduated with a first-class honours degree in English and was delighted to be living her dream of teaching English to young adults. She had to travel a long distance from her home to the school where she taught and spent a lot of time preparing for class beforehand.

Part of this preparation entailed; photocopying class notes for her students. The photocopier seemed to be always “out of order”. There was another photocopier, but it was on the other side of the school and was in the principal’s secretary’s office. She felt uncomfortable going such a long distance and the secretary seemed very unfriendly. The secretary would go silent whenever Marian came into the office and no matter what Marian asked the secretary, she would almost always scoff at Marian with a one-word answer. For the first couple of weeks the secretary seemed to be very polite but for some reason had changed and was now unfriendly.

One day Marian asked the secretary had she any idea when the photocopier nearer her classroom would be fixed and the secretary replied “who do you think I am, Jim will fix it”? Marian felt very uncomfortable about this, she tried to stay away from the secretary’s office as much as possible. Marian even started photocopying things at home at considerable cost to herself to avoid the conflict.

The initial interpersonal conflict incident characterised by the secretary ignoring Marian and being quiet around her had developed into incivility. Marian felt she had a real problem, she needed to communicate with the secretary for many items pertaining to the school such as paper, roll books, pay forms, and general information but was afraid to run the gauntlet of conflict and incivility. What brought some relief to her plight was when the principal’s secretary went on sick leave. When Marian asked the porter when the school secretary would be back to work, she was told that the secretary “takes a few weeks off every year around this time and calls it sick leave.

Marian felt that the school secretary had become a “gate keeper”, deciding how and when she could obtain resources. The porter told Marian that the spare part to fix the photocopier which was close to her own class had in fact been in the secretary’s desk for some time but because the secretary did not like Marian, she decided not to insert the part into the faulty photocopier. Marian was horrified and could not believe anyone could do such a thing.

Marian was only new in the job, in her first term and could not summon the courage to report this to the principal. She believed that reporting this would negatively affect her being called back to teach at the school. Other colleagues in the school told her not to report any problems in the first year at the principal did not invite such teachers back.

After about three weeks, the school secretary returned to work from sick leave, Marian required a roll book for her class and summoned the courage to ask the school secretary for one. Although Marian had not been in the office in weeks, the school secretary replied “not you again”. This was the final straw for Marian. She now felt that she could not enter the secretary’s office again.

The decision not to enter the office again seriously affected her ability to teach, she was unable to photocopy, get paper, obtain pay forms, get a roll book or organise any kind of meeting with the principal as this was organised by the school secretary also. Luckily for Marian it was coming close to the end of term and she would not have to deal with this problem over the summer holidays. During the summer period she applied for another position in another school and was successful which meant that she would not have to go back to the school she had been working in.

The whole episode left Marian with many questions, questions, chiefly, “why was I picked on for no reason?”, “should I have confronted the school secretary?” “How did this conflict lead to incivility and bullying?”. Marian had many sleepless nights because of these stressful encounters and admitted that her home life had suffered because she could be very snappy around her own children

Marian seemed deeply traumatised by these events and admitted that she felt that she would become very ill if she remained in her old position where the secretary was in conflict with her. Her new school has two secretaries who are in control of various resources so she believes that this assists her when obtaining resources as no one person is in total control.

### **5.3.5 Workload**

This thesis found that eight teachers out of 25 reported workload as a noteworthy stressor. They cited the volume of paperwork, class preparation, online classes and lesson plans consumed much of their time. For those teaching a subject for the first time, this was particularly pertinent as they had to begin notes and lesson plans from the beginning. Unrealistic deadlines for work preparation were also a stressor.

The volume of work to be done on a daily basis combined with meetings, examination preparation, notes, meeting parents, preparation of reports, continuous professional education to be attended, feedback to students, achieving good student results, and deadlines all contributed to an increase in stress. They indicated that this had a negative effect on their work.

There was a lack of acknowledgement by the school management of the extra work involved in class preparation and also activities that were not classroom based. These outside classroom activities consumed a lot of time for teachers in this thesis without a feeling of adequate recognition. It was noted that eight teachers out of 25 were able to cope with stressful episodes at work more effectively as a result of their experience obtained in

teaching over their career. These teachers acknowledged that at the beginning of their career, stress was significantly worse for them. Over time work-related stress and IPC had diminished as the teachers familiarised themselves with how to cope with stressors in their workplace. Their unfamiliarity of their role and school environment made the stress of being a new teacher a challenge.

The experience gained over their career helped them to cope with many different stressors that arose in their work environment more efficiently and focused their attention on familiarising themselves with their work role and school environment, resulting in less stress being encountered. These teachers cited the need for more procedures and policies to be put in place to help newer teachers gain experience and suffer less stress in their work environment.

## **5.4 Stress effects**

This thesis noted many multi-faceted and diverse consequences for participants who experienced stress which are noted in the following sections.

### **5.4.1 Coping**

The 25 participants in this thesis were asked about their coping strategies with regards to stress in their teaching environment. Many teachers had numerous coping strategies to help them cope with the stress experienced in their workplace. This thesis noted that 16 out of 25 teachers used some form of physical exercise to disconnect from stressors, which included, walking, work outs, running, or some form of sport. These teachers believed that this physical activity disconnected them from stress and assisted them as a coping mechanism.

Some 11 teachers out of 25 used mindfulness, meditation, yoga, breathing techniques, counselling or coaching to overcome various stressors from their workplace. It was found that nine out of 25 teachers withdrew on occasions from any social activities in the school and stayed in their offices or classrooms in order to avoid IPC with colleagues and other stressors in the school. This withdrawal also extended to outside work activities such as social evenings or graduations. They also ignored emails sent outside working hours in an attempt to reduce stress and withdraw from interactions about work.

Eight teachers out of 25 cited interacting with sympathetic colleagues and family members as the most effective way of coping with stress. Five of these teachers believed that their family suffered as a result of them unloading their stressors from work to family members. One participant noted the difficulties of coping with work related stress, *“I look back at the end of every year and ask myself, how did I do that? how did I cope? It is living on the edge though. I am coping on the edge a lot”*.

Seven teachers out of 25 coped with stress by working harder or longer hours to complete their work duties and thus reduce stress levels. These seven teachers all cited that working harder was the best approach to cope with work stressors but as time passed, they became doubtful as to whether this coping strategy was working as it increased their workload and gave them less time.

This thesis also noted that five teachers out of 25 used distancing to cope with stressful situations and believed that long periods away from work without any contact by phone or email was the best coping strategy to refresh them for further work activities. Three teachers believed alcohol, coffee and cigarettes assisted them from coping with stress and partook in these activities particularly when suffering very stressful episodes at work. These teachers did suffer some negative side effects from these coping mechanisms but believed that the benefits outweighed the costs.

#### **5.4.2 Mental and physical side effects from stress**

The interviews for this research revealed that 24 out of 25 teachers had numerous negative side effects from stress experienced in their work environment. These ranged from physical problems such as headaches, nausea stomach aches, heart palpitations, sweatiness and unsteadiness to psychological problems such as irritability, feeling low, anxiety, depression, uncontrolled worrying, poor sleep, loss of appetite and fatigue. These physical and psychological problems had a devastating effect on teachers lives and severely affected their ability to cope at work. This had many side effects such as long and short periods of sick absence, arguments with family, inability to face colleagues, lack of motivation, feelings of uncomfortableness and anger.

A finding from this thesis that was evident from teachers was the lack of any kind of training to deal with stressful situations at work. Eight out of 25 teachers felt incapable of dealing with stressful situations because of this. Five out of 25 teachers cited poor communication from their employer as to how to deal effectively with stressful situations in work. One teacher said *“I cannot think when I get stressed in work, I get all kinds of ailments, some headaches, back pain, stomach problems, colds, I was stressed at the time”*. 15 out of 25 teachers reported taking unofficial sick leave from work to recuperate from stressful events in work, believing that they had become sick from stress in work but did not declare this, and instead simply obtained a sick note stating the symptoms of the illness.

A more in-depth analysis of the data showed the age category 30-39 cited mental and physical health problems more than other age categories. 44% of concerns about mental and physical health problems was noted in the age bracket 30-39. The inference from this data is that the age category 30-39 experienced more health problems than other categories from stress encountered in the workplace.

The salient finding here was the sheer scale of stress related negative effects on participants in this thesis. Given the extensive literature related to stress and negative effects on health, it may be reasonable to assume that this stress could cause health difficulties for these participants.

#### 5.4.3 Productivity

This thesis found that 21 out of 25 teachers noted a decrease in work productivity as a result of work-related stress. They were comfortable with what they saw as normal levels of stress but felt their productivity suffered negatively as a result of higher levels of stress. Three out of 25 teachers believed that their productivity was not affected by stress. One teacher believed that their productivity increased as a result of work-related stress.

Eight out of 25 teachers reported being severely distracted from their work because of stress experienced in their workplace. This resulted in sleeping difficulties which compounded the distraction. Three out of 25 teachers reported being more irritable with co-workers and family as a result of stress experienced in their work environment. Stress was described by two teachers as a “productivity killer”. From this thesis, the majority of teachers described a reduction in their productivity at work as a result of stress experienced in the workplace. One teacher described this as follows, *“there is not a lot of help from staff, my productivity goes down with stress, it is a productivity killer”*.

#### 5.4.4 Costs

Teachers interviewed in this thesis experienced direct financial costs associated with stress from work but also indirect costs, some of which were non-financial costs. An example of a non-financial cost for one teacher was what was called a “loss of reputation”. Four out of 25 teachers in this thesis reported that they had no adverse costs financially or otherwise from stress at work. 21 out of 25 teachers reported that they had incurred costs either financial or otherwise as a result of having experienced work-related stress. Other costs were indirect, such as reputation, arguments with family members, as a result of stress from work.

This thesis showed that 12 out of 25 teachers had expenses from medical appointments as a result of stress in work, which resulted in Doctor’s notes that were produced to the employer as evidence that they had been ill. It was found that 12 teachers out of 25 had taken time off work as a result of stress. This resulted in lost salary which was an expense that they also had to absorb. This sick leave was not declared as “stress” to their employer, the Doctor’s note simply read “Unfit for work”.

This thesis noted that three out of 25 teachers experienced private health insurance premium rises as a result of medical appointments, in these three cases further medical examinations were warranted and this resulted in their health insurance premium increasing substantially. One interviewee said *“When I got sick from stress at work, I had to pay for my private health insurance which went up. My husband had to take time off work to go to medical appointments, there was a time costs also, many costs were hidden, reputation, people gossiping about you”*.

This thesis also found that ten out of 25 teachers believed that their relationships had suffered with their family or loved ones at home as a direct result of stress at work. They became ‘snappier’, had less patience or over thought their stressful situation in work and this overthinking became debilitating to them which resulted in arguments with family members. They described using their family as a sounding board to vent their stressful situation and this venting of anger had a negative impact on family relationships.

Six out of 25 teachers believed that they had incurred substantial costs associated with stress at work. These costs were both financial and emotional. Some teachers had to avoid certain colleagues that they perceived as stressful. This avoidance caused upset for them. These six teachers would stay away from certain areas of the school or certain classrooms where they perceived that a difficult colleague would be encountered. Stress had redefined their relationship with the school and their family.

These same people had also experienced other costs to their relationships, such as guilt for taking home stress. They, believed that their stress and absence from work had had reputational damage at work as a result of not being trusted or other staff members gossiping about them. Although this damage was difficult to quantify, they felt it was real and could be more severe than financial costs. An example of a teacher taking stress home can be seen in the following quote. *“I find myself being snappy with my friends, my kids, sometimes I will not talk to anyone and hold it in, but I need head space, to be by myself and to think it out, I can isolate myself and this makes the bringing of stress home even worse”*.

Health costs were also referred to by interviewees, 16 teachers out of 25 had taken time off from work because of medical ailments that they felt was caused by stress. Some of the symptoms cited were back pain, neck pain, stomach problems, anxiety, colds, chest infections, heart palpitations, and fatigue. These teachers believed that stress in their workplace and IPC had caused these medical ailments that resulted in absences from work. Three out of 25 teachers cited the costs to the school of them missing time from work and were also stressed about this. They believed that the school suffered as a result of them missing time from work due to stress and worried that other teachers, unfamiliar with the class would have to take the class instead

Three out of 25 teachers used alcohol and tobacco to help them cope with stress from work and these teachers believed that this helped them cope with stress from work but they also believed that there was a cost to pay for the consumption of these substances. Four out of 25 teachers either changed job from one school to another school or turned down work in a particular school because of what they perceived as stress at that centre. They believed that work related stress and IPC encountered at a particular school made working in that school unfeasible.



Broadly the teachers itemised three areas of costs in relation to stress at work, firstly there were the direct financial costs of being sick such as Doctor's fees etc, secondly these teachers suffered non-financial costs, such as quarrelling with family, a loss of reputation in their career from being judged as not being able to cope with stressors from work. Thirdly there was a cost associated with becoming ill and the symptoms and pain that followed the illness, these costs could be long lasting and undefined.

The data from this thesis shows that three out of 25 teachers believed that stress from their workplace had caused them to have severe, chronic, life-threatening diseases. These diseases had caused them to incur several, concurrent and ongoing costs in relation to their health, such as medicines, attending inpatient and outpatient appointments in hospital, days off work, not being able to return to work, and emotional costs. They believed that they could not return to work and declared stress to their employer. At the time of concluding this thesis they had not returned to work.

#### **5.4.5 Training**

Eight out of 25 teachers cited lack of training as a stressor to them in the carrying out of their workplace duties. 39% of these teachers were in the younger age category of 20-29 years. From this data, younger teachers place more importance on training than other age categories. This may account for the lack of knowledge teachers have at the beginning of their career and the desire for some form of training to assist them cope with the many stressors that they seem to encounter.

#### **5.4.6 Experience**

It was found that eight out of 25 teachers believed that their teacher experience resulted in less stress for them. They used their experience in their teaching career to deal with work situations in a more effective way. These teachers believed that their experience had shielded them from stressful situations and enabled them to cope better with stressors that arose in their school. These teachers also believed that they could deal in a more effective way with the various stressors that occurred.

## 5.4.7 Further Findings

### 5.4.7.1 Female Difficulty with female colleagues

It was found that seven female teachers out of the 17 female teachers, cited a difficulty of working with women colleagues. These teachers all cited females as being more difficult to work with than men. They also cited the higher probability of being involved in an argument or disagreement with female colleagues in a covert way. (Bem, 1981) noted that since directness and overt confrontation are not consistent with a feminine gender identity, women adhering to such standards are forced to use more manipulative and covert means of resolving conflict and establishing dominance. Women on women harassment accounts for 50 percent of all bullying claims and causes considerable stress for women in the work environment (Namie, 2003; Mitchell, Koen, Crow, 2008).

These female teachers believed that they would have to be extra careful when interacting with other female colleagues in case they said the wrong thing and an argument would evolve. They cited arguments with female colleagues in particular as a source of stress and they indicated that they believed that an argument was more likely with a female colleague and as a result were careful not to incite disagreements or arguments as they would have to work with these colleagues for many years. A female teacher noted, *“The other source of stress was we work in a small lab and it is a very small place, and we are all women and we have hormones and if you say something you have to watch people’s feelings, especially women, so there is a bit of that”*. One of these female teachers believed that certain female colleagues could be difficult to work with and noted *“I work with a lot of women, I find you have to be very careful what you say around women, sometimes, women can be a little bitchy, men in my experience can joke more and not take things so personal”*.

### 5.4.7.2 Mistrust with their employer

Mistrust of the employer was a more important factor for male teachers than female teachers. 59% of male teachers cited mistrust with their employer as a noteworthy factor compared with 42% of female teachers. Female teachers placed more emphasis on the importance of relationships with their employer by 76% compared with 24% by male teachers. Despite more females taking part in this thesis than males, there is an inference from the data that males are less trustful of their employer than females in this thesis. Mistrust may be difficult to resolve and last an entire teaching career. Once the cycle of mistrust has begun, it can only be broken if one party exhibits specific behaviours that focus on resolving the issue rather than perpetuating the cycle (Lilly, 2020).

#### 5.4.7.3 Workspace

Workspace was an issue of concern for six out of 25 teachers. The lack of appropriate workspace, having to share workspace with colleagues and the need for their own workspace was an issue of concern for these teachers. The age range of 50-59-year-old teachers cited “workspace” as more salient than other age categories. This category of teachers also cited workspace more than other age categories. The inference from these results is that older teachers cited workspace and the desire to have privacy to be more important than other age categories.

### 5.5 Summary of main findings

The findings in this thesis demonstrated that the vast majority teachers who participated in this study were adversely affected by stress caused by their colleagues. This IPC manifested itself in many different detrimental ways including a fear of reporting stress, reduced productivity at work, more sick absences from work, a feeling of an inability to escape from these stressful encounters due to workspace issues, a mistrust in formal mechanisms to resolve stress, and an exploration of different coping mechanisms to help resolve stress. These findings are categorised below.

This thesis found 24 of the 25 teachers would not report stress to their employer through established channels. There was a general fear of participants informing the employer of work-related stress and IPC as the teachers believed they would be judged in a negative way, or have long term negative effects on their career.

A high number of teachers viewed work colleagues in a negative way, citing colleagues as their main stressor. These teachers had endured or were enduring many stressful encounters from work colleagues and believed that colleagues were their biggest stressor. They believed that difficult and dysfunctional colleagues were not confronted about their behaviour and as a result this stressor festered and grew over time. IPC once begun was difficult to resolve for these participants and IPC could last for many years. Avoidance strategies was the main way conflict was approached.

Workspace was a stressor for six of the teachers. The lack of appropriate workspace, having to share workspace with colleagues and the need for their own workspace was an issue of concern for these teachers. 15 of the 25 teachers cited the school management was a noteworthy source of stress for them. This mistrust permeated their role in the school and governed how they interacted with colleagues. In many cases this mistrust defined their relationship with their colleagues and the school and had many negative effects on relationships within the school.

Productivity was affected in a negative way by stressors in the school environment for 21 of the 25 teachers, for these teacher's productivity in their work went down as a result of stress in work. This impacted on their job and caused even more stress to these individuals. 16 of the 25 teachers used some form of physical exercise to assist them cope with stress in their workplace

24 of the 25 teachers had numerous negative mental and physical side effects from stress experienced in their work environment, these ranged from physical problems such as headaches, nausea stomach aches, heart palpitations, sweatiness and unsteadiness to psychological problems such as irritability, feeling low, anxiety, depression, uncontrolled worrying, poor sleep, loss of appetite and fatigue. Finally, 21 of the 25 teachers reported that they had incurred costs either financial or otherwise as a result of having been stressed at work. Although some of these costs were financial, other costs were non-financial but were a considerable stressor to teachers of this study.

# Chapter 6 DISCUSSION

## 6.1 Introduction

Interpersonal conflict (IPC) describes a “process that begins when one party perceives that the other has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that he or she cares about” (Thomas, 1992). Conflict can be seen as “a struggle over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs between two or more interdependent individuals” (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011).” This may include differences in values, desires for esteem, control, and correctness, work related interpersonal conflict is described as the process resulting from the tension between team members due to real or perceived differences (De Dreu, Van Dierendonck, Dijkstra, 2004; Billehoj, 2007).

There is evidence in this thesis that IPC appears to be the main cause of stress for teachers and it may be reasonable to assume that IPC also exists in other schools in Ireland. It could be envisaged that some aspects of the working conditions within the school such as workspace and school resources may also cause stress for teachers. An inability to escape from colleagues where IPC exists may exacerbate stressful encounters and scarcity of resources may intensify stressful encounters. IPC also seems to be linked to other factors within the school environment such as the non-reporting of stress, lack of adequate workspace and resources, un-supportive school management, and mistrust. These school factors may intensify or diffuse stressful feelings between colleagues. IPC can start in many different ways but once established can prove very difficult to resolve as procedures are not in place to prevent, mitigate or manage IPC and the problems it causes.

Unfortunately, the literature has few examples of successful interventions for IPC within schools. There does not seem to be any realistic interventions where IPC effects will be minimised in Irish second level schools any time soon. This chapter will show that there is a real possibility from the findings of this thesis and the literature that IPC will continue for the foreseeable future. There are some interventions that may partially work to mitigate IPC related stress, but so far, the interventions in this area have had poor outcomes and mixed results.

### 6.1.1 Bias

A source of bias affecting findings could be the author of the study. (Guba, 1981) notes that recognising bias in oneself is an important beginning to conducting qualitative study. There is also a possibility albeit how the process of snowball sampling to select participants by chance overrepresented or under represented actual interpersonal conflict related stress. Twenty-five participants (N=25) were interviewed on their experiences of stress in the secondary teaching profession. After an analysis of the literature on sample size, this was considered an appropriate sample for this thesis. Choosing a suitable sample size in qualitative study is an area of conceptual debate and practical uncertainty (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, Young, 2018).

Reducing bias can include respondent validation, constant comparisons across participant accounts, representing deviant cases and outliers, prolonged involvement or persistent observation of participants, independent analysis of the data by other researchers and triangulation (Morse & Richards, 2002). Therefore, in relation to this research question, participants were encouraged to clarify and recount their answers at the end of their interviews and participants answers were transcribed verbatim and analysed through (Smith & Osborn, 2008) eight-step cycle of analysis which identified, analysed and reported patterns within the data. Interviews were chosen as the best rational to obtain information from teachers as to their experiences of stress in teaching. Interviews offer a data collection approach which invites participants to offer a rich, in-depth, first-person account of their experiences (Smith, 2009).

Potential bias was considered while constructing the interview and questions were suitably ordered, with open ended simple questions that were careful to avoid words that could introduce bias. Leading questions or gestures of the author were excluded from any interviews so as not to lead participants to answer in a particular way (Alder & Alder, 2012). Interview questions were phrased in a way that allowed the participant to feel accepted no matter what the answer was.

The findings of this research represent the experiences of participants. If the findings of this study are representative across the Irish teaching sector, it might be expected that teachers may be currently experiencing IPC related stress in schools. In summary, although bias as in all studies is present in this research, there is no evidence that it has affected the findings to any great extent due to careful field work and acknowledgement that bias may exist.

### 6.1.2. Sample Size

An appropriate sample size in qualitative study is an area of conceptual debate and practical uncertainty (Vasileiou et al, 2018). For qualitative research for an interview study to be published the appropriate number of interviews required seems to be between 20 and 30, (Warren, 2002). Previous empirical investigations of sample size in qualitative interview-based studies have resulted in claims that the number of interviews seems to correlate with many subjective determinants, such as the journal of publication (Bluhm, Dustin, Harman, Wendy, Lee, Mitchell, 2011), the geographical region, whether it is a European or US outlet (Marshall, Bryan, Cardon, Peter, Poddar, Amit, Fontenot, Renee 2013).

(Adler & Adler, 2012) advise a range between 12 and 60 participants for studies in qualitative study. The difference between these two authors suggests how difficult it can be to try to specify sample sizes. Considering the amount of time that in-depth analysis and administering qualitative data requires, authors such (Boddy, Clive, Roland, 2016) and (Sandelowski, 1995) respectively suggest that a sample size of 50 or 30 for in-depth interviews is very large for a qualitative study.

However, the issue of sample size seems to have been addressed by (Mason, 2010), who stated that given the ranges of opinion about appropriate sample sizes it is not surprising that when examining the abstracts of doctoral theses derived from interview based qualitative study in Great Britain and Ireland, it was noted that 560 theses contained research that had varying sample sizes from 1 to 95, with a mean of 31 and a median of 28.

A sample size of 25, as was selected for this research question, therefore seems an appropriate sample size to obtain data from a population of secondary teachers. These figures are highly subjective, but it would seem reasonable to assume that the findings of this study could be replicated somewhat across a national or European level. With such high levels of teachers suffering stress and the resultant illnesses and negative outcomes associated with stress, there would seem a pressing need for us as a society to explore these findings further.

From the participants in this study, IPC was found to be very prevalent in a self-selected sample. The accuracy of these figures can fluctuate but it would seem reasonable to infer that there would be a likelihood of high levels of IPC in other self-selected samples. There is also a possibility that high levels of IPC may be prevalent in most schools throughout Ireland. Many participants in this study reported small disagreements and incivilities turning into long and protracted conflicts that could last a career. This seems to underpin how easily IPC can start and is therefore likely to be widespread among other teachers in Irish education.

## **6.2 IPC related stress & the evidence of IPC as a stand-alone cause of stress**

Interpersonal conflict is an inevitable consequence of human interaction (Crossfield & Bourne, 2018). Of the 22 out of 25 participants that experienced IPC in this research, eight did not knowingly partake in negative social behaviours with other colleagues, but IPC could result in spite of this. Key for bullying victims on the other hand is that they are exposed to actual and deliberate negative social behaviours (Einarsen, Hole, Zapf, 2011; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Interpersonal conflict does not necessarily imply actual behaviours; it arises as soon as one party feels obstructed or irritated by another party (Van der Vliert, 1998). IPC seems to be “in the eye of the beholder” in some sense.

This thesis noted that people who did not get on at work used avoidance measures to avoid further instances of IPC. There was no intent to purposefully hurt or irritate colleagues but rather to avoid them. While intent is not a defining element of interpersonal conflict, bullying researchers agree that workplace bullying involves in some respect actual or by the victim perceived intent to cause harm (Einarsen et al, 2011). Interpersonal conflict may be regarded as incidents of part of the day-to-day interactions and, therefore, they can be regarded as normal, unavoidable, possible to overcome and not always done purposely (Baillien et al, 2017). It is reasonable to assume that these day-to-day conflict interactions could not be described as bullying, incivility or other workplace mistreatments because they were not done purposefully.



This thesis also proposes that IPC is a stand-alone stressor identified between colleagues as opposed to other workplace mistreatments such as incivility, aggression or bullying. Workplace mistreatment is a broad or overarching term, capturing a range of more specific abuses and insults that a worker may experience, often routinely, in their workplace (Hodgins et al 2013). Teachers identified many reasons for conflict with other colleagues such teacher personalities, manners, speaking loudly, political opinions, religious beliefs, how teachers interacted with others, etc.

A further stand-alone nature interpersonal conflict noted in this thesis was the lack of repetition for conflict to ensue and the ease of which conflict might occur, i.e., a colleague might do something to annoy another colleague once and this was enough for a long-standing dispute to begin. A much-cited distinguishing feature of workplace bullying is its clear emphasis on frequency: workplace bullying includes a consecutive number of conflict occurrences (Zapf & Einarsen, 2011).

IPC had a profound effect on participants as it seemed to start easily and was difficult to resolve. IPC related issues could last an entire career and define a teacher's relationship within the school. (Blaine, 2006) noted that IPC can originate from discrepancies and politics in different aspects of the workplace, and are sustained by informal groups through gossip and rumours. There may be a complex and interwoven relationship between IPC and other factors which exacerbate and prolong IPC within the school environment which will be further discussed in this chapter.

### **6.2.1 IPC stress with teaching colleagues**

Over the years, a phenomenon in the literature on the management of the employment relationship is the observation that organisations will pay a high price if workplace conflict is not addressed quickly and effectively (De Dreu, 2008; Beheshtifar & Zare, 2013; Doherty & Teague, 2016). This research found a high number of teachers in conflict with their work colleagues. IPC with colleagues seemed to differ from other workplace mistreatment such as bullying and incivility. One of the differences noted by colleagues was that there was no intent.

The literature shows evidence that colleagues can be a source of stress for workers (Bolger et al, 1991; Griffith et al, 1999; Kyriacou, 2001). IPC in schools among colleagues may result in salient and multi-faceted problems for all parties concerned. Some teachers may avoid workspace that certain colleagues were residing, to avoid further conflict. There is a possibility that IPC issues could transcend into other areas of the school including the staff room, meetings and school outings.

The school management may be unwilling to confront IPC between teachers for fear of teacher unions becoming involved and the problem escalating or stagnating. (Thirwall, 2015) noted that despite clear recommendations to promptly ensure cessation of bullying, human resources and union representatives prolong it via “organisational sequestering”. It may be easier to keep parties engaged in IPC apart from each other as noted in this research. The school management may have to make arrangements to keep these warring parties apart, such as rescheduling classes, trips and timetables. A so-called “laissez-faire leadership”, or passive leadership, where management avoids confronting problems is considered a factor in the development and maintenance of a bullying dynamic (Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, Vartia, 2003; Salin & Hoel, 2011).

Teachers may have specific seating arrangements to be together, have classrooms that are no go areas for other teachers or amend their working relationship with the school to avoid IPC with other teachers. These actions could conceivably hamper teachers and the school management in finding solutions to IPC issues. Teachers in management positions and principals who sought advice or guidance from head office to deal with IPC may receive little help and may be advised to handle the conflict internally within the school as was noted in this thesis. A study by (Mannix McNamara et al, 2018) noted that the failure of HR to resolve or even address bullying issues was part of a complex web of power relations and were consistent with the examination of bullying redress seeking experiences of Irish teachers which identified that the process of redress had become technologies of future power and subjugation.

There would seem to be no simple one-dimensional solution to these seemingly deep-rooted IPC issues in schools. When interventions have been implemented for teachers, they have had little consistency in approach or type of treatment, often falling across many diverse and eclectic areas (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Naghieh et al 2015). (Fahie, 2014) noted that training in workplace bullying, particularly in relation to the appropriate application of relevant policies and procedures for school staff and a greater attention is also needed at a policy level in schools.

Teachers' personalities may affect their reactions to stress and burnout (Foley, 2013), and therefore dysfunctional or disagreeable personalities may cause other teachers' anxiety and stress. Teachers may want to avoid each other but find this difficult in the proximity of the school environment. Schools are designed in such a way as to encourage interaction in communal areas such as corridors, staffrooms and gymnasiums (Mc Gregor, 2004), possibly resulting in an inability of teachers in conflict with each other to avoid each other. This research also noted a fear to report stress caused by colleagues because of a perception that the school management would view the reporting of stress negatively. This fear to report stress from IPC assisted the escalation of the conflict over time. Many communal areas are designed so that teachers in conflict have few opportunities to escape each other's company. There seems to be ample evidence in this thesis to support the research question that IPC is the primary cause of stress in secondary schools.

### **6.2.2 IPC stress arising from teacher and school management relations**

The literature shows that the school management can have a considerable positive or negative effect on the teaching population of a school (Lacey, 2003; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Berry et al, 2008). The school management would seem to be an important factor in stress levels in schools. (Blasé & Blasé, 1994; Chuang & Tzy-Ning, 2003, Blasé, Blasé, Du, 2008) note that praise by the principal provides teachers with an increased efficacy, self-esteem, and creates greater motivation. There is a possibility that teachers conflicting with school management can cause multiple and multi-faceted problems throughout the school environment. This could result in a deep sense of mistrust over time which could lead to self-protection measures being implemented on both sides and a lack of cooperation that could pervert the school environment.

Leadership and leader behaviours are among the most studied fields in management literature, with numerous studies exploring areas such as specific traits, behaviours, and leadership styles that lead towards successful leadership and positive follower outcomes and/or the adverse effects that emerge from darker leadership styles (Tepper, 2007). The importance of educational leadership has recently gained more considered focus in global research and policy development. Indeed, growing recognition of the importance of teacher leadership and its intersection with school improvement and educational development (Harris & Jones, 2019) is evident in the growing body of literature.

Poor relations between teachers and the school management may be invisible to the other stakeholders in the school, such as parents, students and the Department of Education. The lost productivity that conflict between both these parties could be responsible for may be difficult to quantify and impossible to calculate in terms of impact on students and therefore on society. (Swaen et al, 2004) reported a lack of social support with supervisors or colleagues as being associated with the risk of being stressed at work and (Bruhn & Frick, 2011) cited good communication with management as a major issue in the eradication of psycho social risks.

Conflict between the school management and teachers may result when teachers with appropriate ideologies are promoted within the school. Favouritism by the school management towards certain teachers can deepen and exacerbate the sense of unfairness within the school (Blasé, 1988; Pounder & Blasé, 1988). This research found that favoritism could also result in some teachers being ruled to the letter of the law and other teachers being given vast scope, exemptions and excuses when being dealt with by the school management. Stress between teachers and the school management could potentially mean that teachers would interpret decisions made by school management as being unfair, biased, or not having been examined adequately. This could also potentially result in feelings that decisions made about certain teachers would suit the school and not consider teacher difficulties.

There may also be a potential that the school management deal with teacher difficulties unequally for different reasons, (Blasé, Blasé, Du, 2008) such as lack of training, lack of judgement, bias towards certain teachers, favouritism or a need to put the school interests first over the teacher. A study by (Ball, 1981), notes that official school policy is open to interpretation or special arrangement, and that individual teachers may be given considerable leeway to pursue their own 'vision' of education. This may result in tension and conflict among teachers as being unequal and unfair.

(Fullan, 1992) noted that when educational visions are grounded in the leaders personal and prior vision, they become not visions that illuminate, but visions that blind. This study noted a sense of mistrust among participants on fair and equitable decisions being made about some school issues. (Hargraves, 1999) noted that principal's lack of involvement of certain staff members resulted in disengagement and exclusion of many staff from the decision-making process.

Evidence also exists in this study to show that some teachers may have more influence over the school management than others. (Hargraves, & Mac Millan, 1992) notes that many schools have two groups, the "ins" and the "not ins". The "in" have influence over the school management and the "not in" do not have influence. Therefore, IPC may be exacerbated by being part of the "not in" group as this group seems to have less control and influence over decisions made within the school.

Lack of trust in the school management may be a factor for poor employer support (Ayoko, Callan, Härtel, 2003; Glas et al, 2006). (Kelman, 2005) found that employer support of staff on a day-to-day basis led to faster change within organisations. Kelman explores the concept of "activating the discontented", as a path to change initiation with an organisation. He notes that in order to activate the discontented, management need not persuade, pressure or scare people but need only provide the opportunity for already existing supporters to assist in solutions within the school. Kelman notes that consolidating change can be assisted by positive feedback to staff and intrinsic motivation of staff especially for skeptics within the organisation.

### 6.2.3 Is IPC inevitable in schools and difficult to resolve?

Intractable conflicts vary in the degree of complexity involved (Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003), and multiple levels exist in every intractable conflict (Northrup, 1989). It may be difficult, if not impossible for teachers to escape from conflict with other teachers. Teachers seem to work in school environments that have many communal spaces, such as staff rooms, corridors and offices. Teachers in this thesis reported that handing over of classes from one teacher to the next teacher could be stressful. In the process of change over, avoiding other teachers was difficult. This inability to avoid other teachers may contribute to IPC.

There are also limited opportunities either formally or informally for teachers to resolve conflict between each other. This may be because of fear or unwillingness to share IPC experiences with others. Job security is generally quite high for those that obtain permanent contracts in teaching and about 80 per cent of the academic staff in Ireland hold permanent tenured positions. All full-time academic staff are civil servants and tenured in the sense that they cannot be fired without a serious cause (Fahie, 2019). A secure job environment may provide an atmosphere whereby a teacher can initiate and promote IPC without any consequences for them. Available evidence suggests that stability of employment is greater in the public sector than in the private sector (Bellante & Link, 1981). Because teaching jobs are mostly public sector jobs there may be a view that teachers employment positions are more secure than non-public service jobs thus creating no impetus on resolution of conflict as their jobs are secure (Lu et al, 2012). The stability and job security of a public service teaching position may reduce the fear of consequences for engaging in IPC behaviours by teachers.

Teachers' groups may have multiple personalities within the school. These various personalities may on occasions conflict with each other (Foley, 2013). This conflict could reasonably cause IPC, incivility, disharmony, bullying and disputes between teachers. One participant noted *"the dynamics of working with colleagues and the expectations and politics involved can be very stressful, working with people with different personalities, with their own agendas, with different values and norms can be so demanding "*. (Ball, 1987) notes that schools occupy an uneasy middle ground between hierarchical work organisations and member-controlled organisations. A study by (Ball, 1981) also described how individual schools differ from one another according to emphasis and for that matter, between product producing systems and public service institutions.

The difficulty in resolving conflict in organisations was noted by (Thirwall, 2015) who found that organisations do little to rectify workplace bullying and no examples of satisfactory, permanent solutions being implemented by organisations were identified in this research. There is evidence in this research that the above school-based factors facilitate and exacerbate IPC among teachers within schools. IPC seems to thread its way through these school-based factors and may be influenced to a greater or lesser extent by them.

Stressors identified in this research such as interpersonal conflict seem to be complex problems with many origins and individual factors involved. They may require multi-faceted innovative solutions and a willingness of all parties to change behaviours to highlight, reduce and eradicate the problem. This thesis would seem to support the findings of (Roloff & Johnson, 2002; Chung & Tzy-Ning, 2003 and Waite-Miller, Roloff, Malis 2016) who reported that many everyday disputes end without resolution with parties leaving their place of work, refusing to discuss an issue further or simply stop arguing, thus the same issue may become the basis for recurring arguments.

Organisational and individual interventions may prevent bullying in the workplace but the study and evidence supporting this is of low quality (Gillen et al, 2017). From this study, many negative IPC interactions go unreported furthering the difficulty in challenging this behaviour. There seems to be few mechanisms for resolving interpersonal disputes between colleagues (McNamara, 2019), this could conceivably result in these disputes going unresolved and lingering over time which may create a culture of segregation within schools.

Difficulty with judging the efficacy of stress interventions for teachers resonates across many studies, there is little consistency in measurement of teacher stress or use of specific subscales, indicating that the field has little agreement upon a singular scale that adequately measures stress (von der Embse, Pendergast, Segool, Saeki, Ryan, 2016). Interventions for stress in the literature have only had limited efficacy (Levin & Belfield, 2015) and very often involved long and protracted interventions over long periods of time. These factors combined with the many environmental factors in schools that facilitate IPC would seem to point to IPC continuing unabated for the foreseeable future as will the negative outcomes of IPC.

#### 6.2.4 Conditioned reflex

There is evidence that may explain how IPC causes work related stress by considering conditional reflex. In short IPC may be a conditioned reflex to their previous experience with a work colleague. A conditioned reflex, also known as a “conditioned response”, is an acquired response in which the subject learns to associate a previously unrelated neutral stimulus with a different stimulus that elicits some kind of reaction (Carno-Garcia, Padilla-Munoz, Carrasco-Ortiz, 2005). In IPC among teaching colleagues this conditioned reflex could be a negative reaction to a teaching colleague whom they had previously experienced a negative interaction with.

Teachers reported feeling anxious and nervous which caused stress simply at the sight of a particular work colleague and therefore avoided them. Excessive environmental stimulation can impose far ranging consequences on behaviour (Shors, Weiss, Thompson, 1992). There is a possibility from the findings of this thesis that a conditioned reflex can be one factor involved that may explain the cause of stress from IPC. This reflex may result in stress and anxiety for teachers who experience it and as a result some teachers try to avoid certain work colleagues as much as they can.

Fear conditioning represents the process by which a neutral stimulus comes to evoke fear following its repeated pairing with an aversive stimulus (Lissek et al, 2005). In this thesis teachers associated other dysfunctional colleagues as stressful and the mere sight of them provoked a stressful reaction. Stimuli, such as the continued bad behaviour of a colleague could trigger a psychological and physiological responses (Conor- Smith, Compas, Wadsworth, Harding-Thomsen, Saltzman, 2000) that may trigger negative reactions for teachers.

Previously encountered negative interactions with colleagues may provoke a feeling of stress by teachers who associate their colleagues with these stressful feelings. This may cause teachers to avoid each other or be more likely to be engaged in IPC with each other. Encounters with a colleague whom a teacher has experienced IPC with may provoke feelings of anxiety and stress. This encounter may result in confrontations or an attempt to avoid the colleague which may result in further stress being experienced by the teacher.



### 6.3 Lack of reporting of stress by teachers due to fear

There would seem to be evidence in this thesis of an inability of many teachers to report stress. The fear of reporting stress to the school management may underscore a possibility that the school management may not be aware that employer support is inadequate for some teachers. Teacher silence may have the effect that the school management believe that no employer support is necessary. A fear of reporting stress may manifest itself in feelings of isolation and a perception that school management will not listen. This may exacerbate feelings of stress among teachers who have no one in the school management to report stress to.

(Harlos, 2010) and (Michalak, 2015) note that victims of stress and bullying may lodge a formal complaint with human resources about the inappropriate workplace behaviour; however, complaining is an unusual occurrence and subject to a number of uncommon facilitative conditions being met. Reporting of IPC may also be viewed negatively by the school management and therefore teachers appear reluctant to report. If teachers did complain about another teaching colleague, there may be a fear that sides would be taken by allies of either party, this would escalate the stressful interaction and spread the conflict through the school. As an example, one study noted that making a complaint could lead to reprimands and reprisals opening teachers up to professional humiliation and criticism (Mannix McNamara et al, 2018).

Teachers who reported work related stress formally reaped negative connotations for their future in the school and there was a fear that teachers may be looked upon as troublemakers. The best mentality for many teachers in such cases was to *“keep one’s head down”* and *“just get on with it”*, as any reporting was considered negative. This avoidance behaviour may cause further stress for teachers as they have to suppress their true feelings about stressful events pertaining to them within the school.

The school management may be untrained or unwilling to engage with teachers who report stress. They may be too busy to concern themselves with reports of stress and feel that if they do not engage with teachers reporting stress, then the problem will simply go away. This research identified that IPC was considered by the school management as difficult to resolve and therefore should be avoided. This finding would seem to support (Fahie’s, 2010) work where he identified teachers as being perceived to be reluctant to make a

complaint because of fear generally and because of fear of their complaint being dismissed or fear of being regarded as a whistle blower or troublemaker. Indeed (Mannix McNamara et al, 2018), cited that the literature frequently identifies fear as a characteristic emotion in subverting attempts to seek help or redress.

There may be a belief by teachers that figures of authority within the school environment are to be feared and have a lot of control over a teacher's future within the school (Conlon & Glasman, 2008). Reporting of stress to these figures might be viewed as weak and as such may be perceived as an inability to cope. There is also the possibility that the school management may take sides against the teacher reporting stress, especially if the school management did not have a good working relationship with that teacher.

### **6.3.1 Effects of poor reporting of stress by teachers**

The school management may believe that a teacher reporting stress may in some way be associated with the cause of stress. There may also be an inference that there is a certain portion of blame on all parties in any stressful event and therefore, this may be perceived negatively by the school management. Therefore, the fear of reporting of stress could be viewed by teachers as being responsible for increasing stress levels and contributing to teachers becoming ill or taking time off work. As a result of this perceived inability, there may be feelings of disharmony and resentment towards the school authority which may cause further feelings of alienation.

There is some evidence that suggests there is a belief by teachers that school management are not trusted as being fair or impartial about the reporting of stress (Van Wyk & Pelsler, 2016). There is also an inference in this thesis that school management may be seen to keep up a united front in matters relating to the school that were in some cases not to the benefit of the teacher, especially in matters of reporting stress. In short, the school was more important than the individual teachers experience of stress and the school must come first. To be able to report stress without recrimination or suspicion would seem fundamentally important for teachers. Furthermore, if stress is not reported it remains covert, thereby perpetuating and sometimes escalating the stressful events within schools.

A fear to report stress, seems to underscore a deep sense of mistrust and agitation between teaching colleagues and the school management. Because this fear of reporting stress exists, it may prevent a smooth operation of the school environment, where small conflicts and stressors may be covertly concealed only to become greater issues of concern later. As teachers are reluctant to report stress, this could result in teachers harbouring strong emotions against the school management such as fear, isolation, anger and resentment. Over time this may result in teachers taking covert action against the school by refusing to volunteer for certain work duties, taking sick leave, not being available for school trips and only doing the bare minimum of what is required of them as teachers.

Teachers may use inappropriate coping strategies because they cannot report stress. These inappropriate coping strategies may result in an escalation of the problem. An example would be for a teacher to withdraw and self-isolate in order to avoid stress, this may be an incorrect course of action for a teacher. Teachers may also confide in colleagues to assist them with stressful events, as they feel they cannot report stress officially. This may bring colleagues into stressful situations and force them to take sides further exacerbating the problem. Teachers may even feel it necessary to resign from their teaching positions or move schools resulting in good teaching talent being removed and cause problems for the school management in recruiting new teachers. High teacher attrition may reflect negatively on students (Marinette, 2019), as students may be familiar with a particular teacher only for them to leave.

#### **6.4 IPCs role in the creation of mistrust and further stress**

Trust has been defined as *“the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and co-operative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms”* (Fukuyama, 1996). The author argues that we live in an era of increasing mistrust and that high levels of trust create better relationships within a workplace and more efficient economic production. This is because resources are saved from monitoring and legal mechanisms. This thesis has evidence of high levels of mistrust from teachers which seemed to be caused by unfair decisions that had been made over long periods of time in relation to different teachers. The mistrust also seemed to be caused by the biased and prejudicial personalities of the school management about different teachers. Bias could lead to favouritism and a lack of impartiality in how teachers were treated, thus perpetrating the sense of mistrust throughout the school. One participant noted that *“If you are not able to trust people you work with, or*

*you cannot trust someone who manages you, that can be a big source of stress, it defines your relationship with the school”.*

This situation was contextualised by (Hargraves & Macmillan, 1992) who noted that there was conflict in secondary schools especially with power and decision making. Mistrust could cause a sense of fear of the school management, in that a teacher could be bullied if they did not behave in a certain way or had a certain opinion. The casual tolerance of negative behaviours was interpreted as bullying and as something that was not being taken seriously by the organisation, despite the fact there was an anti-bullying policy in place (Hodgins et al, 2020).

Teacher ideology may have to be in line or similar with what the school principal or vice principal or there may be a price to pay. Suspicion as to the impartiality of decisions made by the school management could create anxiety, stress and fear among teachers. This mistrust could result in teachers self-protecting in case assumptions or decisions made by the school management were unfair. Self-protection would result because of a fear of assuming extra workload, or duties resulting from untrustworthy decisions made by the school.

Previous experiences of unfair decisions made by the school management about other teachers and themselves may have resulted in mistrust and therefore a fear of reporting ensued to avoid more unfair decisions being made against them. Several teachers reported there was also considerable mistrust experienced among colleagues. Some colleagues were deemed untrustworthy and this lack of trust defined their relationship with their teaching colleague.

Teachers who feel 'put upon' to carry out additional tasks and others do not. It seems that each teaching group can be viewed as a gordian knot, i.e., an almost unresolvable package of mistrust. Resolving inter-group mistrust is fraught with problems and characterised by each groups mistrust of each other and an unwillingness to engage in intervention methodologies for incivility, bullying or IPC.

Mistrust could create doubt in teachers as to the honesty, humanity and impartiality of the school management and colleagues. Over time this might lead to a general suspicion of decisions made by the school management and a scrutiny surrounding even the smallest decisions as to its fairness. The idea that mistrust is a prevalent factor in schools is supported by (Fahie & Mc Gillicuddy, 2018), study which noted that data consistently revealed a palpable mistrust of, and sense of disengagement from, institutional HR department

personnel; highlighting an inherent structural tension between the dual (but seemingly unequal) responsibilities of HR to simultaneously safeguard and represent both the staff member and the organisation itself in any dispute.

School staff with HR functions have also been viewed by teachers as an inherent problem, as they perceive the role of HR as strategic partners of the organisation and no longer as having the welfare of workers in mind (Thirwall, 2015). Trust is also affected by negative events in the vaguely defined area of reciprocal interpersonal relations which do not have clearly stated behavioural guidelines (Bush, 2015).

It would seem reasonable to infer that mistrust in the school environment must underpin the lack of reporting of stress found in this thesis. This mistrust of the school management by teachers can be characterised by a reluctance to report stress for fear it is not dealt with in a discreet, impartial and fair manner. Trust would seem to be a fundamentally important attribute for teachers to have towards their employer, indeed (Guthrie, 2006), notes that the education sector is characterised by long term enduring relationships, such as those between parents, teachers, parents, Government and the school management. Relations between bullying and trust may be bi-directional as it was found that lack of respect and trust between the school management and employee causes intensification of bullying symptoms (Glasó et al, 2011). This intensification may result in long lasting and deep-rooted negativity among staff that can define a teacher's relationship with colleagues and the school.

Mistrust exists in discrete packages vertically i.e., between different teacher groups towards the school management. This unwillingness to and mistrustfulness of engaging in intervention methodologies with each other, many contribute to IPC i.e., with the school management or with HR for example. The picture being presented here is one of widespread mistrust by teachers of other teachers and their managers. This is not a good advertisement for the teaching profession and underscores the negative workplace atmosphere the participants find themselves in. Furthermore, the position of school managers must also be considered. It seems unlikely that they are unaware of this mistrust or that it is making their job more difficult.

## 6.5 Work related stress caused by sharing of workspaces

Participants in this research noted that inappropriate workspace has become more of a stressor for teachers in recent years. Austerity measures by the Department of Education and increased paperwork associated with teaching roles has necessitated the need to share spaces and desks in schools. This sharing and amalgamation of workspace has increased stress for these teachers. Teachers may leave classrooms untidy or with writing on whiteboards, this may be seen as a source of disrespect for other teachers.

There may be a belief that stress is associated with the school staff room and politics associated with seating arrangements, use of electrical sockets, sharing of tables and seats, the use of crockery and cutlery and the formation of teacher groups within this setting. (Mannix McNamara et al, 2018) described school staff rooms as “curious places” as they are typically not characterised by the discourses of “workplace”, yet this does not inure them from being the sites of significant workplace bullying.

There is a likelihood that this imbalance in workspace is causing stress to teachers and resulting in increased levels of IPC and disharmony. Schools are designed and operated in such a way as to facilitate contact between teachers and students (Heitor, 2005), this does not assist teachers who wish to have privacy or avoid teachers with whom they have had IPC. Teachers who desire their own privacy or wish to be with colleagues who they have similar attitudes and views is not facilitated. Therefore, there may be a perceived imbalance between the physical environment of the school and teacher’s preference for private workspace within the school. It is possible that this facilitates IPC between colleagues as they feel there is no escape from interactions between colleagues that they are in conflict with.

As teachers share communal spaces and have many other stressors to contend with, there is a possibility that space restrictions may heighten the sense of stress and exacerbate interpersonal stress. Some teachers in this thesis believed that colleagues deliberately left desks untidy or spent long amounts of time using resources, such as desks, computers, or photocopiers to frustrate other teachers whom they are in conflict with and a way of revenge against them. This action may be described as counterproductive work behaviour which includes any actions that employees engage in that harms their organisation or organisation members (Dalal, 2005), and may represent a response to ineffective coping with work stressors (Cullen & Sackett, 2003).

The lack of appropriate workspace and rest areas or having to share workspace with colleagues were issues of concern and stress for teachers in this thesis. Teachers may need their own privacy and space to reduce stress (Cheryan, Ziegler, Plaut, Meltzoff, 2014), and to carry out their work functions effectively. An inability to avoid stressful colleagues may lead to frustration, this frustration may lead to negative emotions such as fear, anxiety and anger. Over time there is a possibility that these negative emotions may lead to ill health.

#### 6.5.1 The Balkanisation of Schools

There is evidence in this thesis that teachers form into different like-minded groups, these groups have similar goals, and support each other, this process is identified as balkanisation, (Hargraves & MacMillan 1992; Shun-wing & Ng, 2011). One teacher noted that *“You want to be around people in the school that are like minded and have similar goals to you, you cannot trust some people in this school. We tend to stay in our own groups”* Mistrust in schools seems to result in teachers fragmenting into likeminded groups that support each other.

Micropolitical struggles were evident within schools in this thesis. Micropolitics refers to ‘the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals and influence in organisations’, (Blasé, 1991). (Lindle, 1999, p. 176) noted that the study of micropolitics is absolutely a question of survival for school leaders and other educators. Indeed, most practicing school leaders are already astute, or even unwitting, students of micropolitics. Not only is the study of micropolitics inevitable, for most school leaders it is an inherent occupational requirement

Micropolitics has implications for how leadership is performed in schools (Ball, 1981), and leadership could conceivably affect the whole school environment. According to (Shug-Wig, 2011) teachers may Balkanise into different cliques with different ideological demarcations. (Hargraves & MacMillan, 1992) notes that these groups are characterised by being strongly insulated from each other, and are clearly delineated in space with clear boundaries from each other. (Hargraves & Macmillan, 1992) also notes that these groups are especially attached to these sub communities which defines their life within the school. These groups may have a political complexion to them, with repositories of self-interest, where promotion, status and resources are distributed among each group.

This balkanisation among teachers could result in mistrust being permuted throughout the school environment and result in a more fragmented school, where stress is more prevalent. Balkanisation of school cultures may have negative outcomes for both students and teachers (Siegel, 2006). (Hargraves & MacMillan, 1992), notes that many secondary schools are characterised by a maze of bureaucratic cubbyholes, which results in bureaucratic inflexibility, staff that are unresponsive to change and poor outcomes for students. (Namie, 2007) notes that nearly three quarters of all bullying occurs when the target is not a protected group member or when the harasser is a protected group member. Therefore, it may be that teachers who are not part of balkanised groups may suffer more negatively from IPC experiences.

## **6.6 Workload, resources and productivity as causes of stress for teachers**

### **6.6.1 Workload as a stressor for teachers**

Uneven workload may cause teachers to become irritated that they have to be highly functional while other colleagues are excused work duties because of their dysfunctionality. Irritation of colleagues not undertaking equal work duties may increase tension between colleagues and result in annoyance, and anger (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). More reliable workers who are agreeable to carry out more work duties without question are more likely to suffer burnout (Byrne, 1994; Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Teachers may become severely distracted from their work because of stress and bullying and this distraction may take from the quality of their work and result in poor productivity (Ethureten et al, 2013). Poor sleep may also result from stress encountered in the work environment as identified by (Danielsson et al, 2012). This can also negatively affect the efficacy of class plans and learning outcomes in the classroom (Poon, Cyanea Yui-Sam, Hui, Ka-Ying, Yuen, Gigi Wing-Chee, Kwong, Wing- Yang Chan, 2019). In such school environments it may be plausible that there may be a preoccupation with stressful matters in the school resulting in teachers directing energy towards coping solutions and therefore putting less energy into their teaching. Stress may cause concentration problems effecting their functioning within the school.

The picture being painted here is of agreeable teachers undertaking high workload to cover for more dysfunctional teachers who are not expected or encouraged to perform even the simplest of tasks. Over time this creates frustration, and anger and can lead to IPC among teachers which seems to be high among teachers in this thesis. This view would support the findings from (Blix, Cruise, Mitchell, Blix, 2006), who noted that heavy workload and



deadlines are frequently cited reason for stress and the consideration of job change. Teachers may feel that many deadlines are unrealistic and were simply put there without thought or consideration of the challenges of completing them, this may further compound the sense of frustration and stress.

Modern communication technology itself can also create an increase workload for teachers (Peralta & Costa, 2007). By its nature and its accessibility, it enables teachers to be accessible more freely. Communication technology's ability to extend the reach of work to outside the work environment and to extend into after working hours' time could be a source of stress for teachers. Teachers may feel that they cannot "shut off", that they must answer student or school management queries even after school hours or perform teaching tasks when not in school. Normal teaching contact hours may extend far beyond the school environment and into evenings and weekends, this may be a source of stress for teachers.

There could potentially be stress created because of new technologies being introduced into schools (Tarafdar, Tu, Ragu-Nathan, 2003; Yuen & Ma, 2008). Recent developments in technology resources have seen numerous new and innovative ways of educators interacting with students (Shapka & Ferrari, 2003). Technostress" is defined as stress created by adoption of information and communication technologies which can impact worker productivity, job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation, and retention (Sass, Seal, Martin, 2011; Palus, Lester, Britt, 2013; Tarafdar, Pullin, Ragu-Nathan 2014). There may also be a more menacing perspective to resources as a stressor in schools. There could potentially be vandalism of resources as a way of thwarting the use of these resources. Resources such as certain technologies could be deliberately damaged so as individuals do not have to participate in their uptake. This topic is highlighted in section 2.8.8 of this thesis. This behaviour could result in extra costs for the school and poor learning outcomes for students.

### **6.6.2 Resource allocation causing stress for teachers**

School resources are very often outside the control of the individual teachers (Betoret, 2009). This lack of control over resources could be seen to heighten the sense of stress teachers may have (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, Schaufeli, 2001). Teachers may have to make alternative arrangements at short notice if technology resources are not functioning prior to class commencing. Resources such as photocopiers, internet connections, classroom projectors or audio equipment may not be functioning and therefore teachers will have to adapt their class, at very short notice to facilitate this malfunctioning equipment.

This control over resources could potentially be used as a bullying technique against other parties in the school. The school management may act as a “gate keeper”, deliberately withholding resources to frustrate teachers that they are conflict with. One participant noted that, *“Management tend to resource themselves well on corporate entertainment, but I see resources do not go where they are needed, and it leads to a disconnect between management and employees”*.

There is evidence in this thesis that the school management may on occasions allocate coveted resources such as the work laptops, best room, lockers etc, to what they see as compliant teachers or for example have work laptops available for certain teachers and not others. Teachers felt uncomfortable about sharing resources with other teachers in this thesis, sharing of resources could lead to conflict between teachers. Teachers may perceive that a teacher is dominating a particular resource by spending too much time on a resource which may lead to feelings of frustration and anger. It is clear that multiple sources of stress are affecting teachers in schools; however, IPC is the primary cause of stress and certain factors inside and outside the school environment exacerbate and facilitate IPC to continue unabated throughout the school environment. Resource sharing is a typical example of this.

There is also a possibility that teachers who experience IPC, delay or disrupt resources for each other to frustrate or antagonise the other party (Spector, Bauer, & Fox, 2010). This delay or disruption of resources may also emanate from the school management towards teachers who are perceived as not cooperating with the school as a sanction against them. Such behaviours may heighten and escalate a sense of stress among all parties in the school environment causing disruption and poor outcomes for teachers, and students.

If a particular resource is not available within the school environment teachers may have to consider alternative resources or strategies in order to make the class plan function and cover the educational topic. The threat of withholding resources, actual loss of resources and a failure to gain resources from resource investment could potentially be used by all parties within the school environment as retaliation for IPC issues. Potentially resources may be used as a weapon to control different parties throughout the school. It could also be noted that some teachers could withdraw their labour by taking sick leave as a deterrent to the school management behaving in an inappropriate manner.

### 6.6.3 Productivity and teacher stress

Holding teachers accountable for their work and rewarding good performance could present problems with implementation (Ingersoll, Merrill, May, 2016), and there may be problems with teacher unions accepting such policies that would cause teachers to be held accountable for actions. There are also difficulties in what constitutes “good performance” in the teaching profession. Performance in teaching may be difficult to measure, and there is the difficulty of whether key performance indicators should measure good or bad performance in teaching (Moss, 1996; Berk, 2013).

There is also the problem of what is a good measure of teacher performance, (Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, Ladd, Linn, 2010) if for example a key performance indicator was “examination results”, and a teacher was appraised on his or her student examination results performance, this might be considered unfair. Particular class years may be weaker than other years and this might be an unfair reflection on a teacher. Similarly, “class retention” as a performance indicator, might also be considered unfair as in many cases, teachers have little control as to whether a student comes into class or not. Establishing systems for holding schools to account for the work they do has been the focus of policy development in many countries for a long time, (Mac Ruairc, 2019). Other jurisdictions have attempted to introduce and identify key performance indicators in schools such as for example the USA with the introduction of the “No Child Left Behind Act (2002)” which was later replaced by the “Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)”.

The Act rewarded schools for student success in examinations and could cut funding to or even close schools that performed poorly. However, these Acts have been criticised for several reasons, namely for encouraging students to achieve well in examinations instead of learning being the primary goal and failing to address the reasons for lack of achievement in teaching. The USA also adopted a common and standardised curriculum in many States called the Common Core State Standards Initiative in 2010, which required teachers to adopt new instructional practices which has resulted in teacher stress (Von der Embse et al, 2016; Sandalos et al, 2016).

(Wilson & Bertenthal, 2005) noted that teachers if accountable may be inadvertently contributing to equity issues and access to quality teachers. Teachers with expertise may choose to teach in higher performing schools to avoid the pressure to attain adequate yearly progress and other negative consequences that could occur. This would seem to be another negative consequence for assessing teacher performance.

According to the Department of Education and Skills (2019), there are 30,062 second level teaching staff in Ireland, very few teachers have been sanctioned for poor performance and indeed it was only in 2016 that the Department of Education introduced the so-called 'Fitness to Teach' provisions which gave the Teaching Council the means, much like the Medical Council does, to adjudicate on complaints related to the professional conduct of teachers.

Given the difficulties described above in assessing school and teacher performance and the lack of concrete key performance indicators for schools and teachers in Ireland to date. There would seem to no quick fix solution available, however, there would seem a need for all parties to come together to at least discuss performance indicators in schools. It would be reasonable to assume that teacher stress could result in a lowering of productivity for teachers and stress could also affect a teacher's passion to teach, their level of interest in investigating new ways to teach or their building on continuous professional development. The lowering of productivity could result in a disinterest in exploring new technological tools or have the effect of communicating poorly to students what is expected from them. The negative relationship of stress and job productivity has already been well established in previous studies (Sundquist, et al, 2003).

Lowering of productivity from stress could presumably result in poorer classroom outcomes for students and therefore may result in poorer examination or assessment results (Nelson, Low, Hammett, 2012). This could affect a student's ability to obtain their desired course in third level institutions and have implications of their future career. There is an inference from this thesis that a cycle of stress can begin and escalate from lowering of teacher productivity. Lower productivity from a teacher suffering from stress, can emanate to the student population (Blix et al, 2006), who in turn can inform their parents and this may result in the school management confronting the under productive teacher, restarting the stress cycle for that teacher. Excessive stress may result in teacher attrition (Falk, 2012), and teachers may leave the teaching profession as a result. Teachers leaving the teaching profession may result in dedicated teachers with a long productive career ahead of them failing to reach their potential.

High teacher turnover can dilute the pool of good teachers available to schools and result in teacher shortages which can have long term implications on student results (Ryan, Von der Embse, Pendergast, Saeki, Segool, Schwing, 2017). Teacher retention rates may drop and schools may find it more difficult to find effective teachers for their school because of the stressful nature of the teaching job. Parents of students who have obtained poor results from teachers lowering of productivity from stress may confront teachers at parent teacher meetings. These confrontations may result in added stress for teachers, increasing the negative cycle of stress and possibly furthering the lowering of productivity for teachers.

#### **6.6.4 Stress from students and parents**

Several studies have revealed students and parents as a noteworthy stressor (Chaplain, 1995; Kyriacou, 2001; van der Wolf & Everaert, 2005; Kokkinos, 2007; Otero- Lopez, Santiago, Godás, Castro, Villardefrancos, Ponte, 2008; Clunies-Ross et al, 2008; Kerr et al, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014) and (Fenton, Ocasio-Stoutenburg, Harry, 2017). As a result, all students in a class may suffer educationally from the disruption. Stress for teachers may also result when other students become involved in disruptive behaviour and join in, especially if the teacher is seen as weak or unable to maintain class discipline.

There is a possibility that good school policies and procedures on student discipline had been tried and tested in schools over many years and had proven successful when addressing issues of discipline with students (Sprague, Hill, Annemieke, White, Myers, Shannon, 2001). This may be an example of the school management and teachers with appropriate policies and procedures coming together to solve and abate problems emanating from the school. There is a possibility that if all parties within the school show a united effort to reduce or eradicate stress on a particular issue, then this can be achieved. This would give hope that other interpersonal relationships within the school that cause stress for teachers can be solved also.

Unlike conflict between teachers and students, conflict between teaching colleagues within a school can continue indefinitely. Therefore, stress from students is of temporal concern for teachers as the student will be moving on, usually within a short period and will be no longer a source of stress for the teacher. Stressed teachers may deal with students or colleagues in an uncivil or bullying manner, causing further stress and negatively defining school relationships in the future. The extent to which teachers' lower productivity may affect students negatively may be difficult to measure.

It would be reasonable to assume that some teachers may increase their productivity as a response to stressors but how sustainable this might be over long periods is a matter for further study. There is a possibility that increasing productivity as a response to reduce stress may in the long-term result in burnout and time off from work (Schaufeli, Daamen, Van Mierlo, 1994; Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

There is also a power imbalance between a teacher and student (Chan, 2007), a teacher has a position of authority, trust and respect. The nature of this is the creation of a power imbalance, professional boundaries require that the teacher takes care not to misuse this imbalance, but by its very nature a teacher has more authority over a student and is more likely to be trusted and believed with issues of student discipline.

This same power imbalance does not exist between teaching colleagues in schools and therefore conflict between teaching colleagues would seem more difficult to resolve and more prevalent, as in this thesis. This view would support the work of (Vredenburg & Brender, 1998), who describe power as the currency of the work organisation forming the context of work relations in all work organisations and finds expressions both as power over and power to influence beliefs.

Disciplinary procedures against students in schools is commonplace and therefore acceptable but the same cannot be inferred from a teacher reporting conflict with a teaching colleague, this may be seen as a last resort and taboo. Complaints about colleagues can have long lasting negative effects for all parties involved (Cohen, 1996). There is a possibility that it is acceptable for a teacher to have conflict with a student but not with a teaching colleague. A possible explanation for the low percentage finding of student stress in this thesis compared with other studies on teaching is that the three teachers who cited stress from students had little experience in teaching. This may have enhanced the effects of student misbehaviour and challenging parents for these teachers (Yoon, 2002; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). These three teachers had little experience of teaching and as a result found it more difficult to cope with student and parent misbehaviour.

## 6.7 Costs from effects of stress on teachers

### 6.7.1 The costs from stress for teachers

Studies in the EU estimate that 50% of all working days lost have some links with work related stress (Cox et al, 2000). Costs for teachers suffering from stress at work could be seen to be multi-faceted, some costs had monetary, physical, emotional and cognitive consequences (Kalia, 2002). Work related stress from the school environment and IPC would seem to be the main cause of various costs being incurred for teachers in this thesis.

Poor coping skills employed by teachers to cope with stressful events may result in costs for teachers. Poor coping skills may ultimately result in teachers making poor choices and as a result some teachers may not deal with stressful situations appropriately. This may result in illness and have cost implications from being absent from work. Teachers may leave the teaching profession because of stress encountered in work (Humphries, 1993; Davis & Humphries, 2012; Shannon, et al, 2017).

This may have cost implications for the school, the management of that school, the students of that school and ultimately society. Many costs from being absent from work may be non-reimbursable so teachers may suffer financially as a result. Stress may cause the body's defences to be depleted and this may result in ill health which may have a physical cost. Aside from the physical costs to teachers, cognitive costs such as overthinking stressful situations may also be a cause of stress (Natzel, 2019).

Physical costs of stress in teaching may result in fatigue, colds, flus, chest infections and a range of other short term and long-term physical ailments. The emotional value a teacher may pay in terms of suffering and discomfort, when faced with stressful situations may lead to a weakening of emotional health. Stress may cause deep feelings of anger, guilt, irritation, revenge, depression, anxiety, irritability, memory and concentration problems, compulsive behaviour or mood swings (Netterstrom, Conrad, Bech, 2008; Mahan, Mahan, Park, Shelton, Brown, Weaver, 2010; Clarke, Warren, Hagen, Johnson, Jerkins, Werneburg, Herman, Preston, Rausch, Warren, Olsen, Clarke, 2011).

There may also be cognitive costs as a result of teachers experiencing stress in schools, teachers may experience forgetfulness, disorganisation, excessive worrying, a lack of focus, or over thinking stressful situations for possible remedies, or how better they could have dealt with a stressful situation. It would be reasonable to assume that these negative work-related stressful side effects could result in poor teaching outcomes for teachers.

There are also monetary costs reported from participants from enduring stress in work, examples of which could be lost wages, doctors' visits, medication etc. These costs may extent to the school where a replacement teacher may be employed to replace any teacher who is absent from stress. One participant noted *"I get sick a couple of times per year because of stress so there are doctors' bills, parking, medication, lost wages etc, a lot of small costs but you would not be reimbursed for these costs and stress plays a part in that"*.

Certain financial costs also could result from stress at work, these costs could be multi-faceted in nature and affect some teachers more than others (Kalia, 2002). Examples of such costs might be visits to the GP, childcare, health insurance premiums, prescriptions for medicine and time off from work. Costs may be non-recoverable and vary widely across the teacher population. There could be a sense of disillusionment, isolation and anger from teachers who had experienced non recoverable costs from stress which could result in mistrust and suspicion of the school management.

Potentially this mistrust could result in disharmony within the school environment facilitating further stress. Negative teacher emotions could result from appraisals of success or failure with respect to how stressful events were encountered with and dealt with in the school environment. In these cases, teachers could potentially spend a considerable time over analysing the events, searching for ways to better deal with such events in the future or how retrospectively they should have dealt with stressful events.

#### **6.7.2 Ill health among teachers from stress**

Participants in this research who reported mental and physical health problems from stress may develop further negative health outcomes as found by (Ooi et al, 1997; Maxon, 1999; Bluff & Johnston, 2005; Kenny, 2015, Agilis, 2015). Stress may come from a variety of sources within the school and poor coping mechanisms employed by teachers can have negative health implications for teachers. IPC was a noteworthy stressor for participants in this thesis, which supports evidence from (Spector & Jex 1998) who noted that over time, the failure to get along with others is likely to make an individual apprehensive about coming to work and may very well induce feelings of depression.



It would seem reasonable to assume that the negative range of symptoms that teachers experienced in this thesis, as a result of stress in their school, had negative implications on their work and on their private life. Work related stress is a known contributor to physical and psychosocial health problems as well as an increasing economic burden for enterprises and society (Van de Vliert, 1998; Andersen, Burr, Kristensen, 2004; Leka & Kortum, 2008).

Teachers may have different behaviours while ill at work, some teachers may try and work through illness or fatigue, resulting in presenteeism as found by (Goetzel et al, 2004; Elstad & Vabo, 2008 and Young, 2016). This is the act of showing up to work sick, injured, or overly fatigued and as a result not operating at normal levels of productivity. Working while ill, may exacerbate the illness or fatigue which may result in even more time off work. Teachers may try to cope with illness until their next rest period off from work, such as a weekend or midterm break to avoid stress from work not being done or time lost from work.

The scale of reported symptoms of ill health in this thesis cannot be underestimated in terms of negative effects. The health status of the participants in this thesis may only be subjectively described as poor and in great need of intervention. To have so many teachers in this study suffering from the negative effects of stress may point to a need for an intervention. It is also recognised extensively in the literature that stress can be one of the components of any disease and physicians have long recognised that people were more susceptible to sickness when subjected to high levels of stress (Dodge & Martin, 1970; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Neidhammer, Goldberg, Leclerc, Bugel, David, 1998; Fitzgerald, 2008; Bruhn & Frick, 2011).

It would seem reasonable to assume that teachers suffering from mental or physical health issues from stress at work could also suffer from poor performance which may have many negative effects for students (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Therefore, the students in such situations may not attain their full potential in the particular subject. The inference from this research is that teachers are becoming ill at work from IPC stress but may be reluctant or unwilling to declare this to the school management. Sickness resulting from stress at work may also have affected the way in which teachers report stress to their employer. It seems possible that teachers did not tell their employer they were sick from stress because of negative implications for their career.

Teachers effected by stress in schools could suffer long and enduring diseases which can last for many years and cause immeasurable discomfort and pain to individuals (Stansfeld & Candy 2006; European Risk Observatories Literature Review 2014; Ylipaavalniemi, Kivimaki, Virtanen, Keltikangas-Jarvinen, Vahtera 2005). It would seem wholly unacceptable that our society allows teachers or any employee to become ill from stress encountered in work without having appropriate measures in place to reduce and stop this stress.

### 6.7.3 Strategies used by teachers to cope with stress

Participants in this study had different coping mechanisms for dealing with work related stress. A particular coping mechanism for one teacher may not be effective for another teacher. There was mixed success and approaches to these coping mechanisms, some were effective for some teachers and not for others. The highly varied approach to teacher stress interventions, as well as the multidimensional nature of teacher stress, suggested that searching for a single univariate solution may be futile (Bertoch, Nielsen Curley, Borg 1990; Tjosvold, 1990; Darling-Hammond 1998). Successful teacher training interventions for workplace stress may be unsuitable due the high instances of stress reported in the literature and this research.

There is a strong attachment to the notion that workplace bullying and incivility are principally problems of interpersonal behaviour (Hodgins et al, 2013) and an unwillingness to address it has been identified as fundamentally contributing to the problem (Pearson & Porath, 2005). The success of the intervention affirms the need to design complex interventions that intervene at several levels, with a clear focus on organisational change to reduce incivility, which in turn will improve employee health and the acknowledgment that workplace bullying may be more complex and intractable than incivility (Hodgins et al, 2013). The noteworthy prevalence of mistrust and IPC among teachers in this thesis would imply that such an intervention does not exist as of yet.

This unwillingness to become involved was noted by (Einarsen et al, 2007) who described organisational responses by “managers and employers” and sometimes even public sector or government bodies, as often unwilling to accept the very existence of the problem, much less prevent it and manage fairly those cases that come to the fore. The school managements unwillingness to become involved in conflicts among teachers may determine the coping mechanism utilised by teachers. There were several reasons for this, the school management

believed that if they became involved in teacher disputes that union intervention would soon follow and this would make the dispute process more difficult.

In conflict between teaching colleagues there may also be a perception that the school management would be seen to be siding with one teacher rather than another, thus causing disharmony. Initiating solutions to resolve disputes within the school was in some cases seen to be worse than the actual dispute itself and any possible solution would be scrutinised by all parties for fairness, equality and transparency which was seen as nearly impossible to achieve. Colleague support, when it exists, may be very beneficial to teachers experiencing stress (Schuster et al, 1990; Cunningham & Barbee, 2000). These teachers may have benefited from extremely positive interactions with colleagues when dealing with stressful matters in the school.

Teachers who are being bullied may be isolated (Hong et al, 2017) there may be problems with teachers sourcing social support from colleagues. Teachers may want to keep stressful situations to themselves and not bother other colleagues with what they perceive as trivial matters. There may be a sense of embarrassment or attracting unwanted attention by teachers who are experiencing stress, to ask colleagues for advice and support. This could have ramifications on them working within the school and could leave them open to criticism from the school management if conflict escalated. (Mannix McNamara et al, 2018) notes that in bullying cultures this would be typified by employees who do not wish to draw bullying and therefore stressful behaviours in their direction, they therefore maintain a superficially positive working relationship with the bully.

The attraction of teachers towards passive coping strategies may be because of deep-rooted problems in the functioning of schools and the ability of teachers to seek redress for stressors in their school. In short, teachers may feel there may be no alternative for dealing with IPC other than coping strategies. Passive coping refers to cognitive attempts to avoid actively confronting problems and behaviours to indirectly reduce emotional tension by such behaviours as eating or smoking more (Blalock & Joiner, 2000). There may also have been fear to report stressors in a direct manner for fear of negative repercussions. There may be several reasons why teachers employ a passive coping strategy before trying alternative means. Passive coping strategies may be considered less confrontational and this lack of confrontation reduces the need to escalate the problem (Hershcovis et al, 2018).

There is an inference from this research that reporting stress as a coping strategy is rarely done due to fear. The choice of coping method that teachers decide upon maybe because of fear and necessity. Certain coping mechanisms may be considered perilous by teachers and these mechanisms may be perceived to have many negative and multifaceted repercussions. A fear of reporting work related stress was also noted by (Fahie, 2014).

Withdrawal may be an effective coping mechanism for stress which is used by employees (Evans, Rhee, Forbes, Allen, 2000). Some teachers may withdraw from any social activities in the school and stay in their offices or classrooms in order to avoid IPC with colleagues. This withdrawal may extend to outside work activities such as social evenings or graduations and emails being ignored outside work hours. This coping strategy could result in isolation for teachers, which in turn, could result in anxiety and further stress. It would seem inappropriate that a teacher would have to self-isolate to cope with stress in their school.

#### **6.7.4 Secondary schools compared with primary schools**

(Buckley, Abbott, Franey, 2017) noted in their study of stress among Irish teachers, that secondary teachers had higher levels of problematic relationships with colleagues than primary teachers. Which leads to the question of what factors could be limiting IPC in primary schools. Most primary teachers in Ireland have their own specific classroom, whereas most secondary teachers have to share or rotate classrooms with colleagues. The nature of secondary teaching, shows that students have a variety of specialised subject teachers. The probability of secondary teachers interacting with each other during class changes is more prevalent. This could be problematic and stressful for teachers in conflict with each other. These interactions may be less in primary schools as classes have generally one teacher and interactions with other teachers may be less. As (Buckley et al, 2017) noted, predominately secondary teachers share classes with other teachers which causes stress.

There may also be a possibility that the student profile in secondary schools is more stressful than primary schools' students. Students in secondary schools are more adult like and therefore able to argue with teachers when they feel they have been treated unfairly and are subject to discipline. Secondary students are also bigger and stronger, and this may intimidate teachers when confronting them about their behaviour.

### 6.7.5 The educational hot potato

There has been little success in resolving work misbehaviours such as bullying and incivility in the literature. The introduction of interventions such as, Civility, Respect and Engagement at Work, CREW at the organisational level has only had limited success. (Hodgins et al 2013) noted that cultural interventions such as these should be analysed in schools for their efficacy and applied if workable.

Interventions for stress that have been implemented for teachers have had little consistency in approach or type of treatment often falling across diverse and eclectic areas (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). The highly varied approach to teacher stress interventions as well as the multidimensional nature of teacher stress suggests that searching for a single univariate solution may be futile (Bertoch et al, 1990).

Neither the findings of this study nor literature showed any universal panacea for a solution of reducing or eliminating stress or IPC in schools. Some interventions which teachers participated in resulted in partial success for some teachers. The success may have been as a result of many factors such as the personality of the teacher, the intervention tried, the support a teacher received etc. A common theme throughout this research were participants accounts of IPC with dysfunctional colleagues as a source of stress within the school environment.

These dysfunctional colleagues were a noteworthy source of stress both for teaching colleagues and the school management. There seemed little colleagues or the school management could do to abate their sometimes-dysfunctional behaviour. School policies seemed to enable dysfunctional teachers to continue their practices without any consequences. (Ball, 1981) notes that official school policy is open to interpretation or special arrangement, and that individual teachers may be given considerable leeway to pursue their own 'vision' of education.

(Stein, 2014) notes that, unfortunately, many school leaders are intimidated by non-performing teachers' often abrasive personalities and tough demeanour. However, if a teacher is not performing to acceptable standards, they should be offered an opportunity to take corrective action. The inability or unwillingness of the school management to challenge dysfunctional teachers that causes IPC with colleagues may cause a feeling of inequality and unfairness throughout the school environment.

(Hargraves & MacMillan, 1992) noted that principal's lack of involvement of certain staff members resulted in disengagement and exclusion of many staff from the decision-making process. (Fuller, 1992) notes that school principals may rule the school in a dictatorial fashion using poor judgement which can cause division among teachers and that school principals' educational visions are grounded in their personal and prior vision. Part of this inability to challenge dysfunctional teachers may be these teachers influence over the school management of the school. This was noted by (Hargraves & MacMillan, 1992) who noted that many schools have two groups, the "ins" and the "not ins". The "ins" have influence over the school management and the "not ins" do not have influence. Being in the "in" group resulted in you being close to the school management, having influence and being able to influence decision making within the school. A non status quo opinion from other employees could be detrimental for an employee's future career, as was reported by for example (Thomas, 2005).

The narratives given by those interviewed described by Mary, Ann, Marian, Joanna, Jack and Marian, see sections (5.1.1), (5.1.3), (5.2.2.), (5.3.3.), and (5.3.5). all describe a desire to avoid conflict. This avoidance of conflict with what many participants describe as dysfunctional colleagues led to passive coping strategies. These passive coping strategies did not confront conflict but drove IPC into a covert world of tolerance and acceptance of dysfunctional behaviour. This tolerance and acceptance seemed to perpetuate and intensify dysfunctional behaviour from colleagues, causing IPC for many participants. The strategy of the school management was to isolate and segregate these dysfunctional staff rather than challenge their behaviour.

Challenging dysfunctional colleagues' behaviour could be seen as futile by the school management as teacher unions would be seen to defend the indefensible. Teaching colleagues may also be fearful of making allegations against these dysfunctional teachers for fear of escalating conflict within the school. (Gillen, 2017) noted that school management's reaction to conflict is usually reactionary and not proactive. So, exists "a hot potato", (i.e.), a dysfunctional colleague who spreads IPC, and incivility throughout the school environment, who is defended by parties no matter what their behaviour entails and who are not confronted by the school management in any meaningful way.

### **6.7.6 Answering the research question**

The research question in this thesis was “Is interpersonal conflict (IPC), the primary cause of stress among second level teachers in Ireland?”. There is evidence in this thesis to support the research question that high levels of IPC exist within second level schools. A high number of participants in this thesis noted experiencing IPC with teaching colleagues or the school management within the school environment that contributed to feelings of stress. There would seem to be strong evidence to support the research question that the primary cause of stress in second level schools is IPC. There is also evidence that IPC may have a stand-alone nature as a stressor and that IPC is under researched or misidentified as other workplace misbehaviours as there is a paucity of research on IPC in education sector studies.

### **6.8 Extrapolating to the wider teaching community**

According to the key statistics for the Department of Education and Skills (2019), there are 30,062 second level teaching staff in Ireland. It will be very difficult to ascertain how many teachers suffer work related stress from IPC without further research. The true figures of teachers enduring IPC in secondary schools may be very difficult to ascertain accurately because extrapolating the findings of this research may not be truly representative of an accurate figure. The sample size of 25 teachers from this research is small and not a representative selection of all secondary school teachers. Analysing true figures of IPC among secondary teachers would also have to account for the geographical area in this thesis which did not cover all counties in Ireland. School type, number of teaching staff and other factors would have to be accounted for in the extrapolation of the findings of this thesis.

Extrapolating even further, there are approximately 1.8 million secondary teachers in the European Union (Eurostat, 2019). If the findings of this thesis were generalised to the wider European secondary school teaching community which showed that 22 out of 25 of teachers reporting IPC with colleagues, this could potentially mean that over 1.5 million teachers are experiencing stress as a result of interpersonal conflict with colleagues. These figures are subjective but there is a potential that there could be far more stress from IPC than expressed in the literature.

If even a percentage of 1,584,000 secondary teachers in Europe were experiencing work related stress from IPC in schools, this could have severe negative consequences for the teaching population and stakeholders in the school. In light of this possible extrapolation, IPC within schools would seem to warrant further investigation. Reluctance to report stress, mistrust of the school management, and poor workspace provision within schools were also reported by participants within this research. It would be reasonable to assume that these stressors may also affect other teachers in Ireland and elsewhere. It may not be surprising if the findings of this research are being experienced currently in the Irish teaching sector. This is because of the wider literature reflecting stress, the high percentage of participants reporting interpersonal conflict and the homogeneity of the Irish secondary school system.

### **6.8.1 Conclusion**

The research question in this thesis was found to be “Is interpersonal conflict the primary cause of stress in secondary schools in Ireland?”. The thesis has evidence to show that IPC is the prevalent cause of stress and should now be classified as a stand-alone factor in other challenging workplace misbehaviours. IPC seems easily started in secondary schools and is difficult to remedy. This is leading to a great deal of suffering for stakeholders in the secondary school environment. As things stand this suffering seems set to continue as there is little to suggest any meaningful interventions will be introduced in the near future. Interventions need to be found and implemented to alleviate the harm being caused to teachers by IPC in secondary schools in Ireland.



# Chapter 7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 7.1 Further study

Due to the negative health consequences from IPC related stress, it would seem reasonable that further study be undertaken to analyse these experiences. The level of suffering that teacher in this thesis experienced from IPC within schools cannot be under estimated. Any study undertaken would have to be fair, impartial, non-bias, independent and on a national basis. This would facilitate a representative study to show the extent of IPC in the education sector appropriately. The study would have to include all stakeholders within the teaching community to obtain a multi-faceted view on the teaching environment.

Most importantly, there would have to be a willingness and commitment by the Department of Education to act with intention on the findings, if necessary, in a meaningful and resolution-focussed way. To address the intrinsic mistrust of the school management by teachers that was found in this research, there would have to be a commitment to transparency of the findings, hence the suggestion of an independent study group to conduct and publish the findings. It could be suggested that this type of approach would be relatively long term, as there would seem to be no quick fixes. (Hodgins et al, 2013) noted that an integrated approach including individual, job, organisational and societal levels is required to tackle workplace mistreatment.

## 7.2 Recommendations

This chapter has several recommendations which may contribute to lessen stress levels on teachers. The five main areas of recommendations which this chapter will analyse are

- Policies and procedures
- Workspace
- Training
- Meditation
- Changing the role of the school management

There seems an unwillingness for all parties to “grasp the nettle” of interpersonal conflict, because of differences, priorities and vested interests. IPC seems to be an “elephant in the corner”, that is ignored, side stepped and tolerated in the hope that it will dissipate or go away. There is evidence from this thesis that this policy simply exacerbates the problem. For an intervention such as CREW, to be successful, these differences, priorities and

interests would have to be put aside (Osatuke, Moore, Ward, Dyrenforth, Belton, 2009), for the greater good of teacher welfare. At present the Teaching Council is responsible for professional standards, but to date a very small number of teachers have been held accountable for poor performance. It could be argued that the fact that the Teaching Council's board consists of some active and retired teachers whom have been prominent members of teacher unions which might not represent best practice.

### 7.2.1 Policies

The defining of responsibilities for teachers in a clear and transparent manner would help reduce any ambiguity between teachers and the school management as to what a teacher's role is. This could be a source of mistrust and IPC between both of these parties as was identified in this thesis. Reduced ambiguity could help reduce a possibility of IPC occurring. School policies and procedures that were not open to different interpretations but were specific in nature and direction would also help to reduce mistrust between teachers and the school management.

(Fahie's, 2019) study noted that the mechanisms policies or procedures designed to deal with interpersonal disputes in the education sector were seen by many of the interviewees in his study as lacking in transparency, being unfair or biased. This would seem to underscore the requirement for a more transparent and equal way in which teachers are treated by their employer to avoid stress among teachers. The development of clear set of step-by-step instructions on school procedures that were trackable, as to how the school management are to process staff queries and complaints would seem an appropriate addition to school policies and procedures which can be seen as too generic and not specific.

A transparent school policy and procedure showing equality for all teachers may be beneficial, so that staff are clear about what their roles and responsibilities are. There is an inference from this thesis that school policies and procedures were administered in different ways depending on the staff member. Participants noted that some staff were "ruled to the letter of the law" where their claims of unfairness resulted in renunciation. Other teachers however were treated more favourably through school policies and faced no sanction for the same breach.

To this end the school should keep a record of how each staff member is treated in relation to human resources issues so as to show consistency with regard to promotions, complaints, days off and other issues pertaining to the school.

### 7.2.2 Workspace

Workspace was also a stressor for many teachers in this thesis, and schools do not seem an appropriate place for facilitating privacy and independent space for teachers. In fact, the opposite seems to be true, schools encourage multi-faceted interpersonal interactions and mass gatherings, where social distancing may be difficult to obtain. There is an inference from this thesis that appropriate workspace for teachers is a good moderator of stress.

The sub-division of staff rooms into different sections to aid privacy for individuals or groups of likeminded teachers who wish to be together may facilitate teachers wish to have independent space. The provision of alternative staff rooms may be a prudent alternative for teachers as teachers who are in IPC with other teachers may have an alternative space to relax. The enlargement of staffrooms may also be a workable solution to the lack of workspace for teachers, where teachers can socially distance from other colleagues and get time to themselves without the need to be beside other colleagues. Storage lockers for teachers could be distributed throughout the building to assist teachers involved in IPC meeting each other.

The provision of more than one entrance into the school for teachers might also assist teachers involved in IPC from having to meet each other. A desk sharing policy where teachers have the option of picking who they can share with might reduce conflict. The reduction of desk sharing by teachers where possible would also seem prudent to reduce stress among teachers. Vacant rooms within schools could be reassigned to create extra desks for teachers. This would reduce desk sharing and all the complexities and nuances that accompany the sharing of desks for work purposes within schools. The provision for extra seating areas where staff can have more space, possibly in corridors, quiet areas or outside spaces within the school may also alleviate the necessity for teachers to be together.

An alternative staffroom may be a prudent alternative to one staff room where colleagues who have experienced IPC with each other have alternative places to reside and do not have to communicate with each other. This would facilitate better cohesion of staff, as teachers who had good working relations with each other could communicate without fear or agitation from other colleagues. The allocation of chairs or workspaces in staff rooms to individual teachers or groups might also be a wise policy for schools to elevate workspace issues. There may also be a possibility to enlarge or extend staffrooms to increase social distancing between teachers and therefore avoid conflict between teachers. This action would provide more space between teachers which would add to a sense of privacy for teachers and hopefully create more harmony and less stress.

### 7.2.3 Training

(Murphy & De Paor, 2017) noted that much research has been done on how best teachers' professional development can be supported. However, for it to be effective, continuous professional development (CPD) provision needs to target the right content areas or topics. The introduction of training programmes for all teachers was recommended by the (National Suicide Review Group in, 2005). The NET, (National Education Association) in previous study, acknowledged that teachers should be provided with mentors, and professional development training sessions (NEA, 2002).

The literature review has identified that training can reduce stress and result in a more harmonious career (Dunham & Varma, 1998; Cooper, Dewe, 2008; National Suicide Review Group, 2005). This study also identified nearly one third of teachers citing lack of training as a stressor to them in their carrying out of their workplace duties, 39% of these teachers in this group were in the younger age category of 20-29 years.

It is notable that no teacher in this thesis believed they were the cause of stress and blamed stress on other sources within the school. It is possible that individual teacher's behaviour within the school environment is causing stress to others. Therefore, it would seem appropriate that any training provided for teachers would highlight the culpability of stress. That is, how an individual's behaviour and mood affect others and what actions teachers can take to reduce stress for others. Making employees aware of how conflicts work from a psychological and emotional perspective has been shown effective (Henri et al, 2001; Dunham & Varma, 1998).

It should be noted that training may not be the perfect panacea for some of the problems identified in this thesis, training programmes only inform teachers about issues such as interpersonal conflict or work mistreatment, they do not eradicate it. The premise that if a teacher is more informed about a particular subject, they will amend their behaviour may be incorrect. Is simply informing and educating a teacher about stressors and ways to reduce them going to work? Some think not (Hodgins et al, 2013), for example believes this is a flawed assumption.

**Table 4 below identifies a training schedule that could potentially reduce stress for teachers and be part of their continuous professional development.**

**Table 4- Contents of General Training Course for Teachers under stress**

1. Introduction	
2. Defining Stress	
3. Am I a cause of stress?	
4. Some of the common Causes and Effects of Stress	
5. Coping with stress (Active and Passive strategies)	
6. What to do if you are “Not Coping” with stress	
7. Preserving your Health and Wellbeing	
8. Who to contact if you are stressed	
9. Dealing with Change in Life and in Work  <i>Topics might include, becoming parents, caring for older parents, working in a career for a long time, fear of change, and how these topics effect your work.</i>	

10. Dealing with Parents and Students	
11. Dealing with the School management	
12. Dealing with Colleagues and IPC	
13. Development opportunities on your career path	
14. More experienced teachers	
15. Less experienced teachers	
16. Finding your own space.	
17. Culpability of stress. ( <i>How does my behaviour affect others</i> ).	
18. Teaching teachers the importance of group dynamics and having their own space	

#### 7.2.4 Meditation

There is evidence that mindfulness and mediation techniques reduce stress, indeed, recent findings have demonstrated that mindfulness and meditation significantly reduce pain and stress (Zeidan, Emerson, Farris, Ray, Jung, McHaffie, Coghil, 2015). Given that 11 teachers out of 25 used mindfulness, meditation, yoga, breathing techniques, counselling and coaching techniques to overcome various stressors, classes in these techniques should be offered to teachers. These techniques could be availed of outside school hours or during lunch breaks and may assist teachers overcome daily stressors and assist teachers in coping with school stressors more effectively.

#### 7.2.5 Changing the role of the school management

The literature notes that employees who experience IPC and bullying at work are frustrated by the poor response and unwillingness of organisations to implement appropriate processes to avert it (Hodgins et al, 2019). There would seem a need for concrete, prescriptive and proactive mechanisms to resolve IPC for example (Gillen et al, 2017) noted that the prevention of IPC requires a proactive approach, but management typically is reactive and problem based.

It is possible that a more structured and mandatory schedule of formal training should be introduced as part of any continuous professional development for teachers. These training programmes would be scheduled on an ongoing basis, perhaps forming part of their continuous professional development allocation to facilitate new teachers entering the school and would reduce the concerns of teachers that suffer stress from lack of training.

This research found high levels of IPC among colleagues, school policies were in evidence for bullying and other forms of workplace misbehaviour but there was an inference from this thesis that school policies on conflict were scant. There seemed also to be a lack of conflict resolution mechanisms and management training among the school management. It would seem prudent that the school management's role in conflict resolution be enhanced and updated in light of the high levels of IPC noted findings in this thesis.

(Everard, Morris, Wilson, 2004) notes that the ability to handle conflict is a key factor in managerial success. Everards's study noted that not only have do managers have to handle situations in which there is conflict between ourselves and others but may also at times have to resolve conflicts between our subordinates or, most difficult of all, to plot a course through the minefield of 'politics' when two of our peers or superiors are locked in struggle.

(Ott Marshall, 2018) notes that conflict transformation practitioners, have noted that previous practices of conflict resolution, conflict management and conflict prevention were increasingly problematic as they worked in context with gross power imbalances and framed conflict as a problem in narrow terms without addressing the underlying causes. Conflict transformation noted that these old terms were trying to address conflict as gross asymmetries of power, embedded in complex histories of power and relationship and were multi-faceted.

Conflict resolution, conflict management and conflict prevention treated conflict as an isolated problem seemingly disconnected from larger issues. Conflict transformation notes that conflict is natural and is not necessarily negative, that conflict can be a catalyst for change, that conflict is a "nested phenomenon", i.e., the conflict you see is usually part of a much larger conflict and conflict must be engaged constructively for social change to occur (Miall, 2004).



It may be prudent for the school management to be specially trained in conflict transformation and have access to conflict transformation experts to effectively deal with teaching colleagues who are in conflict with each other. This role could take a proactive stance within the school by the school management interviewing random teachers on an ongoing basis to obtain their experiences of conflict within the school and to take steps to transform this conflict. The school management's ability and success in dealing with interpersonal conflict within the school environment could potentially save considerable time lost by colleagues engaged in conflict. Changing the school management's role to proactively deal with this IPC could improve the school environment for all stakeholders within the school.

Another possible solution for reducing stress within the school environment might be a revolving system of school management. There may be few opportunities for teachers to improve their career within the teaching environment aside from obtaining a management position within a school. Aside from the school management role, there seems little opportunity for teachers to further their career within the teaching profession. Therefore, if a teacher does not follow the management route, teachers may be destined to languish in a classroom environment until the end of their career.

A revolving management structure may also be a welcome change for teachers who are in conflict with the school management. It may give these teachers an opportunity to engage positively with different individuals within the school management structure rather than endure prolonged periods of a school management they are in conflict with. (Burns' 1978) notes that the foundational position that most people are followers, and do not aspire to the lofty roles and responsibilities associated with leadership; they do, however, fervently seek good leadership.

A revolving school management therefore would seem to address two possible sources of stress, namely teachers who are in conflict with a school management whose members do not change over long periods and teachers who are banished to a prolonged teaching career despite applying for school management positions. (Stein, 2014) notes that the unstructured process currently used for locating and selecting school managers, coupled with the mediocre quality of education leadership courses provided by our colleges and universities make it clear that policymakers and educators are under the misconception that almost anyone can be taught or trained to be an effective school leader.

Some researchers have challenged the notion that principals should bear sole responsibility for leading their schools. (Donaldson, 2006) notes that “The widespread assumption that schools need to change has brought our classical notions about leadership fully under the microscope”.

#### 7.2.6 Third parties

The propensity for internal favouritism or lack of transparency when resolving internal disputes within the school environment is noteworthy according to the findings of this thesis. It cannot be assumed that all school managements are fair and equal in terms of how they treat individual members of staff. Noteworthy levels of mistrust were expressed about the school management in this thesis and there is an inference that this mistrust could be replicated in other studies.

In cases where teachers feel that the school management have treated them unfairly, it may be prudent that provision of an external ‘fairness assessment and implementation’ method be considered. The availability of an external panel of personnel to independently assess how a staff member is treated could be considered. This panel should ideally consist of non-teacher, and non-hierarchical staff who are not funded by teachers or educational bodies.

Analysis of disputes within the school and recommendations for resolution could be proposed by this body. A similar recommendation was made by (Fahie, 2014) with regards to third level institutions. Both parties, (teachers and school management) would have the opportunity to present their cases to the panel for analysis. This solution would be for mediation purposed only, to facilitate an agreement between the parties, if this mediation failed, more formal mechanisms for resolution could be explored.

The panel would be independent and have no vested interest in the decision. Their decision could be a recommendation on the best way to go forward and have an adequate solution to the disagreement. It might be suggested that an independent mediator be provided to mediate and possibly even adjudicate on the process. Effective conflict resolution and conflict management would seem important to run a school effectively and the process may need to be external from the school in order to avoid any possible claims of bias. Consideration should be given to the steps that might occur after this process, if the process did not result in conflict resolution.

### 7.2.7 Meetings

A scheduled semester-based meeting with all teachers individually to discuss how their teaching year is progressing and issues of concern to them may be beneficial for teachers to interact with the school management on issues of concern. A written track record of how teacher queries are dealt with so to show transparency in social support concerns could aid traceability in the event of future disputes. Findings have verified that smaller groups of specialised staff having meetings can have beneficial effects on the school environment (Klein, 2006).

Specific methods of school communication could include the school management meeting all teachers individually on a term-by-term basis to discuss issues of concern to both parties e.g., productivity, subjects, programme development, internal areas of conflict, procedures and policies, incivility, etc. By making these meetings actionable a concrete set of actions or goals could be formulated and the outcomes or lack thereof may be more transparent in solving future issues of concern to teachers. In this way the school management may imbue a sense of belonging and concern in teacher's wellbeing within the school.

### 7.2.8 CCTV

A small number of participants in this thesis cited a fear of colleagues in their school, consistent bullying had led to threats of physical violence, these teachers lived in a state of fear. There may also be conflicting sides in disputes between colleagues and colleagues and colleagues and students. Deciphering the truth in such cases may be problematic. Dealing with incidents where a colleague or student is physically or verbally bullied can be the most difficult part of a principal's job (Henebery, 2018).

In many incidents in this thesis, IPC, bullying and incivility were covert and difficult to identify. Allegations of IPC resulted in parties having to provide a written record of the incidence of same. There may be an inference that, this is poor 'evidence' and any allegations of IPC are difficult to prove. By having CCTV that records audio and visual data, a record of poor behaviours would be more likely to be captured. However, CCTV in classrooms would seem an unlikely solution for IPC as there would be GDPR or privacy issues and possibly an outright refusal by teachers and teacher Unions to work under this type of surveillance.

Traditionally, teachers and teacher Unions have been reluctant to 'allow' recording of the inside of their classrooms but alternative methods of addressing IPC and stressful behaviours must be considered if the high levels of ill health from stress in teaching are to be reduced. It should also be considered that CCTV are not restricted to corridors or communal spaces but should be in classrooms also. It might be argued that privacy and data protection issues may have to be laid aside for the greater good of preventing IPC in schools that result in ill health for so many teachers.

#### 7.2.9 Other methods of dealing with IPC

Categorised and prescriptive methods of addressing interpersonal behaviours in the workplace have already been described in this thesis. They encompass readily prescribed policies, procedures and measures designed to address and tackle these issues. Although these methods may result in some success, in the main, they rely on exhaustive record keeping and 'case presentation' of evidence in a forum that may not judge the case so to speak, rightfully. In many cases, respondents are reluctant to engage in these methods at all, because of the exhaustive requirements of same and indeed engaging in these procedures may exacerbate already existent stress situations. In simple terms, many people who experience IPC, incivility and bullying are reluctant to engage in the redress process because of the exhaustive and stressful requirements needs to 'put their cases' forward.

It could be argued that a more personalised, direct approach is needed whereby the person experiencing interpersonal conflict, incivility or bullying addresses the perpetrator directly, in a more unstructured but direct way. The ability to defend as a potential moderator of the relation between exposure to bullying behaviours and health outcomes can be explained by a well-established stress transactional model of coping and stress (Birkeland, Nielsen et al, 2017).

This requires a person's *own* assertiveness to be central in this process (Ireland, 2010). This thesis found a number of cases whereby, persons experiencing conflict, spoke directly to their perpetrator(s) and described directly their experiences, their recognition of being 'in civilised' and their intent to pursue a relationship with the perpetrator that was not categorised by a coercive, uncivil relationship. In simple terms, speaking directly to the perpetrator and explaining that their behaviour is unacceptable, intolerable and untenable may be more productive. A number of respondents stated that when they 'faced their bullies

down' in a clear and simple way, experienced a complete cessation of incivility towards them

There are few previous studies that have explicitly examined the ability to defend as a potential moderator (Birkeland Nielsen et al, 2017), and therefore the requirement for study in this area would seem pertinent. In a review of the literature on the use of coping, the coping method that appeared to consistently produce a significant improvement in a victim's conditions was finding a way to avoid the perpetrator or to leave the situation (Aquino & Thau, 2009).

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## **List of ETCS Credits**

Research Methods	5 Credits
Introduction to Pedagogy	5 Credits
Introduction to Sustainable Infrastructure	5 Credits
Conflict Transformation and Introduction to Psychology (Online)	5 Credits
Understanding the Brain: The Neurobiology of everyday life, (Online)	5 Credits
Going Dark: Law enforcement challenges in the cyber environment	5 Credits
Teamwork skills and The science of wellbeing, (Online)	5 Credits
Wood Science: Beyond building and Successful negotiation, (Online)	5 Credits

## Appendix 1

**Table 5- Thesis Interview Questions- Demographic Questions**

1) Male or Female?	
2) What category is your age bracket? 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79	
3) How long have you been working as a teacher/ in the education sector?	
4) What subjects have you taught in your centre?	
5) Have you ever had sick leave because of stress?	

**Table 6- Questions related to stress for the purpose of the interview of participants**

1) What has your experience been of stress in your workplace?	
2) What effect do you feel that stress had on your productivity at your workplace?	
3) What do you think are the main sources of stress in your workplace?	
4) How do you cope with stress from work and in general?	
5) How do you think your employer could help you to cope with stress?	
6) What costs financially or otherwise do you think that stress from work has incurred upon you?	
7) How would you feel about declaring stress to your employer and how do you think your Employer would feel about you declaring stress to them?	
8) Did you seek any outside assistance remote from your employer to help you deal with the stress you were experiencing?	
9) Any Questions missed	



The following tables identify the salient findings in this thesis. They are presented in table format for ease of interpretation.

**Table 7 Identifies participants by gender**

<b>Gender of participants</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>

**Table 8- Identifies number of participants in each age range**

<b>Age range of participants in years</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>29-29</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>30-39</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>40-49</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>50-59</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>60-69</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table 9 - Identifies years of experience Teaching by participants**

<b><i>Teaching experience in years</i></b>	<b><i>Number of participants</i></b>
<b><i>0-5</i></b>	<b><i>5</i></b>
<b><i>6-10</i></b>	<b><i>14</i></b>
<b><i>11-15</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>

**Table 10- Identifies subjects taught by teachers**

The table below identifies subjects taught by participants in this thesis, some participants taught multiple subjects.

<b><i>Subject taught</i></b>	<b><i>Number of participants</i></b>
<b><i>Personal and Interpersonal</i></b>	<b><i>13</i></b>
<b><i>Communications</i></b>	<b><i>9</i></b>
<b><i>Computers</i></b>	<b><i>7</i></b>
<b><i>Health and fitness</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>
<b><i>Photography</i></b>	<b><i>4</i></b>
<b><i>Mathematics</i></b>	<b><i>3</i></b>
<b><i>Geography</i></b>	<b><i>2</i></b>
<b><i>Woodwork</i></b>	<b><i>2</i></b>
<b><i>English</i></b>	<b><i>2</i></b>
<b><i>Art</i></b>	<b><i>2</i></b>
<b><i>Sexuality and relationships</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>
<b><i>Cookery</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>
<b><i>Drama</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>

**Table 11- Identifies participants who were reluctant to report stress**

<b>Teachers that would report stress</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>24</b>

**Table 12- Identifies IPC among participants from colleagues**

<b>Did participants experience negative stressful relationships with colleagues?</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>3</b>

**Table 13- Identifies stress experienced by teachers from Students and Parents**

<b>Stress experienced from students and parents</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>23</b>

**Table 14- Identifies teachers experiencing stress from poor workspace**

<b>Need expressed for own workspace</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>19</b>

**Table 15- Identifies perceived employer support by participants**

<b>Perceived appropriate employer support</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>16</b>

**Table 16- Identifies teachers who reported workload as a stressor**

<b>Workload cited as a stressor</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>17</b>

**Table 17 -Identifies participants who expressed mistrust towards school management**

<b>Lack of trust cited as a stressor</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>10</b>

**Table 18- Identifies resources reported as a stressor by teachers**

<b>Resources cited as a stressor</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>15</b>

**Table 19- Identifies participants who noted physical exercise as a coping mechanism**

<b>Physical exercise as a coping mechanism for stress</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>9</b>

**Table 20- Identifies participants use of Mindfulness, Meditation, Yoga or Counselling as a coping mechanism**

<b>Used Mindfulness, Meditation Yoga or Counselling to cope with stress</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>14</b>

**Table 21- Identifies negative health effects from work related stress**

<b>Negative health side effects from stress in work</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table 22- Identifies negative health effects of teachers by age range**

<b>Age range of teachers with mental and physical health problems from stress in work</b>	<b>% of participants</b>
<b>20-29</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>30-39</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>40-49</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>50-59</b>	<b>14%</b>

**Table 23- Identifies teachers whose productivity was affected by work related stress**

<b>Teacher productivity decreased from stress</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>No change</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table 24- Identifies teachers that had incurred expenses from stress at work**

<b>Expenses incurred from stress in work</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>13</b>

**Table 25 - Identifies teachers who experienced strained home relationships from work related stress**

<b>Home relationships strained from stress in work</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>15</b>

**Table 26- Identifies teachers who took time off from work for medical reasons from work related stress**

<b>Time taken off from stress in work</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>9</b>

**Table 27-Identifies female participant IPC difficulty with female colleagues**

<b>Female interpersonal difficulty with other female teachers</b>	<b>% of participants</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>59%</b>

**Table 28- Identifies the relationship between gender and mistrust with employer**

<b>Mistrust of employer</b>	<b>% of participants</b>
<b>Male teachers</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Female teachers</b>	<b>42%</b>

**Table 29- Identifies age categories of participants where workspace was a stressor**

<b>Age range of teachers citing workspace as a stressor</b>	<b>% of participants</b>
<b>20-29</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>30-39</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>40-49</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>50-59</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>60-69</b>	<b>5%</b>

**Table 30-Identifies age categories of participants who place emphases on training**

<b>Age range of teachers who emphasis placed on training at work</b>	<b>% of participants</b>
<b>20-29</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>30-39</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>40-49</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>50-59</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>60-69</b>	<b>18%</b>

## **Participant Information Leaflet**

**For potential participants, considering their involvement in a study of the causes and effects of interpersonal conflict related stress among a self-selected cohort of second level teachers in Ireland.**

TITLE OF STUDY

**An exploration of the causes and effects of interpersonal conflict related stress among a self-selected cohort of second level teachers in Ireland.**

INTRODUCTION

My name is Patrick Bruce and I am a teacher in the City of Dublin, Education and Training Board, Parnell Square and the Central Remedial Clinic in Clontarf, Dublin 3. I am currently researching the area of stress in teaching with particular emphasis on the causes, and effects of stress on teaching staff. My research is being supervised at a PhD level, by the College of Sciences and Health, Dublin Institute of Technology. I am evaluating this topic, as I want to evaluate the causes, costs and effects of workplace stress in teaching in Ireland.

The Teachers Union of Ireland have agreed to support this study by sending this information leaflet to their members in order to help recruit participants. After this involvement, the Teachers Union of Ireland will have no further role in the study.

## **Procedure**

If you are interested in participating in this study, I would ask you to consider allowing me to interview you, regarding your personal experience on the causes, costs and effects of workplace stress.

I would also request that you please take at least a week to read this information leaflet carefully. If you decide to participate, I will invite you to contact me on 01-2205000 or email on [patrick.bruce@TUDublin.ie](mailto:patrick.bruce@TUDublin.ie) I will then arrange a confidential interview with you, in a public place of your choosing, which should take about 30 to 40 minutes. You are very welcome to ask me any questions, at any stage prior to, or after the interview.

This interview will only investigate your experiences of stress in your workplace. This interview will be confidentially recorded with a hand-held taping device to ensure accuracy. You will be offered a copy of this recording. I will make research notes, in electronic format, based on the interview within five working days of the interview. After five days, the recording will be destroyed and I will rely on my electronic notes for the study. On completion of this study all my electronic notes will be destroyed. In the meantime, my notes and recordings will be kept secure on an encrypted Dublin Institute of Technology P.C. in my locked office.

### **BENEFITS:**

It is also hoped that the knowledge generated from the research will provide a better understanding of workplace stress in the Irish Teaching profession. This in turn will influence future professional practice and policy related to workplace stress in the educational sector



## **Risks**

There is the potential for the interview to be upsetting and you should carefully consider this before participating. However, it is felt that interviewing people about their experiences of stress will not pose a threat or be stressful to the vast majority of participants.

If you become uncomfortable during the interview, I will discontinue the interview until you feel you are in a position to continue. If you wish to discontinue the interview altogether, I will of course follow your instructions.

Should you decline to take part in any aspect of the interview, your decision will be respected. You will not be asked for an explanation of your decision. If you wish to talk about your interview with me personally, you are more than welcome to do so.

## **Confidentiality**

At all times your identity will be protected. I will not be informing anyone that you participated in the study. Information that might identify you personally or your workplace will not be used in any presentation or publication resulting from the study. I will only ask for your name so that I can contact you to arrange an interview. Your name will not be used in any recordings or for any notes I make.

If you wish to talk to people about the study, you are free to do so. I will keep the recordings for five working days to complete my notes and then destroy the recording. If you want the recording destroyed more quickly, please inform me and I will of course follow your instructions.

## **Voluntary Participation**

There is no obligation on you to participate in the study. If you choose to participate you are still free to withdraw your consent at any time without obligation to anyone. This means you can opt out before, during, or after the interview and at any stage. If you decide not to participate, or if you withdraw, you will not be disadvantaged in any way.

## **Permission**

This research has been granted ethical approval from the School of Food and Health Sciences Dublin Institute of Technology, Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin 1.

## **Funding**

The study is being funded by Technological University Dublin

## **Further Information**

If you need any further information or if anything in this document is unclear, please contact me on 01-2205000 or email on; [patrick.bruce@TUDublin.ie](mailto:patrick.bruce@TUDublin.ie) and I will be happy to discuss any of this information with you

## **Next Steps**

1. Having read the information leaflet carefully and considered your participation for at least one week, please decide if you would like to take part in this study.
2. If you wish to participate, please contact me by phone or email to arrange a suitable date, time and venue for the interview to take place. You also need to sign the consent below and return it to me by post or by hand at the interview. If I do not have this signed consent form, I cannot conduct the interview.
3. If you do not wish to participate, then please ignore this request to participate.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information

## **Consent Form**

### **DECLARATION**

- I have read the participant information leaflet and consent form regarding the causes, costs and effects of workplace stress in teaching. I understand the study's aim of investigating the causes, costs and effects of workplace stress.
  
- I have carefully considered my decision to participate for at least seven days since receiving the information leaflet.
  
- I understand that I will attend an interview of about 30 to 40 minutes duration and that this interview will be recorded.
  
- The record of the interview will be destroyed after five days but confidential notes of this interview will be made and used for study.
  
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily.
  
- I understand that all information collected in this study will be treated as confidential.
  
- I freely and voluntarily agree to be part of this research study, though without prejudice to my legal and ethical right.

• I have received a copy of this agreement and I understand that the results of this research may be published.

• I understand that participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study any time

• I understand that if I decide to participate, I will post or hand this signed and dated consent form to Mr Patrick Bruce, the lead researcher, so that he has it prior to any interview.

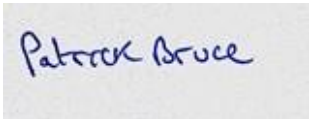
**PARTICIPANT'S NAME (Block Capitals):**.....

**PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE:**.....

**Date:**.....

Statement of the lead investigators responsibility: I have explained the nature and purpose of this study to the persons named above, the procedures to be undertaken and any risks that may be involved. I have offered to answer any questions and have fully answered such questions. I believe that the person named above understood my explanation and has freely given informed consent.

02/03/2017

X 

Patrick Bruce

Patrick Bruce

Researcher

Date



# Interview risk assessment

Interviewer name:

Participant Name:

Location & Date of interview:

Date assessment was carried out:

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing to control the risks?	What further action do you need to take to control the risks?	Who needs to carry out the action?	When is the action needed by?	Done