An exploration of the association of religious faith in coping with work-related stress among special education teachers in Ireland.

Natalie M. Doyle Bradley

Student Number: 18343858

Marino Institute of Education

Author Note

This dissertation is submitted for the attention of Denis Robinson, as the end of course assignment- (Masters in Education Studies 1820- Leadership in Education). The word count is 21,964.
Declaration:

a) The thesis must contain immediately after the title page the following declaration by the author:

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly. This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institution. The work was done under the guidance of Dr Michael Redmond at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

Natalie Doyle Bradley
ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the association special education teachers in Ireland make between their religious faith and coping with work-related stress. Little is known of the role that religious faith may play in coping with work-related stress in Ireland and scant research is available on special education teachers in Ireland. Change is an acknowledged factor in affecting work-related stress, and special educational provision in Ireland has experienced much change recently. This dissertation uses an exploratory mixed-methods study to collect qualitative data on the phenomenon through the use of a guided journalling group. Quantitative data was collected through an online survey to explore the emerging themes with a larger sample. Findings reveal the stressors currently affecting SETs and the general coping strategies SETs use. The concept of religious faith is explored with the sample population along with the associations they make between their faith and work-related stress. SETs identified that their religious faith gave them emotional and psychological support in coping with work-related stress, through a close relationship with God, support from the religious community and through the use of prayer. It also gave them additional perspectives that help them reappraise stressors, finding meaning from uncontrollable situations.

Keywords: Religious coping; special education teachers; stressors; coping strategies
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Michael Redmond. I am very grateful for his expert guidance and valuable encouragement he extended to me throughout the process. I extend my gratitude to the Marist Education Authority for the opportunity to complete this research. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr Denis Robinson for his support throughout the past two years, and for expanding my appreciation of the impact of religious faith. I would also like to acknowledge Dr Rory Mc Daid, Marino Institute of Education, for his input on research methods and Dr Johanna Fitzgerald, Mary Immaculate College, for her feedback on a draft version of the online survey.

I feel deeply honoured to have rich input from ‘my tribe’ of special education teachers who trusted to share with me their lived experiences. Finally, to my family, friends and others who in one way or another shared their support, thank you.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 Introduction.............................................................................................................. 12

Chapter 2 Literature Review...................................................................................................... 15

Special Education Teachers in Ireland.................................................................................... 15

  Background............................................................................................................................. 15

  A gap in the research. ............................................................................................................. 16

Work-related Stress.................................................................................................................. 17

  Definition of work-related stress. .......................................................................................... 17

  Work-related stressors. ......................................................................................................... 17

  Teacher work-related stressors. ............................................................................................ 18

  Special education work-related stressors. .......................................................................... 19

Impact of work-related stress on special education teachers..................................................... 22

Stress........................................................................................................................................ 22

  Definition of stress............................................................................................................... 22

  Acute stress. .......................................................................................................................... 22

  Response to stressors. ......................................................................................................... 23

  The transactional model of stress......................................................................................... 23

Coping......................................................................................................................................... 25

  Coping with stress and work-related stress........................................................................ 25

  Coping definition. ................................................................................................................ 25

  Coping strategies.................................................................................................................. 25

  Positive and negative strategies. ........................................................................................ 26

  Brief COPE. ........................................................................................................................ 28

Religious Faith.......................................................................................................................... 28

  Background......................................................................................................................... 29
Understanding of religious faith .................................................................30
Considerations when exploring the faith of teachers ...................................33
Religious coping .........................................................................................34
Faith as a coping strategy for teachers .......................................................36
RCOPE .........................................................................................................37
Links with Data Treatment .........................................................................38
Limitations to the journalling approach .....................................................39
Quantitative and confirmatory .................................................................40
Identifying themes .....................................................................................40
Closing Paragraph .....................................................................................41

Chapter 3 Research Methodology ..............................................................42
Methodological Approach .........................................................................42
Research Problem .....................................................................................43
Data Needed to Answer the Research Question .........................................44
Data Collection ..........................................................................................45
Collection of qualitative data .....................................................................45
Collection of quantitative data ..................................................................46
Sample selection .........................................................................................47
Methods of data collection .........................................................................48
Data Processing and Analysis ..................................................................53
Journal entry data .......................................................................................53
Online survey data .....................................................................................53
Qualitative analysis ....................................................................................54
Quantitative analysis ..................................................................................54
Limitations ..................................................................................................55
Bias ................................................................................................................................. 55
Time ................................................................................................................................. 55
Selection bias ...................................................................................................................... 56
Response bias ..................................................................................................................... 56
Non-response bias .............................................................................................................. 56
Ethical Issues ..................................................................................................................... 57
Statement of Positionality as Researcher .......................................................................... 57
Summary ............................................................................................................................ 58

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion .................................................................................. 59
Profile of the Respondents ................................................................................................. 60
Journalling group ............................................................................................................... 60
Survey respondents: ......................................................................................................... 60
Theme 1: Identifying Stressors ......................................................................................... 66
Colleagues .......................................................................................................................... 68
Management ....................................................................................................................... 69
Resources ........................................................................................................................... 71
Administration and paperwork ......................................................................................... 73
Theme 2: Recognising Coping Strategies ......................................................................... 75
Exercise .............................................................................................................................. 77
Social support ..................................................................................................................... 78
Active coping and planning ............................................................................................... 78
Mindfulness and meditation .............................................................................................. 79
Theme 3: Nature of Religious Faith among SETs .............................................................. 80
Definition of religious faith ............................................................................................... 80
Development of faith ......................................................................................................... 81
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Transactional model of stress and coping, redrawn from *Stress, appraisal and coping*, by Lazarus and Folkman, 1984.................................................................24

Figure 2.2 Redrawn from *Faith, spirituality, and religion: A model for understanding the differences* by Newman, 2004.................................................................31

Figure 3.1 Research design: Exploratory sequential mixed-methods........................43

Figure 4.1 Ranking of 10 potential stressors by online survey group ..................66

Figure 4.2 Use of coping strategies by SETs.........................................................76

Figure 5.1 Visual summary of findings ...............................................................93
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Number</th>
<th>Table Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Demographic data of journalling group members</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Setting Comparison and population</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Gender comparison</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Survey respondents: age group</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Survey respondents: number of years teaching &amp; years SEN experience</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Setting * Additional SEN Qual Crosstabulation</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Setting * Extra Role Crosstabulation</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Level of Stress * Setting Crosstabulation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Summary of Level of Stress</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Frequency of stressors coded from qualitative data collected</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Sentiment coded towards colleagues</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Sentiments coded towards management</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Administration and paperwork</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Coping Strategies</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>Exercise used as a coping strategy by age group</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Denominational religious faith identified by survey respondents</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>Has your declared religion changed throughout your life?</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>Prayer when times hard</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>Use of Religious coping strategies- summary of Appendix I</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>Religious faith as a coping strategy</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>Career plan?</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDICES

Appendix A  Invitation to participate in journalling group ........................................109
Appendix B  Journal prompt 1 ..................................................................................112
Appendix C  Journal prompt 2 ..................................................................................113
Appendix D  Journal Prompt 3 ..................................................................................115
Appendix E  Journal prompt 4 ..................................................................................117
Appendix F  Journal prompt 5 ..................................................................................120
Appendix G  Journal prompt 6 ..................................................................................122
Appendix H  Online survey .......................................................................................124
Appendix I  Results from the Brief RCOPE administered to the journalling group 133
Appendix J  Combined qualitative data codebook ......................................................134
Appendix K  Full list of stressors identified ...............................................................141
Chapter 1 Introduction

Recent surveys of the teaching population have identified work-related stress as an increasing aspect of teacher professional life in Ireland (ASTI, 2018; Bolton, 2015; Buckley et al., 2017; Darmody & Smyth, 2011; National Principals’ Forum, 2019). 67% of post-primary teachers report feeling stressed as a result of workload (ASTI, 2018). A survey on special education provision, conducted by the National Principals Forum, a grassroots lobby group, revealed 80.5% of primary principals claim their mental health has suffered as a direct result of their job (National Principals’ Forum, 2019, p. 4). The lobby group claim “the system is past breaking point with only dedicated but weary and demoralised staff to hold back the tide” (p.16). Aoife, a special education teacher, describes how work-related stress has affected her:

‘I had a mini-breakdown - lots of tears - with my principal about this before Christmas. Although he doesn’t fully understand, he was sympathetic and took it on board. He told me afterwards he was almost frightened by how stressed I was and my level of anger about it’ (Aoife, personal communication, February 15, 2020).

Special education teaching can be a challenging role. Special education teachers (SET) in Ireland provide individualised teaching to students- addressing specific needs, teaching small groups or working as team-teachers with a class teacher (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). They often have extra training and are responsible for the planning and coordination of resources. A significant amount of their time can be spent collaborating with other professionals to create individualised learning plans specifying priority areas and interventions needed. When SET perceptions of these duties result in feeling unable to cope, stress can result.
Stress impacts physical and mental health, family life, relationships and workplaces through reduced morale, absenteeism and high job turnover (Russell, Maître, Watson, & Fahey, 2018, p. xii). Conversely, teachers who do not feel stressed are more likely to have effective classroom practices, improve their teaching, positively impact student achievement and are less likely to leave teaching (Cancio et al., 2018, p. 476).

Introducing an extensive Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (Department of Education and Skills, 2019b) indicates the importance of wellbeing within the Irish education system. The Department of Education and Skills shared their vision, that by 2023, “the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education” (2019b, p. 1). Resilience in dealing with the everyday stresses of life contributes to wellbeing. One goal in the document, reflecting teacher inclusion in the whole-school approach, is to raise “awareness regarding supports for teacher wellbeing” (Department of Education and Skills, 2019b, p. 25). There are several ways to support wellbeing.

This dissertation explores how religious faith may play a role in supporting SET cope with work-related stress. Pargament suggests stressful times “provide one of the clearest windows into religious experience” (1997, p. 5). Religion can come to the fore when stressful experiences occur and provide guidance about coping with the experience (Pargament, 1997).

The first task is to identify if work-related stress exists among SETs, and if it does exist, capture baseline data describing the scale of the issue. Using an exploratory mixed-methods approach, qualitative data will be collected on the phenomenon utilising a guided journalling group. A preliminary exploration of the coping strategies employed by SETs in addressing work-related stress will be conducted. Quantitative data will be
collected through an online survey to explore the emerging themes with a larger sample. More specifically, this research aims to explore the role of religious faith as a coping strategy within the SET population and add to the existing knowledge.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review what the literature has to say about key elements of the study. There are six main sections to this chapter reviewing literature related to key elements. Firstly, an understanding of the population of SETs in Ireland will be explored through the literature. Secondly, the phenomenon of work-related stress and stressors will be explored. Thirdly, a theoretical model linking stress and coping will be examined. Next some fundamental ideas underlying coping theory will be presented and an instrument with the potential for exploring coping strategies of SETs discussed. The fifth section will explore religious faith, factors which may need to be considered when exploring the religious faith of SETs in Ireland, and provide an overview of religious coping theory. The chapter concludes with a discussion on possible data treatment.

Special Education Teachers in Ireland

**Background.** Fitzgerald and Radford refer to Irish special education as a “rapidly transforming educational landscape” under “constant re-construction” (2017, p. 453). There has been a dramatic increase in the number of students with special educational needs attending mainstream schools, resulting in an expansion of resources such as special needs assistants (SNAs), special classes and SETs (Banks & McCoy, 2017). Having additional teachers does not necessarily mean extra specialised teachers. Currently, teachers employed as SETs do not need specific training - they simply need to be a registered teacher.

The ‘New Allocation Model’ introduced in 2017 specifies that any fully registered primary teacher can be appointed as a special education teacher (SET) (Department of Education and Skills, 2017b). In primary schools, the SET role is often rotated among staff members.
Similarly, in post-primary, any fully recognised and registered post-primary teacher can be appointed as a SET. In contrast with primary teachers who would typically spend their entire working week focusing on students with special needs, some post-primary SETs spend only a small fraction of their timetable working specifically with students with special needs. Other post-primary SETs spend all their student contact time supporting students with special or additional learning needs.

Teachers working in a special school setting need to be deemed qualified in either primary or post-primary. For this study, all teachers working in a special school setting are considered SETs.

Official circulars advise SETs access relevant professional development (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a, 2017b). To this end, funding has been provided to certain colleges/universities to provide specific post-graduate courses for both primary and post-primary SETs. Post-primary teachers are required to spend a minimum of 11 hours a week, specifically working with students who have special educational needs, to access this training (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a).

**A gap in the research.** Research concerning stress has been carried out on certain groups within the teacher population, such as principals and post-primary teachers (Buckley et al., 2017; Darmody & Smyth, 2011; Kerr et al., 1998). It is possible SETs, the population of which is rapidly expanding (Donohue, 2020), may be experiencing more work-related stress than the typical mainstream teacher due to the rapid change in special education in Ireland. To date, no study has looked explicitly at identifying work-related stressors among SETs in Ireland’s schools. There is limited research identifying coping strategies among teachers in Ireland (Bolton, 2015; Kerr et al., 1998), and no literature can be discovered which explores the association of religious faith with the coping strategies of those teachers.
**Work-related Stress**

**Definition of work-related stress.** The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) defines work-related stress (WRS) as “stress caused or made worse by work” and more specifically “when a person perceives the work environment in such a way that his or her reaction involves feelings of an inability to cope. It may be caused by perceived/real pressures/deadlines/threats/anxieties within the working environment” (2016, p. 6). It is important to note the perception of the individual experiencing stress is central to the definition of stress. “It is a state characterised by high levels of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping” (Levi, 1999, p. v).

**Work-related stressors.** Employers in Ireland have a legal duty to ensure the demands placed on their employees at work are reasonable (Health and Safety Authority, 2016, p. 11). Determining what is ‘reasonable’ can be complex as the source of stress on particular teachers will vary depending on their personality, values, skills and circumstances (Kyriacou, 2001). What is reasonable for one teacher may not be reasonable for another teacher with a different personality, values, skills or circumstances.

There is no single list of stressors available, as the context within which we teach inform the sources of the stress we encounter. They are based on “the precise characteristics of national educational systems, the precise circumstances of teachers and schools in those countries and the prevailing attitudes and values regarding teachers and schools held in society as a whole” (Kyriacou, 2001).

A comprehensive guide on work-related stress was produced on behalf of the European Commission (Levi, 1999). It describes work-related stress, its causes, and consequences. It investigates the challenges faced by employers and describes actions that can be taken to alleviate the difficulties. Some of the common stressors caused by
work include; the level of workload, insufficient time, unclear instructions and role, inadequate capacity and skills (Levi, 1999).

The *Workplace Stress Risk assessment form* from the Health Service Executive identifies the following as categories of potential workplace stressors in Ireland; demands, control, support, relationships, role and change (Health Service Executive, 2018).

Although the literature presented so far is not directly related to the field of SETs and education, it provides a broad range of potential stressors for consideration in this study.

**Teacher work-related stressors.** In 2001, Kyriacou provided an overview of the state of contemporaneous research on teacher stress in the UK and Europe. He examined what had been done to date and provided suggestions for future research. Kyriacou notes the need for research on teacher stress will constantly be there, as schools undergo periods of change in curriculum content, assessment and teaching methodologies (2001). He envisages that this research can inform governments and policymakers on the impact educational reforms have on teacher stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Special education in Ireland is currently undergoing a period of rapid change in teaching methodologies, curriculum content, assessment and settings. Kyriacou assimilated a comprehensive list of stressors associated with teaching, from a collection of other studies; these included administration and time management, role conflict and ambiguity, dealing with colleagues, maintaining discipline and coping with change (Kyriacou, 2001).

**Measuring teacher stressors.** In 1988, Fimian developed a major inventory called *The Teacher Stress Inventory*. Fimian’s inventory considers 135 sources and manifestations of teacher stress, illustrating the complex nature of the issue. Fimian
summarises them into five categories; time management, work-related stressors, professional distress, discipline, motivation and professional investment. The Teacher Stress Inventory has been tested widely and validated in international settings (Boshoff, Potgieter, Ellis, Mentz, & Malan, 2018; Kourmousi, Darviri, Varvogli, & Alexopoulos, 2015).

Some of the teacher attitudes inherent in this inventory have changed significantly since this was published. It includes phrases such as ‘teaching students who are poorly motivated’, ‘students who would do better if they tried harder’, and ‘discipline problems in my classroom’ (Fimian, 1988, p. 49). These phrases display a dated attitude that considered any difficulties stemmed from individual students. Current thinking places more emphasis on how changing the classroom and teaching methodologies to cater for students’ individual needs can affect challenging behaviour and engagement (Hutchinson et al., 2014; McClean et al., 2005; National Council for Special Education, 2012).

While the general categories Fimian identified as stressors appear in current literature, the examples he uses are less relevant today, illustrating how the passage of time can impact on the nature and range of stressors. A study of stressors can only ever capture a ‘snapshot’ of time and place. A researcher aiming to study stress would be wise to conduct some initial qualitative exploration to understand the particular context, and therefore the potential stressors within that context.

**Special education work-related stressors.** Although studies on special education teachers in Ireland are limited there is international research on stress experienced by special education teachers. Haydon, Stevens and Leko conducted a qualitative study examining the sources, effects and protective factors of teacher stress in Midwest, a geographical region of the United States, with a small group of 16 special
education teachers from a variety of backgrounds (2018). Haydon et al. identified stressors relating to health and safety, catering for individual students and stress caused by state mandates (2018). The principal stressor was identified as being related to administration and lack of control over it (Haydon et al., 2018).

Lack of control or agency “is afforded to teachers by the systems and cultures that they exist in, interact with and have influence upon” explains O’Brien (2018, p. 22). O’Brien believes that lack of teacher agency has resulted in crises relating to workload, mental health, recruitment and retention of teachers contributing to work-related stress (O’Brien, 2018).

Results need to be interpreted with care by one working and living outside certain settings. For example, *administrative support* refers to the educational leadership or management of a school in some contexts. In Irish settings, *administration* often refers to the support staff of a school whose duties include general office management and clerical work such as maintaining records and entering data. In Ireland, the special education teacher typically performs a sizeable amount of administrative tasks and is often delegated responsibility for it. Fitzgerald and Radford describe some of the substantial administration duties undertaken by SETs in Ireland as “record-keeping, report writing, timetabling of additional support, identifying students with SEN, making applications for reasonable accommodations in exams and liaison with external agencies” (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017, p. 458).

‘Burnout’ is mentioned in many international studies of SETs. Burnout is classed as an occupational phenomenon which results in exhaustion, negativity towards or mental distancing from one’s job and a reduction in professional efficacy (World Health Organisation, 2019). There are contrary findings on whether SETs experience burnout.
Brunsting, Srekovic and Lane analysed 23 research studies from 1979 to 2013. They focused on studies exploring the burnout or chronic stress, of SETs (Brunsting, Srekovic, & Lane, 2014). The authors concluded there is a strong association between burnout and stressors emanating from individual, classroom, school and district levels. These stressors include “teacher experience, student disability, role conflict, role ambiguity, and administrative support” (Brunsting et al., 2014, p. 681). Cancio et al. concurs that student disability impacts on teacher stress levels (2018).

Research by Beck and Gargiulo produced conflicting findings; it showed teachers of students who were ‘mentally retarded’ showed fewer and weaker symptoms of burnout (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983). Some of the language and attitudes in the study seem dated now; nevertheless, it is a useful study due to the relatively large sample of 462 respondents who took part.

Fewer symptoms of burnout could not be linked to demographic variables suggesting this could be due to an intrinsic factor, such as a common personality type, that may have drawn particular educators to special education in the first instance (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983). They theorised that another possibility is a cultural attitude that special education teachers have ‘superhuman qualities and abilities’ due to the work they do, citing Deshong (1981) in support of this theory (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983). Additionally, they suggest while special education teachers tend to experience more frequent stressful situations, they typically deal with far fewer students and often have a paraprofessional working with them.

Beck and Gargiulo considered the following stressors as contributing to burnout in SETs; work overload, time-consuming responsibilities, custodial and managerial tasks, conflict with other educators, a perceived lack of job success and minimal pupil progress (1983).
**Impact of work-related stress on special education teachers.** International studies have found work-related stress can impact on the quality of teaching, result in teachers feeling tired, and can ultimately mean they leave teaching (Cancio et al., 2018). Conversely, if SETs view their workload as manageable, they tend to stay in teaching (Cancio et al., 2018). SETs who perceive themselves as stress-free use better classroom strategies, positively impact on student achievement, take part in professional learning experiences and have greater job satisfaction (Cancio et al., 2018).

School management teams who wish to keep competent SETs need to encourage and support them in minimising and alleviating stress factors (Cancio et al., 2018).

**Stress**

A study including the phenomenon of stress, requires a thorough understanding of the concept.

**Definition of stress.** It is useful to use descriptive precise language. The word ‘stress’, however, has many meanings. Used as a noun, it can refer to the physiological response to a stimulus or the stimulus itself. Used as a verb, it can describe the experience of going through a stressful event. Stress is “an emergent process that involves interactions between individual and environmental factors, historical and current events, allostatic states, and psychological and physiological reactivity” (Epel et al., 2018, p. 146). A ‘stressor’ refers to the cause, trigger, event, or stimulus resulting in a stressful experience (Epel et al., 2018).

**Acute stress.** Acute stress can stem from a specific event or situation, e.g. a presentation at work. “Following the perception of an acute stressful event, there is a cascade of changes in the nervous, cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems” (Schneiderman, Ironson, & Siegel, 2005, p. 5). These physiological changes are often
called the stress response, and they may be useful (adaptive). “Healthy stress - more of
a challenge than a burden - is characterised by health, productivity, vitality, and
wellbeing, on both the individual and organisational level” (Levi, 1999, p. 77).

The acute stress response can cause harm to health if activated repeatedly or
continuously (Schneiderman et al., 2005). Chronic stress stems from repeated exposure
to acute stress or long-term stressors, such as a toxic work environment or bad
relationships.

**Response to stressors.** Response to stressors is not consistent. They can vary
from individual to individual, due to their appraisal or perception of the stressor. “The
stress process begins with organisational demands and stressors that trigger the stress
response, whose intensity, duration and frequency are influenced by a number of
individual and interpersonal modifiers” (Levi, 1999, p. 77). A particular situation may
appear demanding; it may have high stakes, be new, or need much effort to complete it
correctly. Those demands can be offset if someone feels they have the capacity to cope
with it. For example, they may feel they have experience of something similar or feel
well supported (Epel et al., 2018, p. 156). Levi describes one of the potential benefits of
stress, “When we feel in control, stress becomes “the spice of life”, a challenge instead
of a threat” (1999, p. vi).

**The transactional model of stress.** Lazarus and Folkman presented a theory of
coping and stress in their 1984 seminal text, *Stress, Appraisal and Coping*. Much
current research refers back to the staged process, illustrated in Figure 2.1.
The model shows stress as a process; the environment (in the form of stressors) affects a person who experiences the event through their perception filter. The ‘transaction’ happens between the environment and the person, each affecting the other “in a dynamic, mutually reciprocal, bidirectional relationship” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 293). The person interprets the stressor as positive, irrelevant or dangerous. If dangerous, a second appraisal is experienced, where they examine their capacity to deal with the stressor. If they conclude they have insufficient resources to deal with the stressors, stress results. Coping is the next stage. Coping can have a focus on problem-solving or can be emotion-focused. The correct coping approach depends on whether the stressor is within the individual’s control or not.
Coping

**Coping with stress and work-related stress.** The line between stress and work-related stress is ambiguous when it comes to coping. “Someone who is experiencing stressful life events may find that he or she is less able to cope with demands and deadlines at work, even though work is not the cause and had never been a problem before” (Health and Safety Authority, 2016, p. 6). Consequently, similar processes and coping strategies will be employed to deal with both. The employer may be in a position to provide support at an individual and system level.

**Coping definition.** Coping strategies are part of the process people use to help them manage difficult situations. Coping is what one does in response to a stressor and helps one adapt to the new situation; “We ask ourselves will we be able for this?” (Health and Safety Authority, 2011, p. 2). The response is also known as appraisal - where one assesses a situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Several factors influence appraisals; “confidence, previous experiences, sense of identity and learned competencies will influence our considerations” (Health and Safety Authority, 2011, p. 2).

**Coping strategies.** Coping strategies are an integral part of the transactional theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman. They suggest two aims of coping strategies; either to manage the stressor, known as problem-focused coping (PFC) or to regulate emotions occurring as a consequence of the stressful situation - known as emotion-focused coping (EFC) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies are developmental (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Research shows the developmental level and type of stressor play a role in the kind of coping utilised (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003).
**Problem-focused coping strategies.** PFC strategies can be focused on the environment or the self. They can be focused on changing environmental pressures, barriers, resources and procedures particular to the situation. Motivational or cognitive changes may involve shifting levels of aspiration, finding alternative means of fulfilment, developing new standards of behaviour, learning new skills, developing new procedures or reducing ego involvement (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

**Emotion-focused coping strategies.** EFC strategies are generally used when “there has been an appraisal that nothing can be done to modify harmful, threatening, or challenging environmental conditions” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 150). Some examples of EFC strategies include “avoidance, minimisation, distancing, selective attention, positive comparisons, and wresting positive value from negative events” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 150). Sometimes EFC can also be a form of reappraisal; Lazarus gives an example, “I considered how much worse things could be” (1984, p. 150). EFC strategies are not situation-specific and are used in “virtually every type of stressful encounter” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 150).

EFC strategies are generally considered somewhat less successful strategies than PFC. However, Biggs, Brough and Drummond explain EFC can be useful in the short term- if resources are not there, if situations are uncontrollable, then EFC may allow some time to gather resources to engage in future PFC (2017). EFC can include both “constructive emotional expression and explosive emotional discharge” (Skinner et al., 2003).

**Positive and negative strategies.** Several models of coping strategies describe them in positive and negative terms. Positive (active or adaptive) methods may include exercise, meditation and free time activities (Cancio et al., 2018). Negative or avoidant
methods may include denial, behavioural disengagement, and mental disengagement (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008).

**Positive coping.** SETs tend to choose active coping strategies over maladaptive coping strategies (Cancio et al., 2018). SETs use a wide variety of coping strategies for stress; music, dance, support from colleagues, friends and family, membership of professional organisations, counselling, eating, alcohol, prescription medication, exercise, and yoga (Cancio et al., 2018).

**Negative coping.** Certain patterns of negative coping; such as confusion, panic and rumination, demonstrated by an individual who cannot handle pressures they are exposed to, can signal there is a pressure on the system. Those monitoring the individual, such as employers, can use this information to adjust the system (e.g., to back off demands or increase social support)” (Skinner et al., 2003).

Using harsh methods of coping such as self-blame or negative thinking over a prolonged period can “contribute to the accumulation of vulnerabilities, such as low self-efficacy, losing sight of what is important, or interpersonal hostility” (Skinner et al., 2003).

Coping strategies resulting in one feeling overwhelmed are likely to be accompanied by further reappraisals identifying threats rather than challenges (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

A criticism of categorising coping strategies in positive and negative terms is that many strategies fit into both categories. The models are too simplistic to capture the complexities emerging from the research on coping (Latack & Havlovic, 1992). For example, making a plan (a PFC) also calms emotions (an EPC) (Skinner et al., 2003). Seeking social support seems to fall into neither category (Skinner et al., 2003).
Roth and Cohen agree both active and avoidant strategies can be present at any one time (1986). Their research indicates people may have a particular preference for one or other style. Using one style is not always beneficial. Each style has benefits and costs associated with its use. For uncontrollable situations one is best using an avoidance strategy; “Partial, tentative, or minimal use of avoidance can lead to increased hope and courage” (Roth & Cohen, 1986, p. 817). Resolution of a threat, however, is only possible by approach (Roth & Cohen, 1986).

**Brief COPE.** The *Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory*, usually referred to as the COPE inventory, was developed from various models of coping to assess the different ways people respond to stress (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The Brief COPE is a shorter, self-report questionnaire based on the full COPE, and is designed to identify the coping strategies used by respondents; approach or avoidant (Carver, 1997). Several sub-scales are also reported; active coping, substance use, denial, self-distraction, use of instrumental support, use of emotional support, venting, positive reframing, behavioural disengagement, planning, humour, religion, self-blame, and acceptance. The Brief COPE is particularly useful in exploring coping strategies as it is not designed to be used “in an all-or-none fashion” (Carver, 1997, p. 98). Another useful feature is the ability to adapt the inventory to suit; items can be omitted, it can be used to reflect on past or current situations, or in a dispositional format (Carver, 1997).

**Religious Faith**

This section will look briefly at religious faith in Ireland. It will then consider an understanding of what we mean when we talk about ‘religious faith’. The factors that must be considered when exploring the religious faith and religious coping of teachers will be unpacked. This will be followed by an examination of the theories underlying
the study of religious coping. Finally, the RCOPE developed by Pargament to assess religious coping will be explored as a possible instrument to be used later in this study.

**Background.**

**Religion in Ireland.** The religious faith of the population of SETs in Ireland may be representative of the general Irish population. The most recent census in Ireland was in 2016 where Roman Catholics accounted for the vast majority (78.3%) of the population with the second-largest group (9.8% of the population), comprising of those with no religion (Central Statistics Office, 2016). Among the other religions recorded were Church of Ireland (incl. Anglican Protestant), Muslim, Orthodox, Presbyterian, and Methodist (Central Statistics Office, 2016).

**Change in religious practice.** According to Pargament, scholars often use the term “religion” in a very tight sense when exploring religious faith; restricting it to “institutionally based dogma, rituals and traditions” (1997, p. 38). The numbers of Catholics attending Mass dropped from between 88% and 95% in the 1970s to 45.2% in 2008 (O’Mahony, 2010). If studies focused only on those who attended Mass, they would neglect a large proportion of the religious population because although Mass attendance has dropped, research has shown prayer and connection with God remain important to many Catholics. 40% of Catholics in the Republic of Ireland pray daily (O’Mahony, 2010, p. 14). 35% of Catholics report personal connection with the Divine outside of the Church (O’Mahony, 2010).

The census figures also show show a less extensive drop in numbers. A qualitative approach, using a broad definition of religious faith, may better be able to capture a truer sense of religious experience in 2020.
Understanding of religious faith.

**Definition of religious faith.** When two people discuss religion “one may be speaking of being a good person and having a feeling of closeness to the sacred, the other may be talking about going to church and believing in the truth of religious claims” (Pargament, 1997, p. 24). A definition is needed to prevent misunderstandings, although Pargament suggests one single definition may be impossible to create “because religion is so complex and personal” (1997, p. 24).

Hill, Knitter and Madges describe religious faith as a way of life, which requires action to make the world a better place (1995). They expand further when they say people with religious faith believe there is an “ultimate source for all existence and an ultimate goal in life” (Hill et al., 1995, p. 10).

Pargament supports a broad definition, suggesting religion “comes in many shapes and sizes” (2007, p. 743). He proposes a broad definition would include “both institutional religious expressions and personal religious expressions, such as feelings of spirituality, beliefs about the sacred, and religious practices” (Pargament, 1997, p. 4).

Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones, & Shafranske define religion as “the search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality” (2012, p. 15). The significance here refers to things we care about, “death, suffering, tragedy, evil, pain, and injustice” (Pargament, 1997, p. 27). The significance becomes religious after it “has been invested with sacred character” (p. 32). He simplifies; “Religion has to do with building, changing, and holding on to the things people care about in ways that are tied to the sacred” (p. 32).

**The relationship between religion, faith and spirituality.** The terms religion, faith and spirituality are often used interchangeably in conversations around religion although they do have distinct meanings varying at intensely personal levels. The
variable nature of the relationship between faith, spirituality and religion is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 2.2 (Newman, 2004, p. 107).

![Diagram of the relationship between faith, spirituality, and religion](image)

**Figure 2.2 Redrawn from Faith, spirituality, and religion: A model for understanding the differences by Newman, 2004**

Newman uses the model to describe how faith is the source and foundation for both spirituality and religion; one can be either spiritual, religious or both (2004). The presence of religion or spirituality is an indication of faith, which Newman considers static while one can move up, down, and between the continuums of spirituality and religion (Newman, 2004).

Newman maintains religion and spirituality are dynamic, fluctuating in response to life experiences over time; at “certain times in life, one may be more spiritual and perhaps not as religious. At other times, it could be the opposite: one is more religious, yet not as spiritual” (2004, p. 108).

The idea that one’s level of ‘religious faith’ can be described as a temporary state as opposed to an enduring trait may illustrate why discussing whether one is religious or
not can be difficult. An easier question to answer may be ‘Have you ever had religious faith?’

*Sacred spaces and religious items.* Sacred spaces and religious items can serve as a religious focus which helps shift focus from the stressor (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). Religious spaces, such as temples or churches, often provide a socially accepted space, bridging the gap between work and home. Pandey and Singh researched a sample of 151 female health activists that followed Hinduism; religion was ingrained into the daily routine of the women due to their use of religious rituals, such as praying and visiting a temple, and their philosophical approach to helping others, in keeping with their religion (Pandey & Singh, 2019, p. 322).

Hartwick and Kang suggest that the provision of sacred spaces for teachers within a school could provide “safe places where teachers could connect with their inner life to cultivate a sense of peace, calm, and openness, which could then be applied to the demanding work of teaching” (2013).

*Prayer.* Prayer is a core aspect of many religions. Pargament says people “look to religion for physical health as well as psychological and emotional wellbeing” (1997, p. 53). Asking for recovery from illness is the second most common type of prayer (Pargament, 1997). Thousands of people take religious pilgrimages in search of healing to sites such as Lourdes in France (Pargament, 1997). Prayer, especially contemplative or repetitive prayer, may bring about a physiological response that may change a person’s perception of a stressful event, helping a person’s mental health (Hartwick & Kang, 2013).

Prayer may benefit teachers in other ways. Hartwick and King suggest prayer, as a form of spiritual cognition, may “yield fruits of special insight and intuition” (2013).
In their research, teachers described how they pray to cope with stress and address professional problems (Hartwick & Kang, 2013).

**Considerations when exploring the faith of teachers.**

*Maturation of religious faith.* Religious faith can fluctuate from time to time. For example, some people may feel as though they are losing their faith when they are simply going through a maturation process of examining and questioning their faith (Fowler, 1991; Powers, 2003; Westerhoff, 1976). Religion varies in its “importance and embeddedness in peoples’ lives” (Pargament, 1997, p. 40). It can be an overarching way of life, or it can be restricted to certain transitions in life, or to certain times of year (Pargament, 1997).

*A consciousness of religious faith.* Hull believes people find it difficult to verbalise what they believe; it is easier to describe that which they do not believe. When discussing religious faith, Hull states “people are not generally aware of the rules which govern their thought processes” (1999, p. 42).

*Religious faith outside of institutions.* Religion can be something “passively accepted, handed down from generation to generation” or it can grow out of “active searching or questioning” (Pargament, 1997, p. 40). Pargament suggests “a number of people are searching for significance outside of traditional institutions” (1997, p. 39). Hill, Knitter and Madges feel that while many young people can find it difficult to experience God in traditional church rituals, they may encounter God through the beauty of nature, literature, art, athletics, dance and music (1995). They describe how some such experiences can move us emotionally, beyond appreciating the event to wonder and awe at the author of such an event (Hill et al., 1995).

Similarly, they describe situations where people encounter God in their friendships with others; a mysterious unlimited feeling of loving and being loved
beyond description or analysis (Hill et al., 1995). Pargament, who at one stage had not thought himself religious, describes feeling he was “part of something larger than” himself, when undergoing more stressful times, or when celebrating with family or outdoors: he now considers them religious experiences (1997, p. 15).

**Religious coping.** The topics of religious faith and religious coping merge in the seminal text by Kenneth Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping* (1997). Pargament has published over 200 papers on religion and spirituality in psychology (2005). Subsequent research by others into religious coping tend to refer back to work by Pargament. As a result, this section will frequently refer to studies by Pargament.

Gall and Guirguis-Younger note that research in the mid to late 1980s began to reveal how relevant religious coping was to physical health and wellbeing: the numerous research projects mentioning religion with medical issues, in particular, are a testament to that fact (Gall & Guirguis-Younger, 2012). Studies tend to focus on crises, e.g. medical life or death scenarios involving acute stress - not on chronic stress like day to day work-related stress.

**Underlying theories of religious coping.**

*Main religious styles of coping.* A research project by Pargament, Kennell, Hathaway, Grevengoed, Newman and Jones in 1988, proposed three main religious coping styles (1988).

- Collaboration: involves an active, personal exchange with God.

- Deferring: the individual waits for solutions from God, providing answers to questions the individual is less able to resolve.

- Self-directing style: which emphasises the freedom God gives people to direct their own lives, an active approach which stresses personal agency.
They found individuals who used a collaborative approach also tended to use a deferring approach as situations warranted. The type of approach most useful depends on the context of a situation. A self-directing style may be most useful when an individual can control a situation (Pargament et al., 1988).

Positive and negative religious coping. When the terms ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ are typically used with coping, they normally reflect whether they successfully allow a person to cope, especially long term. When the terms are used in relation to religious coping, they tend to address the individual’s relationship with the Divine. “Positive religious coping methods reflect a secure relationship with a transcendent force, a sense of spiritual connectedness with others, and a benevolent world view. Negative religious coping methods reflect underlying spiritual tensions and struggles within oneself, with others, and with the divine” (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011, p. 51)

Pargament, Koenig and Perez list the positive strategies as religious purification, forgiveness, religious conversion, religious helping, seeking support from clergy members, collaborative religious coping, religious focus, active religious surrender, benevolent religious reappraisal, spiritual connection, and marking religious boundaries (2000). They describe the negative strategies as spiritual discontent, demonic reappraisal, passive religious deferral, interpersonal religious discontent, the reappraisal of God’s powers, punishing God reappraisal and pleading for direct intercession (Pargament et al., 2000).

A meta-analysis into religious coping mechanisms and stress by Ano and Vasconcelles found “a moderate positive relationship exists between positive religious coping strategies and positive outcomes to stressful events” (2005, p. 473). According to Pargament, people using religion as a coping mechanism experience less stress, anxiety and depression than those who do not (1997).
When do people use religious coping? According to Pargament, many people reference religion as a coping strategy when asked how they cope with stressful situations (2000). Studies have shown people “turn to religion as a resource in their efforts to understand and deal with the most difficult times of their lives” (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 52). Religion provides ways of making sense and responding to difficult situations such as death, suffering, tragedy, evil and pain (Pargament, 1997).

Religious people benefit by bringing a bank of religious resources with them when they encounter stressful situations; the “depth and nature of this reservoir is unknown” until it is tested (Pargament, 1997, p. 5). Unsurprisingly, more religious people tend to be more aware of religious coping methods and use them more often (Pargament, 1997). When tested, people are “more likely to turn to religion in the face of more difficult situations” and “more religious people are more likely to cope through religion” (Pargament, 1997, p. 155).

Faith as a coping strategy for teachers. Teachers may be able to use their spirituality or religious faith as a strategy for dealing with work-related stress, and schools may have a role in encouraging and supporting this (Cook & Babyak, 2019). Hartwick and Kang suggest that as work-related stress is so widely acknowledged as an issue in teaching, pre-service teachers should be supported with the development of a personal stress management plan; student teachers in Christian institutes should “be encouraged, not compelled, to consider spiritual coping strategies” (2013). Hartwick and Kang explore a variety of spiritual practices employed by teachers with religious faith as a means of dealing with stress such as prayer or meditation (2013). They suggest schools could support teachers with purposely designed retreats which “could focus on educational issues and yet draw upon religious traditions and spiritual disciplines such as prayer and meditation, reading and contemplation of scripture,
meeting with a spiritual advisor, and corporate worship” (Hartwick & Kang, 2013). There is a need for more research regarding the relationship between teachers, sources of stress, coping strategies and their religious faith (Cook & Babyak, 2019; Kyriacou, 2001).

**RCOPE.** The RCOPE is a comprehensive measure of religious coping developed as a way of exploring links research found between religious and spiritual factors and mental health (Pargament et al., 2000). It was also intended as a way to help practitioners “better integrate religious and spiritual dimensions into treatment” (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 54). “It provides a theoretical framework that assess religious coping as a function of religion” (Pargament et al., 2000); the emphasis is not on what the person does, rather on how religion assists the person in understanding and dealing with the stressors. It concentrates on five key religious functions; meaning, control, comfort/spirituality - the desire to connect with a force beyond the individual, intimacy/ spirituality - connection with others through spirituality and, finally, life transformation with subscales within each key area.

As well as positive, effective methods, the RCOPE considers negative (possibly ineffective) methods of religious coping also, e.g. punishing God reappraisals, spiritual discontent and pleading for direct intercession, all of which can be associated with greater distress (Pargament et al., 2000).

There is an overlap between many religious coping strategies and those not considered religious. The RCOPE considers active, passive and interactive coping, problem and emotion-focused approaches and cognitive, behavioural, interpersonal and spiritual domains (Pargament et al., 2000). When the sacred is an inherent part of the coping strategy is when a strategy becomes religious. Pargament gives an example of a person coming to terms with job loss; one can get emotional support from friends
(social support), they can search for a new job (active planning), or they can reframe the loss as a chance to start afresh (1997). None of those strategies qualify as religious coping. The coping becomes religious when the “sacred is woven into the person’s aspirations, and responses: when the situation is viewed as an opportunity to get closer to God” (Pargament, 1997); the congregation could provide emotional support or links to job opportunities, the Bible could be read and provide a source of comfort, or God could be blamed for the loss (Pargament, 1997). Those strategies would be considered religious.

One issue with the RCOPE is the extensive length of it; it has 105 items. This makes it challenging to use in situations where it is not possible to ask people to complete such a lengthy assessment. Consequently, a condensed version, the Brief RCOPE was created. Research by Pargament, Feuille and Burdzy suggests the Brief RCOPE is a reliable and valid measure which presents findings consistent with the RCOPE (Pargament et al., 2011).

Links with Data Treatment

This study aims to explore the association of religious faith in coping with work-related stress among SETs in Ireland. As has been seen through the preceding discussion, religious faith is deeply personal and complex. As such, a qualitative approach is appropriate to examine the phenomenon thoroughly. Such an approach, however, would only relate to the experiences of a small sample of the population under study. In order to investigate if the results can be generalised, it will be useful to conduct a quantitative study also. For this reason, a mixed-methods approach will be adopted.

The first strategy will use a guided, journalling approach. The use of guided journal writing can help to “capture an experience, record an event, explore our
feelings, or make sense of what we know” leading us to make new appreciations and understandings (Boud, 2001, p. 9). This method provides participants with time to reflect deeply, which may not be possible using other research instruments such as focus groups. Qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon seen through the eyes of the population been studied (Wilmot, 2005).

In 2005, Hubbs and Brand considered reflective journalling and learning theories. Journalling is an opportunity for the writer to “mull over ideas, uncover inner secrets, and piece together life’s unconnected threads, thus creating a fertile ground for the significant learning” (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 62)

Through writing, an opportunity is created for inner dialogue to be crystallised, connecting feelings and thoughts with actions allowing journalists to apply new meaning, understanding or interpretations of the events experienced (Hubbs & Brand, 2005). Hubbs and Brand consider a journalling approach is particularly useful with adult learners, moving them away from their automatic, habitual way of thinking toward a more rational, critical way of thinking (2005). They caution that it is important for the writer to have trust in the journal reader; the writer should have clear expectations for the use of the material produced and an idea of the quantity and quality of the feedback (Hubbs & Brand, 2005).

Limitations to the journalling approach. There are also limitations to this method. Writing for others to view “can profoundly shape what we write and even what we allow ourselves to consider” (Boud, 2001, p. 15). The writer may “experience the desire to please the instructor, to say the right things, or to seek approval and validations of his or her feelings, thoughts, and values” (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 66). The reader must take this into account when reading the journal entries. Guiding the writing process from the outside is a useful way of challenging the beliefs and ideas
held by the writer which can otherwise be processed and reprocessed in a personal journal in a self-affirming manner (Hubbs & Brand, 2005).

Reliable research is concerned with whether a study can be repeated and elicit replicable results. However, it is unlikely the results of this guided journalling group would yield the same results in a similar study. Even utilising the same participants, their understanding of the key issues would change having reflected on it (Carcary, 2009).

**Quantitative and confirmatory.** Due to the relatively small sample that could be used in the journalling process, it makes sense to use a second method to verify that the experience of the small group can be generalised to the broader SET population. It is plausible that some findings may be transferable (Carcary, 2009). The introduction of a second method, an external validation, should help confirm the findings within the small group and protect against the impact of an outlier or deviant case within the smaller sample (Carcary, 2009). The journalling group aims to get meaningful, reflective qualitative data. The second respondent group aims to find out if these personal experiences are reflective of the wider SET population and the extent to which this is the case.

The focus of the second method is both quantitative and confirmatory. How many feel the same way as the smaller group? Does this vary within distinct populations such as primary and post-primary settings? In order to collect this data, a survey will be conducted using a questionnaire.

**Identifying themes.** Identifying themes can be a complicated task as people use different terms, labels, codes or expressions to express inherently similar concepts. A variety of scrutiny techniques can be used to identify the themes; such as repetitions,
analogy and metaphors, transitions, linguistic connectors, and identification of missing data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

By using a priori themes garnered from the literature, the examination of the material can be accelerated. However, it will be essential to leave space for unexpected, surprising themes which may be overlooked if the original framework of themes is rigidly adhered to (University of Huddersfield, 2019).

**Closing Paragraph**

This chapter set out to provide a thorough discussion of the current knowledge relating to key aspects of the focus of this study. An overview was provided showing the background of the population of SETs in Ireland. A review of the literature surrounding stress, work-related stress, religious faith and religious coping was offered. The chapter concluded with some consideration of the type of methodological approach needed to achieve the aims of the study.
Chapter 3 Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach of this study, introducing the approach taken. The research problem is explored. The methods of data collection are described in detail, giving specifics of the research methods used, the materials used to gather data, and the criteria used to select participants. This is followed by a description of the processing and analysis of the data. Next, the methodological choices used to achieve the goals of the study are evaluated and justified. Possible limitations of the approach chosen are acknowledged, and finally, how this approach contributes new understanding to the research field is discussed.

Methodological Approach

The phenomenon of stress is experienced by individuals through their senses and can have multiple manifestations. As noted in Chapter 2, the perception of the individual experiencing stress is central to definitions of the concept of stress. Additionally, religious faith and coping are multidimensional and complex. This combination of factors, along with a gap in current research, resulted in an exploratory approach to this study.

An examination of the literature revealed an exploratory, sequential, mixed-methods design would best achieve the goals of the research to investigate the association if any, Irish special education teachers make between their religious faith and coping with work-related stress. Creswell describes this approach: qualitative data is first gathered to explore a phenomenon, and identify themes followed by the collection of quantitative data which may explain relationships found in the qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). The sequencing and weighting of an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach can vary, so Creswell recommends including a schematic to help readers identify the sequence and priorities of the data collection (Creswell, 2012).
Figure 3.1 describes the design of this research. This study adopted a mixed-methods approach using a guided reflective journalling group to gather qualitative data, followed by an online survey collecting primarily quantitative data.

Creswell explains the “mixed-methods researcher emphasises the qualitative data (QUAL) more than the quantitative data (Quan)” (Creswell, 2012, p. 550).

Using capital letters on the word ‘qualitative’ in Figure 3.1 signifies priority in this project is given to the qualitative data with the primary role of the quantitative data being a support to the qualitative data findings. Similarly, ‘thematic analysis’, also displayed in capital letters, is given greater weighting in this study than the descriptive statistics analysis of the quantitative data.

**Research Problem.**

This research explores the views, understanding and experiences of SETs from a variety of settings to gain an insight into the associations they make between their religious faith and coping with work-related stress in Ireland in early 2020.
The initial stage of this research explored the current knowledge available through an examination of literature based on the phenomenon of stress, work-related stress among teachers in international and national settings, coping strategies and the role of religious faith in coping.

A search of the literature found no studies of stress among special education teachers in Ireland. An analysis of the literature also revealed the circumstances under which work-related stress typically occurs. The hypothesis was made that it was likely SETs were experiencing work-related stress.

The transactional model of stress and coping reveals the concept of stress depends very much on the perception of the individual. The literature identified several categories under which coping strategies, which help people manage difficult situations, could be classified. One of those categories is religious faith. The literature proposed that religious faith is a useful coping strategy for certain types of stressors.

Exploratory research is needed to explore the Irish context: does work-related stress exist among SETs in Ireland? If so, to what extent? What stressors are present? What coping strategies do they use? Do they associate their religious faith with their coping strategies?

**Data Needed to Answer the Research Question.**

Creswell proposes the phenomenon of stress can be studied in numerous ways such as observation, individual interview, interview of individuals who interacted with the individuals, or by physical examination (Creswell, 2012). These methods all result in qualitative data.

Quantitative data would be required to see if the experiences of a few individuals could support the generalisation of the results to a broader sample of SETs and validate the findings. Collecting statistics from a larger group can be used to offset
the experiences which were only collected from a few people, such as in a smaller qualitative research group. Creswell suggests collecting a second form of data can support the primary form of data (Creswell, 2012, p. 554).

Mixed-methods research allows for integrating in-depth exploration of a phenomenon through qualitative data collection and for generalisation through numerical measurement and quantitative data collection. It allows for the collection of numbers and stories often required by policymakers (Creswell, 2012, p. 543).

Cresswell supports using a combination of methods instead of a single method because each method has its strengths and weaknesses. He uses the term ‘triangulation’ to describe this, meaning one can use data collected from different sources or at different times, different methods or different modes to reach the same conclusions (Cresswell, 2012, p. 543). Collection of both qualitative and quantitative data is thus warranted.

Data Collection

Collection of qualitative data. Reflection is critical when considering a personal and sometimes sensitive phenomenon such as work-related stress. Time spent reflecting between the posing of a question and answering typically results in a more thoughtful, in-depth answer. Religious faith is also a difficult topic for some people to discuss. Drawing on the work of Hull, Creswell highlights how people often find it difficult to verbalise what they believe about religious faith; often, their actions contradicting their speech (Creswell, 2012).

For these reasons, the use of a focus group or interviews to get qualitative data was rejected. Interviews often require lengthy transcription which could limit the number of research participants due to time constraints. Two disadvantages of mixed-methods study are the volume of data collection required, and the longer time
requirement (Creswell, 2012). One strength of focus groups, however, is the ability to respond to others, and this strength was adopted in the final journal prompt; participants were given a chance to respond to observations made by other participants. The qualitative data collection method chosen was a journalling group.

Dunlap utilised journalling in her research studies as research has shown it to enhance critical thinking, encourage reflection and capture changes in participants’ perception (2006). According to Hubbs and Brand, guided reflective journalling allows participants “to mull over ideas, uncover inner secrets, and piece together life’s unconnected threads, thus creating a fertile ground for the significant learning” (2005, p. 62). It is useful to uncover meaningful learning and deep reflection when conducting qualitative research.

The collection of the journal entries was made using Microsoft Forms. Microsoft Forms is an online tool which allows a researcher to create a form and collect responses from participants in real-time. All data is directly collated into an MS Excel spreadsheet.

There are three main benefits to this. Firstly, no transcription is required. The responses are inputted directly by the participant, removing one of the main limitations of collecting qualitative data, as manual inputting is known to be time-consuming. Secondly, direct input allows for the elimination of transcription errors and enables the participant to reflect and edit their contribution. Thirdly, it is easier to maintain confidentiality. No personal contact was needed in the selection of participants in the journalling group. The consent form submitted by the participants is the only document recording their identity.

**Collection of quantitative data.** The design of the quantitative instrument in an exploratory mixed-methods study can be informed by the qualitative findings
RELIGIOUS FAITH, WORK-RELATED STRESS & IRISH SET

(Creswell, 2012). Creswell recommends the use of surveys when one is seeking to assess the “trends or characteristics of a population; learn about individual attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and practices” (2012, p. 403). The aim of this research exploring the association of religious faith in coping with work-related stress among SETs in Ireland meant that a cross-sectional survey examining “current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices” (Creswell, 2012, p. 405) is an ideal form of quantitative data collection.

The quantitative data collection method chosen was an online survey instrument; again, Microsoft Forms. Microsoft Forms was used to gather quantitative data that might support the generalisation of findings from the qualitative phase. There are some advantages to using an online survey instrument. A web-based survey can gather extensive data quickly (Creswell, 2012). Using mostly closed-ended questions in an online survey allows for the easier analysis of results from a large sample. Microsoft Forms can analyse some forms of data within the program, and it allows export of data collected for further, more detailed analysis using analytical data software such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Difficulties using web-based surveys can arise. According to Creswell, the response rate to web-based surveys may be low and may be biased towards certain demographic groups tending to use computers (2012, p. 544) The sample in this study consisted of volunteers garnered from a well established Facebook group catering to the target population.

Sample selection. According to Coyne, sample selection has a profound effect on the quality of qualitative research (1997). This is especially true in an exploratory study. Participants in the journalling group were invited from the ‘Special Education Teachers Ireland Supporting Each Other’ Facebook page (see Appendix A). Members of this page are all members of the sample population and were easily accessible.
Twenty-nine teachers volunteered for the journalling group, and 11 participants were chosen based on demographic criteria such as age, gender, teaching experience, and setting. As a significant focus of this study examined religious faith, volunteers who did not claim membership of any particular religious faith were excused.

This sampling procedure can be described as purposeful sampling; participants were “intentionally selected according to the needs of the study” (Coyne, 1997, p. 629). There are variants of purposeful sampling (namely maximum variation, phenomenal variation and theoretical variation); phenomenal variation allows coverage of variables helping us understand how diverse factors may impact the phenomenon (Coyne, 1997, p. 628). Coyne describes the initial phase of this method as starting the study “where the phenomenon occurs” (1997, p. 625).

Participation in the online survey was again invited from the Facebook group; however, acceptance criteria were widened to include all SETs regardless of religious faith affiliation. The final section in the survey allowed for the early exit of those without a current religious faith.

**Methods of data collection**

*Phase 1: Journalling group.* The first phase of data collection occurred over two weeks commencing on February 5, 2020. After the selection process, participants in the journalling group were emailed with further information about the research and they were required to fill in a consent form. A *short guide to reflective writing* (Library Services, 2014) was attached to the email.

Collection of data was facilitated by Microsoft Forms. Over the two weeks, links to forms were emailed to each participant containing journal prompts in the form of questions. There were six forms in total spread over the two weeks, and participants were invited to write as much or as little as they wanted. There was space under each
prompt to answer. Their answers were inputted automatically to a spreadsheet, analysis of which informed the prompts in subsequent forms.

**Prompt 1.** This had a broad focus and asked participants to describe a typical workday, the best parts of their job and the worst parts of their jobs (see Appendix B).

**Prompt 2.** This prompt included the Health and Safety Authority definition of work-related stress. The questions requested a personal response to five apriori themes on work-related stress garnered from the literature. These themes had been referenced naturally by the journalists in the reactions to prompt one also. The themes were; workload, role ambiguity, colleagues, change and wellbeing. A free-text box was added for journalists to include stressors not fitting within those categories (see Appendix C).

**Prompt 3.** This prompt included definitions of acute and chronic work-related stress and requested participants describe a recent acute or chronic stressful situation affecting them. They were asked to identify what made it stressful, whether they felt they could deal with it and what strategies were used in coping with it.

The topic of religious faith was introduced. They were asked what the term religious faith meant to them, and if they associated their religious faith with the coping they had described (see Appendix D).

**Prompt 4.** This prompt required the participants to identify the coping strategies they used through the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). This questionnaire is a 28-item multidimensional measure of strategies used for coping in response to stressors. The answers identified the extent to which they use specific coping strategies. The results of this were emailed back to the participants individually.

Participants were also given the following statement; “In general, people who do use religious coping strategies such as prayer, are more likely to use them when an event is assessed as harmful, unmanageable, challenging, or threatening to them or
others.” They were asked did they use prayer, and if so, why. They were asked to describe how they coped with uncontrollable situations (see Appendix E).

Prompt 5. This prompt delved deeper into the religious aspect of the study. The prompt was introduced with a paragraph giving some reasons, taken from the literature, explaining why discussing religious faith may be a difficult topic for some to talk about.

The Brief RCOPE was then administered (see Appendix I for results). It is a 14-item measure of religious coping with major life stressors. This form was constructed from a Christian perspective to include individual and institutional expressions of faith and was used after confirming the teachers had all declared membership of the Christian religious faith. If that had not been the case, this prompt would have responded to that and looked different.

Subsequent questions sought to see if their understanding of religious faith had changed through reflection and if they had discovered alternative ways of coping they might consider in future. An opportunity was offered to record further reflections or insights (see Appendix F).

Prompt 6. This was the final prompt. Seven statements were drawn from previous submissions made by the participants. All participants were asked to respond to those statements to gain further insight into the emerging themes of workload, colleagues, parents and loneliness. They were asked for specific suggestions that may help other teachers in coping with work-related stressors. Their response to a particular coping strategy, such as career change, was sought (see Appendix G).

Phase 2: Online survey. The use of the journalling group to first identify themes and supporting statements was essential in the creation of an instrument, in the form of the survey, broadly measuring the experiences of the wider population regarding topics
that are typically very sensitive. The first draft of the survey was piloted by a small group of 10, and feedback resulted in changes.

An introduction to the survey explained the layout. Respondents were advised of the ethical considerations, treatment of data and the right to discontinue. Consent to participate was given through completing the form, and respondents were advised of this.

Section 1. The final survey consisted of four sections (see Appendix H). Section 1 explored demographic variables such as gender, school setting, confirmation respondents were a special education teacher, years teaching, years teaching as SET, qualifications and training in SEN and additional responsibilities within the school.

Section 2. This section explored stressors and coping strategies. Respondents were given the Health and Safety Authority definition of work-related stress as “stress caused or made worse by work” and more specifically “when a person perceives the work environment in such a way that his or her reaction involves feelings of an inability to cope” and asked for the frequency with which work-related stress affected them. Response choices ranged from ‘Never’ to ‘A great deal’.

The next question required respondents to rank a total of the ten most frequent stressor themes identified by the journalling group. An opportunity to add other stressors experienced was offered in the form of a free text box.

Exploration of coping strategies was conducted with an adaptation of ‘The Brief COPE’ which was designed to facilitate the broader examination of coping strategies in naturally occurring situations (Carver, 1997). The author of the scale recommends a flexible use of the instrument, adapting the scale to assist with the reduction of time demands on survey respondents allowing researchers to focus on the aspects of coping of particular interest (Carver, 1997, p. 98). Ten general categories of coping strategies
were chosen based on the responses of the journalling group to the full version of the Brief Cope. Participants were asked to identify the extent to which they used each coping strategy ranging from ‘Not at all’ to ‘A great deal’. Where the title of the category was unclear, an explanation was added to aid the respondents understanding. An opportunity to add other methods of coping was offered in the form of an optional free text box.

Section 3. In Section 3 survey respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed to a selection of statements made by SETs who participated in phase 1. Closed responses in the form of a 5 point Likert scale were offered with choices ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’.

Section 4. Section 4 explored the impact of religious faith on coping. The first question in this section asked respondents to name their current religion if any. The next question asked if their declared religion had changed throughout their life. Branching was used in this part of the survey. Respondents who answered ‘Yes’ or ‘Maybe’ were invited to expand on their answer. Those who answered ‘No’ skipped to the next question. Those who answered ‘Not Applicable’ were brought to the end of the survey.

Two subsequent questions asked respondents to react to statements made by participants in the journalling group. The first was a two-part statement; (a) “I don’t identify with the religion I grew up in.” (b) “However, I can still benefit from what I have learnt from it.” Respondents could choose to agree or disagree with the parts independently.

The second statement from a journalling participant, encapsulated one of the main findings from the review of the literature; “When things are going good, I may not dwell much on my religious beliefs. However, if I am faced with a difficult situation in
either my personal or professional life, I will use prayer as a way of keeping calm, seeking help and as a way to cope.” Respondents used a 5 point Likert scale of agreement to respond.

Again a free text box was offered for respondents to add other ways of coping relating to religious faith.

Finally, the survey concluded with an opportunity to submit final thoughts in a free text box. In total, it took about 10 minutes to complete the survey.

Data Processing and Analysis

**Journal entry data.** Data processing started on submission of the final journal entry in response to each form. A visual examination was conducted of the data, and the data was entered into NVivo 12. The auto coding feature was used to quickly elicit themes that needed to be responded to in subsequent journal prompts.

Completed journal entries were combined into one spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel. Email addresses, collected to match journal responses, were removed and replaced with pseudonyms. The data was cleaned by completing a spelling and grammar check to aid clarity. All Likert scale responses were coded into numbers to help analysis.

**Online survey data.** A similar process was followed with the online survey data; qualitative data was checked for spelling and grammar errors. Respondents were sorted into three settings; primary, post-primary and special school. The data were examined to ensure respondents met the research criteria. All Likert scale responses were coded into numbers to aid analysis. An extra column was added to indicate whether a respondent had an extra role within the school, other than SET. A further column was added to indicate whether a respondent had an additional SEN
qualification, and finally, a third column was created to show if a respondent identified a denominational religion.

Respondents could skip certain fields accidentally and some fields were not available to all as a result of branching; this resulted in some empty fields. ‘999’ was inserted into empty cells to identify invalid or missing data.

**Qualitative analysis.** The qualitative data from each journal prompt was imported into NVivo regularly and autocode to influence subsequent journal prompts. After the data collection had finished, the autocode themes were archived as they had fulfilled their initial purpose of quick coding to inform data collection.

The online survey data was also imported into NVivo, as it also included some qualitative data. The analysis of both data sets involved thematic analysis of the responses. The files from the journalling group and the open-ended responses from the broader online survey were then coded manually. Files were coded separately. Each new idea was coded with at least one code. The coding framework was populated with apriori themes garnered from the literature and supplemented by emerging themes – new codes were added as new themes emerged (see Appendix J). The final coding framework focused on themes, rather than on individuals; it reflected the group rather than the individual perspectives.

**Quantitative analysis.** Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS Statistics, a software package used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data. Descriptive statistics are used to “indicate general tendencies in the data (mean, mode, median), the spread of scores (variance, standard deviation, and range), or a comparison of how one score relates to all others” (Creswell, 2012, p. 182).
Limitations.

The main limitation of a mixed-methods approach is that it is typically more time consuming to conduct. Creswell describes mixed-methods research as “time-consuming, requiring extensive data collection and analysis” (Creswell, 2012) He suggests the researcher needs to know both methods, and each method needs to be done well and in-depth (p. 535). This can be a drawback; however, it can also be an opportunity for a novice researcher to experience and learn from both qualitative and quantitative paradigms.

If a researcher were to consider replicating this study, consideration should be given to the recruitment of journal respondents who would consider themselves as having a strong religious faith. This might achieve richer data from the journal respondents regarding religious faith.

Some compelling data regarding religious faith practices linked to coping were obtained from some of the online survey respondents. The precoded answers in the survey may have been frustrating for survey respondents who wished to elaborate further rather than tick the box.

Bias

Time. Collection of data was carried out in February 2020 over the first two weeks for the journalling group. It could be argued that the time of the year could impact the data collected. Some respondents mentioned this; one cautioned “Please be aware that your results may be skewed by the fact that this is target review and rewrite season.” Another wrote, “I wonder if this survey were done during the first term when stress is the worst between timetabling, testing, support plans and RACE would your data change?” and a third said “I find the stress is equally bad in every term now.”
As the Covid 19 global pandemic has impacted on much research carried out in early 2020, it is worth noting that the first report of an Irish case happened on 28 February, 2020 and Irish school buildings closed on 12 March 2020 due to the pandemic (RTE, 2020). Online survey data collection for this research started 29 February and was complete by 6 March 2020. No mention of the pandemic was made by participants.

**Selection bias.** For the journalling group, purposive selection bias was employed: from the volunteers, only respondents who named a religion were selected to take part in the journalling group. Religious participants were chosen because a clear focus of this research was on religious faith.

During phase two, a response was invited from the broader population of SETs. Purposive selection bias was used again, the final section of the questionnaire on religious faith was not available to respondents if they identified that religious faith did not apply to them. The use of branching logic allowed for sensitivity to personal boundaries and reduced the number of questions not relevant to particular populations.

**Response bias.** Response bias is a type of bias where the subject consciously, or subconsciously, gives a response they think the interviewer wants to hear (Creswell, 2012). Volunteering for a study that explicitly states its purpose is to research work-related stress may lead respondents to adapt their response to fit in with what they expect might be anticipated findings. Likewise, respondents who feel stressed may be more likely to take part. Careful sequencing of journal prompts and questions was employed to reduce response bias as much as is practicable.

**Non-response bias.** Non-response bias must also be considered in the second phase. The initial invitation to the survey mentioned the focus of the study was work-related stress and religious faith. Potential responders who do not experience work-
related stress or identify with a religious faith could have opted out of completing the survey because they felt they had no information to add to the discussion.

**Ethical Issues**

This study involved the participation of non-vulnerable adults. Ethical issues regarding the journalling group mainly involve privacy and concerns around data storage. Informed consent was collected from the journalling group participants. Names were not attached to any of the data collected at any stage, and all contact was made solely through digital means. No potentially identifying information was disclosed in the narrative, and the identity of participants was masked through the use of a pseudonym. Journal entries submitted were kept in a secure, encrypted file without names attached to it. The data were retained only for the current study and destroyed once complete.

Names were not requested from the survey respondents, and IP addresses were not collected. Participants were advised of their right to discontinue participation in the study until they submitted their responses, should they wish to do so. However, once the responses were submitted there was no way of tracking them so they could not withdraw consent at that stage. They were informed of this.

**Statement of Positionality as Researcher**

As the author is a member of the population under investigation, there may be unconscious bias present from personal experiences. There are also potential benefits; a shared sense of identity may invite participants to take part that may not otherwise participate. Creswell notes quantitative data researchers are generally in the background and their personal biases and interpretations concerning the interpretation of data are seldom discussed (2012). He goes on to say qualitative researchers make up for this weakness but they are also subject to bias in their interpretations (Creswell, 2012).
Malterud suggests a “researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (2001, p. 483). He further suggests different approaches do not make a study unreliable but can “result in an increased understanding of complex phenomena” (Malterud, 2001, p. 484).

**Summary**

This chapter has described the methodological approach of the study. It has outlined the research question and identified the type of data needed to answer it. The process used to collect the data and analyse it has been charted. The choice of methodology has been justified, and limitations acknowledged. By following this process, new information will be presented in the next chapter adding to current understanding about special education teachers in Ireland, the stressors they experience, and the association they make between their coping strategies and their religious faith.
Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

This chapter will initially describe the demographic profile of the sample population, comprising of the journalling group and the survey group. The instruments used to collect the data are available in the appendices A-I and are described in Chapter 4. The context will be set by the inclusion of settings, roles and qualifications of the sample population. Data describing the extent of stress across settings will be presented. Finally, four main themes will then be explored in more detail.

Table 4.1 Demographic data of journalling group members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>SEN Qual</th>
<th>Years of teaching</th>
<th>Yrs SET</th>
<th>Current religion, if any?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orlaith</td>
<td>Special School</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keri</td>
<td>Special School</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aidan</td>
<td>Post-primary</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aoife</td>
<td>Post-primary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Post-primary</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eireann</td>
<td>Post-primary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aoibhín</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Catholic upbringing/Buddhist adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Catholic upbringing-none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dearbhla</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Catholic Non-practising Presbyterian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nessa</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Non-practising Presbyterian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liadh</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Catholic (but I greater practise mindfulness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ASD class)
Profile of the Respondents

Journalling group. The demographic characteristics of the journalling group members are summarised in Table 4.1. Eleven (nine female and two male) special education teachers took part in the reflective journalling group. Two work in special schools, four in Post-primary, five in Primary- one of which work in a special class for students with a diagnosis of ASD.

Survey respondents:

Respondents. Four hundred and six qualified SETs, registered in Ireland, completed the online survey.

Setting. SETs teachers are assigned to primary, post-primary and special school settings in Ireland. In primary and in special schools these posts are typically full-time posts. In secondary, time is allocated on an ‘hours’ basis and can be shared by many teachers. An example of this is where a school may be allocated 22 hours; these hours could be served by one teacher or spread among any number of teachers. Table 4.2 shows special schools are accurately represented proportionately by the survey respondents, but post-primary schools are under-represented, balanced by a slight over representation of primary school settings.

Table 4.2 Setting Comparison and population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SET Allocations 2018</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>9,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special school*</td>
<td>1,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTE Post-primary</td>
<td>4,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>14,928</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2017
**Population.** A precise number identifying the SET population is unattainable. Available numbers do not represent the number of post-primary teachers working as SETs accurately due to the structure of contracts in schools. Many SETs in post-primary work as subject teachers as well as having a SET role—51 of the 106 post-primary respondents identified as subject teachers as well as working as a SET. Eighty-four have 11 or more hours as SET, 18 have less than 11 hours as SET. In 2018 there were 4,133 (whole time equivalent) SETs in post-primary. In 2018, there were 9,295 SETs in primary schools. 2018 figures are not available as yet for teachers in special schools. In 2017 there were 1,498 teachers in special schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a). These figures are illustrated in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.3 Gender comparison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2017/2018 Teachers Employed in Ireland</th>
<th>SET Facebook Group</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47851</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>9123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12386</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>60237</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>9901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The data in column 2 is from “Education indicators for Ireland,” by Department of Education and Skills, 2019 (www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/).

Table 4.3 shows the gender breakdown of all teachers in Ireland; the majority (79.4%) are female (Department of Education and Skills, 2020). The proportion of females among the SET population may be higher, similar to the proportion in the Facebook group. The gender breakdown of SETs in Ireland is not available as that information is not collected by the Department of Education (E. O’Flanagan, personal communication, May 15, 2020). The gender breakdown of the survey respondents is
consistent with the gender breakdown of 10,078 members of the ‘Special Education Teachers Ireland Supporting Each Other’ Facebook group; 94.1% female and 5.9% male (Facebook, 2020). 95.1% of survey respondents (n 386) were female with 4.4% (n 18) males.

**Table 4.4 Survey respondents: age group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age group.** There are no official age range statistics available on teachers. Table 4.4 shows a wide range of ages is covered by the survey respondents.

**Experience.** Similarly, statistics are not available showing experience. Table 4.5 below show a range of experience is covered by the survey respondents.

**Table 4.5 Survey respondents: number of years teaching & years SEN experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>SEN Experience</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 or more years</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>11 years or more</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 11 and 20 years</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 8 and 10 years</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>2-4 years</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 and 7 years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>This is my first year</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 5 years</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this study is examining work-related stress (WRS), details were also collected on factors that may impact WRS. An additional role may be expected to add additional stress while an SEN qualification may be expected to alleviate it.
**SEN qualification.** As can be seen in Table 4.6, while 61.1% of respondents had an additional SEN qualification, 38.9% did not. There were significant differences between the three settings. Post-primary SETs were more than twice as likely to hold a special education teaching qualification than a primary school SET. Primary and special school settings were comparable.

**Table 4.6 Setting * Additional SEN Qual Crosstabulation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>No (N)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Yes (N)</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-primary</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28.30%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>71.60%</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>72.70%</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27.30%</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special school</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>72.70%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27.30%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>61.10%</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>38.90%</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Extra roles.** Examples of extra roles include API and APII posts, and teaching principal or deputy principal roles. Special education coordination duties are often assigned as part of an API or APII role, but they are also assigned outside the management structure, so this was offered as an option also. Fifty-nine respondents have SENCO duties outside of a management role.

With regards to additional roles, SETs in primary and special school settings were split almost evenly between those with an extra role and those with no extra role (see Table 4.7). Post-primary SETs were twice as likely to have an extra role (distinct from subject teaching and their SET role). 51 of the 106 post-primary teachers teach a subject as well as have SEN teaching hours.
Table 4.7 Setting * Extra Role Crosstabulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Extra Role</th>
<th>No (N)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Yes (N)</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Primary</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29.20%</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70.10%</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
<td>47.20%</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>52.80%</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special school</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>54.50%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45.50%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
<td>43.10%</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>56.90%</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Work-related stress experienced across settings. As can be seen in Table 4.8, special school teachers tended to report higher levels of WRS than post-primary SETs who report a higher level of WRS than primary SETs.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Darmody and Smyth found 45% of primary teachers in 2011 reported feeling either very or fairly stressed by their job (2011, p. 26). Table 4.8 shows 48% of primary SETs report feeling a moderate or a great deal of stress in this study. This figure rises to 91.1% if those who feel stress occasionally are included.

A 2018 study of post-primary teachers found 67% reported feeling stressed about workload (ASTI, 2018, p. 16). The ASTI study did not clarify a definition of stress or the level or frequency of stress experienced. Table 4.8 shows 75.7% of post-primary SETs report experiencing stress occasionally, a moderate amount or a great deal. Investigating work-related stress, Bolton reported 60% of second-level teachers “found teaching either very or quite stressful” (2015, p. 68). 59.4% of post-primary SETs reported a moderate amount or a great deal of stress in this study. The numbers are similar but use different descriptors.
No existing figures could be found relating to teachers in special schools.

57.6% of special school teachers in this study report feeling a moderate amount or a great deal of stress in this study.

**Table 4.8 Level of Stress * Setting Crosstabulation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Post-primary</th>
<th>Special school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Level of Stress</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Setting</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Level of Stress</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Setting</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Level of Stress</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Setting</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A moderate amount</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Level of Stress</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Setting</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Level of Stress</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Setting</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Level of Stress</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Setting</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Work-related stress overall summary.** As can be seen in Table 4.9, over 50% of SETs report experiencing WRS ‘a moderate amount’ or ‘a great deal’, whereas, 0.5% ‘never’ experience WRS.
The figures discussed above suggest SETs do experience work-related stress. Comparing the level of stress with previous studies of similar populations is difficult as there is no standard way of reporting levels of stress from study to study, which makes comparisons of the phenomenon more difficult.

**Theme 1: Identifying Stressors**

![Figure 4.1 Ranking of 10 potential stressors by online survey group](image)

Ten potential stressors were identified through the literature and the journalling group. These were ranked by respondents to the online survey in order from top stressor to bottom stressor and are illustrated in Figure 4.1.
From the ten categories of potential stressors offered, ‘workload’ was ranked first by 52.4% of the survey respondents. 88.2% of respondents placed it within the top three stressors. ‘Lack of time’ was ranked first by 12.9% and within the top three by 76.9%. ‘Student behaviour’ and ‘role ambiguity’ were ranked in third and fourth place.

An opportunity was given to respondents to add additional stressors not offered for ranking. This allowed for new and emerging themes to develop. The resulting data were included for analysis with the rest of the qualitative data. Seven hundred ninety-eight references to stressors, with 26 different codes were identified in total from the qualitative data collected. ‘Colleagues’, ‘management’, ‘resources’, ‘admin and paperwork’ took the top 4 positions for the most coded references within the qualitative data (see Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10 Frequency of stressors coded from qualitative data collected**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Data sets</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Admin and paperwork</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Outside Agencies</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Student Behaviour</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Parents and home</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Skills and knowledge</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A full list of the stressors identified qualitatively can be found in Appendix K.

Eight of the ten stressors appear in both the unrestricted qualitative and prescriptive quantitative lists. Assessments and role ambiguity were offered as a choice in the quantitative survey but were not referenced in the top ten themes in the qualitative data.
The top four most referenced codes from the qualitative data coding framework were chosen for in-depth discussion. These are the themes most likely to contribute new data.

**Colleagues.** Colleagues were referenced 97 times. References to colleagues were mixed; both positive and negative sentiments were expressed, with a slight emphasis on negative sentiment (see Table 4.11). Aoife captured this when she wrote, “I think for me, it’s 50:50, some colleagues are fantastic, and some are not.” As discussed in Chapter 2, studies by Kyriacou and Haydon also identified colleagues as both a stressor and support (2018; 2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>No. of coding references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Colleagues</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Colleagues - Mixed</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Colleagues - Negative</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Colleagues - Neutral</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Colleagues - Positive</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive sentiment towards colleagues used words like support, family and team. Keri used all those terms when she wrote, “I’m happy to report that in my setting, my colleagues are a huge support network: we are a team and a family.”

Many of the negative references relate to two main sub-themes; role and classroom practice.

Firstly, SETs and their colleagues have different interpretations of their role, which sometimes causes friction. Aidan writes that colleagues do not understand “the boundaries or limitations of our role.” He believes class teachers think “that special needs are not part of their remit; that we, SETs, are the only ones that deal with special needs.” Eireann reasons, “Many teachers feel they don’t have the necessary training to teach the myriad of disabilities in front of them. They try to remove students from their
classes to go to learning support when they should be differentiating for the students. That leads to difficult conversations with colleagues when you insist they need to be in the mainstream.”

Part of the SET role is to work and support class teachers, but this brings an extra workload. “If they are having difficulties they all land looking for advice- that can be nice sometimes as you can share ideas, but sometimes you feel that you just wish they would go away and get on with it,” says Orla. Finding time to collaborate can be difficult; “Corridor nabbing, constant negativity at every door you knock on to collect a child/group/team teaching. Discussing the behaviour of a child you support during lunch break etc. (I sometimes don't even go into the staff room)” says a primary school teacher who identifies as experiencing a moderate amount of work-related stress.

Secondly, SETs want to see mainstream teachers using evidence-based methodologies with their students, and they feel frustrated when they perceive this is not happening. Aoife, a post-primary teacher, feels there is a “lack of knowledge and a basic understanding of SEN”. Aidan, another post-primary teacher, receives “constant referrals from colleagues who may not have tried to differentiate”. Aoibhín, working in a primary setting, tries hard “to ensure that all staff follow best practice as opposed to their own opinion!” She sometimes feels “practice was being decided on a whim or an opinion” and was not evidence-based, resulting in “the stress of seeing the upset of the kids.” Aoibhín reflects, I knew “the best practice to use but maybe didn’t have the skills to ensure it was followed.”

Management. ‘Management’ was referenced 77 times, by teachers who are managed and teachers who manage others, e.g. special education teaching principals or SETs working with SNAs. Table 4.12 shows the sentiment breakdown toward management. Many neutral references related to management as part of a procedure,
e.g. “I asked management to query all of this,” “One member of management deals with the family” and “Go to management to request they attend any multidisciplinary meetings”. Negative sentiment was the next most common.

**Table 4.12** Sentiments coded towards management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Number of coding references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Management</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Management - Mixed</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Management - Negative</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Management - Neutral</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodes\Stressor\Management - Positive</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents sometimes feel more knowledgeable about special educational needs than management. Aoife says she finds management more of a stressor than other colleagues; she says “Management don’t have any knowledge in this area, so don’t seem to get it.” Stress can be caused when management liaises with outside agencies. “Management hold a monopoly over contact with NEPS, so it’s like a triangle, sometimes the information is incorrectly transferred from management to NEPS and vice versa, as management don’t have SEN experience and have limited understanding,” explains Aoife.

SETs can feel powerless when they must go against their own judgement. One post-primary female teacher talks about a colleague appointed to a SENCO post without qualifications or experience in SEN; “I now have to take instructions (and poor ones at that) from her. I feel she does not have the experience or expertise in the role and is quite simply doing what she is told by senior management, and the children are suffering.”
Teachers are tasked with giving SNAs guidance and direction. “Managing SNA’s and their personalities, while not having any training in this type of management position” is a stressor says a teacher who works in a special class in primary. Aoibhín, a primary school teacher, identifies ‘Managing other staff” as one of the worst aspects of her job. Aoibhín illustrates this when she describes “seeing SNAs using practices that I know will lead to distress/ deregulation/ dependency for children.” “As the main teacher working with SNAs in our school- I find managing conflicts etc. between SNAs very difficult- although I know that's not my role! Because I have so many dealings with the SNAs, it tends to be me that gets the brunt of their disgruntlement” writes a deputy principal in a primary school. Sentiment towards SNAs is not all negative, 9 out of 40 references are positive; “I have two SNAs (godsends)” says Keri who works with students in the severe to profound range in a special school setting.

Eireann believes the SENCO role “needs to be a managerial position order to be able to put systems in place; you cannot tell colleagues with more experience and authority what to do, even though to do the job properly, you need to ensure they are doing necessary planning and paperwork. It’s a very tricky situation!”

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Brunsting identifies support from management as a factor alleviating SET burnout, and a lack of support, contributing to it (2014, p. 696). Similarly, Haydon et al. identified the impact supports, or lack of support from management can have on teacher stress (2018). The data both from this study, and the literature provides convincing evidence of a strong association between teacher stress and school management, playing either a preventative or a contributive role.

**Resources.** Lack of adequate resources was referenced as a stressor 67 times. Brunsting identified lack of resources as contributing to teacher stress; suggesting principals can support SETs by providing emotional and instrumental support by
“helping to secure resources, listening and attempting to resolve their concerns” (2014, p. 703).

In this study, lack of resources refers to the insufficient supply of substitute teachers, the allocation of SEN hours and the shortage of suitable books and teaching resources.

Special education teachers report being pulled from their assigned work to cover for absent colleagues as substitute teachers are not available. “Not being able to find substitute staff or the lack of sub cover provided for leave such as uncertified sick leave or force majeure can cause a lot of stress and extra workload for some teachers if they have to cover colleague’s absence,” says Orlaith. One female primary teacher describes the guilt she feels towards missing the students on her caseload; it is “very difficult to promise ‘I’ll do x with you the next day’ as you don’t know if you’ll be able to!” An experienced primary school teacher, complains about an increased caseload “due to the principal misusing other SETs as subs and to reduce pupil-teacher ratio despite circulars!”

Keri talks about having to research and create resources from scratch; “It isn’t a case of open your books on page … Our books, resources etc. are mainly all researched and handmade - so it’s very time-consuming! It requires a lot of pre-planning, and yes, there is an element of stress associated with that”. Lack of resources is an issue for Liadh as well; “I need an equipped team to support my students and do not have this.”

Some teachers feel the SEN hours allocated are insufficient. “Within our school, it is a lack of sufficient SETs to manage the workload. We were allocated an increase of 20 hours under the reprofiling of our school. Under that circular, we were only allocated 20% of that increase. In my view, the 20 hours was insufficient as it was” says one primary principal. This impacts directly on the students; Orlaith does not feel she has
“enough time to help all the individual children.” Mention of substitute teachers was not found within the literature reviewed. It can be seen from the analysis of the qualitative data time spent sourcing substitute teachers impact on management time and on students who miss their special education teacher support. It also impacts SETs emotionally contributing to stress.

**Administration and paperwork**

Unsurprisingly administration and paperwork emerged as a stressor. It is a theme emerging from several studies (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983; Brunsting et al., 2014; Fimian & Santoro, 1983; Haydon et al., 2018; Kyriacou, 2001; Levi, 1999).

When the survey group participants were asked whether they agreed with statements relating to workload, time and paperwork made by some of the journalling group, there was overwhelming agreement; 59.2% strongly agreed, and 33.2% agreed (see Table 4.13). This contrasts with 2.0% strongly disagreeing and a further 1.5% disagreeing. 6 out of 8 of those disagreeing came from primary school settings. 6 out of 8 of these had more than five years of special education teaching experience.

**Table 4.13 Administration and paperwork**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The workload is unmanageable&quot;, &quot;There is simply not enough time&quot;, &quot;Juggling! The never-ending lists!&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sub-themes relating to paperwork refer to the amount of it, ambiguity around what is needed and its impact.

Respondents became very descriptive over the amount of paperwork which they described as excessive, pointless, mountainous, endless, ridiculous, and drowning in. “Endless paperwork which I never seem to be able to get nearly completed; it's like shovelling snow when it's snowing.” says one primary teacher. Nessa explains, “Maintaining child profiles is very time consuming and unmanageable.”

There is also a wide variety of paperwork. Keri, from her special school setting, describes “a box to tick, red tape to jump over, checklist after checklist, recording sheets, ABC charts, medicine administration records, outside of all of our required teacher planning (long /short term plans, Cuntas Míosúil’s and IEPs); the list really could go on and on and on.”

What paperwork is needed is unclear. This was referenced in all settings. There is “ambiguity around paperwork,” writes one primary school SET and “uncertainty about how much paperwork is needed,” writes another. Aidan, in post-primary also talks about the uncertainty of what is required; “Endless amount of paperwork without appropriate training to do the same. A lot of guesswork at times.”

All this paperwork does not necessarily follow the student. “I’ve almost 17 years teaching in special education, and I’ve never been so frustrated,” writes Keri, “this pupil, let’s call her Mary, has had many school placements but yet has very little paper trail.”

The time utilised by completing paperwork pulls the SET away from other priorities. Paperwork impacts on teaching time. “I love the students but find the ever-growing paperwork demands are getting frustrating at this stage and is burning up the energy that I would much prefer to put into the students,” says Orlaith. The focus is
“shifting from enjoying teaching child in front of you to planning targets” laments one primary teacher.

Paperwork impacts home life. One primary teacher spends “many, many hours doing required paper-work at home, which exacerbates family stress.” “The home stress of the never-ending paperwork!!! That’s a whole other story!” says Keri. “I spend a lot of time at home on the computer, adapting templates to minimise the work required by my colleagues in regards to the paperwork that we need to submit” expands Keri.

An efficient structure is not always there to support the completion of paperwork. “Assessments and paperwork have to be kept piling up on the desk until you can get access to the principal's office. All paperwork relating to students is locked into the principal's office, which is not always easy to access” writes a young female post-primary teacher who is a SENCO outside the management structure.

Theme 2: Recognising Coping Strategies

Ten possible coping strategies were identified and adapted from the Brief COPE inventory. Typical examples were added to the strategies to aid comprehension of the categories. The extent SETs used the ten coping strategies are shown in Figure 4.2.

- 22.3% used ‘a great deal’ of active-coping and planning.
- 16.8% used ‘a great deal’ of social support.
- 13.3% used acceptance ‘a great deal’, and 12.5% used ‘a great deal’ of humour.

Some strategies were not used at all by some respondents.

- 73.6% reported they do not use denial as a form of coping.
- 68.1% report ‘not at all’ using alcohol or drugs to cope with stress.
61.8% (46 n) report ‘not at all’ turning to religion as a coping strategy. Twenty-three of these declared themselves as having a current denominational religion.

The two respondents turning to religion ‘a great deal’ identify as Catholic.

Think about how you try to understand and deal with major problems in your life. To what extent is each involved in the way you cope?

Figure 4.2 Use of coping strategies by SETs

The qualitative data on coping strategies show much in common with the results of the quantitative data. Active coping and planning, social support and acceptance were strategies identified by both methods. The qualitative approach identified new themes; apriori themes did not fully incorporate exercise, mindfulness, meditation, and improving SEN knowledge. The following discussion will examine the most referenced themes from the qualitative data. Turning to religion as a coping strategy was ranked 18th in this list.
Table 4.14 Coping Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Data Sets</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coping Strategies Collated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Coping and planning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness and meditation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for help</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing, staying calm</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise. 17.9% (87n) of the 467 references to coping strategies referenced exercise. These references were typically one-word answers. Exercise (44n), walking (20n), and yoga (7) were the most frequent words mentioned. Nine respondents referenced exercise outdoors, to get fresh air or to connect with nature. Aoife explained, “exercising helps my brain to focus on something else.”

Exercise is considered an active coping method by Cancio (2018, p. 461). It typically does not appear as a distinct coping strategy in the literature, but the frequency with which it was mentioned by the participants contributes to it being coded as a separate strategy in this study. Cancio suggests SETs “are no longer able to balance the long hours that their heavy workload requires with other more adaptive leisurely activities, such as exercise, yoga, etc.” (2018, p. 474). The data gathered by this study, shown in Table 4.15, does not support that suggestion within the SET population in Ireland. 12.0% of the 20-29 age group mention using exercise, this rises to 22.7% of those 30-39 and remains fairly steady until rising to 33.3% mentions by the small number in the 60+ age group. Future studies could explore this further.
Social support. 12.6% (59n) of the 467 references to coping strategies referenced social support of some sort. Friends (10n), colleagues (8n) and family (5n) are where most SETs find social support. Eireann “seeks comfort from friends and family”. Aoife gets a “listening ear from friends who are also teachers”. Keri often has “a little chat with myself, my husband or friends and their support is often the most beneficial remedy to help me build myself up again.” Fourteen respondents report accessing social support from professionals and referenced doctors, therapy, psychotherapy and counselling.

Management could support those experiencing work-related stress by facilitating strong social support within schools, as suggested by Skinner in Chapter 2 (2003, p. 231).

Active coping and planning. As discussed in the literature review, Cancio et al. found SETs tend to choose active coping strategies over maladaptive coping strategies (2018). Examples given by SETs in Ireland, of active coping and planning, include; lists (14n), organising (13n), asking for help (6n) and bringing work home (4n). Maladaptive coping strategies, such as substance use and denial, were not chosen often. 68.1% report never using alcohol or drugs to reduce distress.
SETs use a wide variety of active coping and planning. Liadh advocates using tick lists: “Try and condense paperwork to tick lists. I recently had an inspection, and she told us to cut out all unnecessary paperwork, make it functional with checklists.” Nessa makes use of every little chunk of time; “Sending kids to the bathroom and organizing them for lunch is time-consuming. Use these little snippets of free time to write up notes.” Cara says she has “got very good at asking for help. I am honest with officials when I’ve found myself struggling and have found even the Inspectorate to be sympathetic when asked for support.” Eireann advises others to “pick an object on the route home and switch from school mode to home mode at that part of your journey.”

**Mindfulness and meditation.** SETs referenced mindfulness (17n) and meditation (19n) as coping strategies. Meditation is classed as a positive coping strategy by Cancio (2018). SETs often used one-word answers about mindfulness and meditation, but occasionally respondents qualified whether their practices pertained to religious faith or not. “Not religious faith, but meditation helps to calm me,” writes one post-primary teacher. Another SET linked her religious practice with mindfulness, writing “Mass can be a mindful space.” Aoibhín recognised the blurry line between meditation and prayer when she wrote “not prayer in a traditional sense. I would meditate.” One post-primary teacher talks about using “Mantras like This too will pass”, questioning “Is that more philosophical than religious or faith-based?”

A post-primary teacher, with a Masters in Religious Education, expanded on the links between them; “A lot crosses over with emotional regulation and well-being, with what is currently referred to as mindfulness; Taizé music, attitude, perspective, nature of love, the spirituality of various traditions.”

Hartwick and Kang, as discussed in Chapter 2, suggest schools could support teachers with education-based spiritual retreats, drawing on “religious traditions and
spiritual disciplines such as prayer and meditation, reading and contemplation of scripture” (2013, p. 183).

**Theme 3: Nature of Religious Faith among SETs**

69% of all the respondents identified as having a denominational religious faith see Table 4.16). When examining the religious faith of SETs, it is vital to consider what the teachers understand about the term. It is also essential to appreciate the factors impacting on their understanding of the term.

Table 4.16 *Denominational religious faith identified by survey respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>357</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>‘999’</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>406</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition of religious faith.** The journalling group were asked to define what the term ‘religious faith’ meant to them. Dearbhla summarised it vaguely as “belief, hope”. Aoibhín and Liadh described it in terms of personal spirituality. Liadh alludes to a personal faith by saying “Faith to me can also mean Spiritually- where you let everything go and just breathe and be.” “For me, it means what kind of spirituality I have to understand and connect with others and the outside world,” said Aoibhín.

Some included a reference to the sacred or divine in their definition. Aidan said faith is a “belief that there is a higher power”. “A belief that someone watches over us and a belief that there’s a heaven,” writes Aoife.

Orlaith, who, throughout her journalling, describes her faith as being very important to her, links the divine with the personal. She says “faith to me means believing in God.” She also describes how intensely personal faith is; “It is part of who
I am - faith is your lived life.”

Participants in the study tended to favour a broad definition of religious faith, similar to the one Pargament proposed; “both institutional religious expressions and personal religious expressions, such as feelings of spirituality, beliefs about the sacred, and religious practices” (1997, p. 4).

**Development of faith.** Religious faith is not a static concept - it changes throughout one's life. The nature of religious faith changing and developing over one’s lifetime has been discussed in Chapter 2 (Fowler, 1991; Newman, 2004; Pargament, 1997; Powers, 2003; Westerhoff, 1976). This development is illustrated well in the examples given by the participants. Aoibhín touched on it when she wrote “I don't feel like I have to identify with the religion I grew up in. However, I can still benefit from what I have learnt from it. I can also add this to new insights or practices that I have gained from other religions.” This insight was explored further through the survey group when they were asked to agree or disagree with parts of her statement. 27.3% of those who responded agreed with both parts of her statement.

The survey group explored if their religious faith had changed throughout their life. The multiple-choice answers offered were yes, no, maybe and not applicable. As can be seen in Table 4.1, 73.8% of respondents said ‘no’, 20.8% said their religion had changed, and they were invited to expand on their answer.

Sixty respondents referred to their faith weakening; over half describe themselves as no longer practising any religion; a typical example reads, “I no longer practise or believe in the religion I was born into.” Others describe still having faith but not attending religious services now. “While I don't attend Mass, I still try and live my life as a Christian.” Six respondents talked about disillusionment with the church; one says, “I have become more disillusioned with the church’s treatment of women &
children. Women are second class citizens and have no active role besides arranging flowers and cleaning. Mass is stale, and I get little from it. I do, however, know some great priests who are great people. As usual, management is out of touch.” Another says “I have faith and hope, but I feel the RC church has let its community down with the abuse and patronising response from much of the magisterium. I am aware of hardworking priests and nuns and laypeople, but at the moment I feel quite distanced from the institution. This may change.”

Table 4.17 Has your declared religion changed throughout your life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Cumulative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>370</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six respondents describe their faith growing stronger. One describes their faith as becoming “embedded in lifestyle.” Another said their faith “has developed and changed and reflects a private part of who I am.”

Three respondents talk about the transformation of their faith. One was raised Catholic and found herself “Buddhist for a while.” Another was baptised Catholic but considers herself “more Church of Ireland…now more drawn to the teachings and philosophy of Hinduism.” The third describes her faith as being impacted by marriage. “Really neither fish nor flesh. I am in a mixed marriage and brought my children up as
Protestant. I know that community, and worship there. I also attend Church of Ireland services, and Catholic family and school ceremonies.”

5.4% of respondents used the option ‘maybe’ to answer this question, perhaps validating Hull’s thesis that sometimes people find it difficult to verbalise what they believe (Hull, 1999).

**Prayer.** There were 26 qualitative references to prayer. Thirteen participants referred to why people prayed. “I have faith, and when I spend time in prayer, I feel strengthened and helped by this,” says a female deputy principal who is in her 40’s. “Nightly prayer is an important ritual for me,” writes a female teacher from a special school, who describes herself as experiencing ‘a great deal of stress’, to “give thanks and also ask for guidance and inspiration in my personal and professional life.”

Orlaith summed up Pargament’s assertion that we do not know the depths of the reservoirs of our faith until we need it (1997). She wrote “When things are going good we may not dwell much on our religious beliefs. However, if I am faced with a difficult situation in either my personal or professional life, I will use prayer as a way of keeping calm, seeking help and as a way to cope.” Survey respondents who declared a current religion were asked to respond to Orlaith’s statement using a Likert scale (see Table 4.18). 41.4% of the 365 valid responses either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with Orlaith- they turn to prayer when times are hard.

Other references to prayer, focused on how often people prayed; some daily, others only in times of stress. Prayer is an acknowledged source of psychological and emotional support within the literature (Pargament, 1997, p. 53). “I pray every day throughout the day; praising God when things are going well, asking for help when things are hard,” writes a primary school teacher who occasionally experiences work-related stress. Aidan turns to prayer as a last resort, “when I am worried about
something, and I have no one else left to turn to.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Valid</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>365</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Missing</strong></td>
<td>999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>406</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two respondents considered what is meant by the term prayer. Keri ‘chats’ to her deceased past pupils, “a quick hello and say lads give me a hand today ... perhaps this is a prayer to some people?” Aoibhín describes her use of prayer as non-traditional in form. She says it is “not prayer in a traditional sense. I would meditate. I would try and let things settle in meditation to allow space in my mind and allow solutions to surface if any.”

**Sacred spaces, ceremonies, and items.** In Chapter 2, Hartwick and King suggested school management could provide sacred spaces for teachers within the school; the peace and calm gained from visiting the space could feedback into teaching (2013, p. 184). Participants in this study give several examples of finding peace and support through sacred spaces, rituals and items.

A primary school teacher in her 50’s, describes the social support to be gained from attending Mass: “I believe that old fashioned prayers and litanies, novenas and attendance at Mass or worship helps us bond and share life events. It keeps us going in hard and difficult times.”
Eleven respondents referred to sacred spaces such as churches and liturgical ceremonies within the churches. They referred to how the “Mass can be a mindful space,” and allow “time to reflect.” They found comfort in “the sense of sameness and predictability of ceremonies.” Orlaith describes finding the same sense of peace in Lourdes. “Lourdes is a special place for me. Going there in my early 20's when I was in a difficult dark place in my personal life was a wonderful calming helpful experience. As a result, I try and go every couple of years for a short trip, especially if I was going through something extra difficult. I always find the peace and the sense of prayer and faith there an extraordinary calming experience.”

Others found support from rosary beads and the lighting of candles; “Lighting a candle in the church before a WSE!” One primary school teacher describes how she reads “the Bible to see what God says about various situations.” She recites the verse “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” as a passage supporting her.

**Faith within schools.** Ten mentions were made of faith concerning school and professional life. Some teachers are neutral or negative towards faith within schools. Eireann, who identifies as Catholic, said, “I am teaching in a faith-based school, but religious faith is not very important to me personally.” Another primary teacher says “Religion in schools only adds to stress - diocesan advisor visits, sacraments etc.”

Others struggle personally with religious faith. One primary school teacher, who identifies as having no current faith, when asked how her religious faith helps her cope with work-related stress wrote “Sometimes a walk to the church with all the children to get out of the room and to give us all a break? I don’t know if that counts.” She then continues “If God was real, why would he let children be abused? That’s where faith fails, in my opinion. He supposedly made the universe yet he also made cancer and MND and all those other diseases?” The literature is in agreement in identifying how
questioning God’s power can be a part of the maturation development process of faith; they say this can sometimes feel as though one is losing their faith (Fowler, 1991; Powers, 2003; Westerhoff, 1976). Pargament, Feuille and Burdzy categorise questioning God’s power as a negative religious coping strategy, reflecting internal spiritual conflicts (2011). This is associated with less favourable outcomes than positive religious coping (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005).

One teacher reveals, although she turns to religion for support in her personal life, she does not see a place for it in her professional life. “I don't turn to religion when facing difficulty in my professional life, but I do turn to it for issues in my personal life,” she says.

The remaining references are made by teachers who do link their religious faith to their professional life. “I revert to my faith at extreme crisis points in my life to include major incidents related to work,” says Dearbhla. Orlaith agrees, “If I am faced with a difficult situation, in either my personal or professional life, I will use prayer as a way of keeping calm, seeking help and as a way to cope.”

One teaching deputy principal who experiences a moderate amount of stress in school describes how she finds comfort and reassurance through the love and care of deceased family members. She carries “memorial cards of my parents and favourite prayers with me on my person to work. I put my hand on them at various times to give me courage.”

**Theme 4: Faith as a Coping Strategy**

As discussed under Theme 2, the survey respondents were asked to describe the extent to which religion was involved in the way they coped with significant problems in their life. 61.8% of the 406 respondents said, ‘not at all’, 27.8% said ‘somewhat’, 7% replied ‘quite a bit’, and 3.5% replied ‘a great deal’. Within the journalling group,
religious coping was not a strategy used as often as other types of coping strategies. The results from the Brief COPE undertaken by the journalling group show, of the fourteen possible categories of coping strategies used, religion is placed eleventh. This reflects the usage of religion as a coping strategy reported by survey respondents.

The Brief RCOPE was administered to the journalling group. It is a measure assessing “the full range of religious coping methods, including potentially helpful and harmful religious expressions” (Pargament et al., 2000). While the survey respondents represent the wider SET community, the journal group members were primarily selected as they identified as having a denominational religion, and it was expected they would show some measure of religious coping. Table 4.19 presents a summary of the Brief RCOPE results (see Appendix I for full results).

Table 4.19 Use of Religious coping strategies- summary of Appendix I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative (N)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative %</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive (N)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive %</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show three of the respondents do not report using religious faith coping strategies at all; Eireann and Keri identified as currently having a Catholic faith and Nessa, identified as presently being a non-practising Presbyterian. Cara was raised as a Catholic but identified as having no current faith. She responded ‘Somewhat’ to the statement ‘I ask forgiveness for my sins.’ Other than that, the rest of her responses were ‘not at all’. The remaining six respondents (Brian did not complete this journal entry), tended to use the ‘positive-resource’ religious coping strategies ‘somewhat’ and the ‘negative-struggle’ religious coping strategies ‘not at all’.
The qualitative data gathered gives us some insight into the nature of these ‘positive-resource’ religious coping strategies. One hundred fifty-five references were coded as related to religious faith (see Table 4.20). The bulk of these, 138, came from the open text fields of the survey respondents.

**Table 4.20 Religious faith as a coping strategy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Data Sets</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith as a coping strategy collated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining Control through Religious methods</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God-Comfort and Closeness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others-Intimacy and Closeness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RCOPE theory was used as a framework to examine religious coping strategies. The five theoretical functions outlined by RCOPE Theory are meaning, control, comfort/spirituality, intimacy/spirituality, and life transformation. Comfort, meaning, and intimacy were the themes emerging most frequently in this study.

**God- comfort and closeness.** References in this theme were most related to seeking spiritual comfort from God’s love and care. “God has a plan for us all” explained one primary teacher, “he will not see us coming to harm”. Another, talks about the “knowledge that God will look after me and not give me something that I can’t deal with.” A third, trusts she will “be guided by God to do the right thing in each situation.”

These statements reflect positive religious coping strategies which are suggestive of “a secure relationship with a transcendent force” (Pargament et al., 2011, p. 51). They are also beneficial coping strategies; likely leading to “less stress, anxiety and depression” (Pargament, 1997).
That the support and comfort aspect of religious coping is the most referenced is unsurprising, given the isolation many SETs report. Aoife talked about the "worry and stress of being alone making decisions regarding a student’s future, questioning if I’m doing the right thing." She continued, "I feel I’m fighting alone for her (the student's) best interests." 60.4% of the survey respondents either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with Aoife (see Table 4.21).

**Table 4.21 Isolation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second most common reference is related to spiritual connectedness with a divine force transcending the individual. One primary school teacher describes how her religious faith helps her cope: “It’s like having a discussion with a friend. No advice is given, but I’ve unburdened myself, and this helps me cope with what the next day will bring.”

Another teacher, who describes herself as experiencing ‘a great deal’ of work-related stress, has “learned of the value of tuning into the persons of the Trinity to help me at different stages of my life.” She goes on to note that, “because I practise and
attend regularly, I hear these messages often and difficulties or stressful times can be contextualised.” This exemplifies what Pargament said regarding more religious people being more aware of religious coping methods and using them more often (Pargament, 1997).

Seeking a spiritual connection can take time. One teacher described how she was born into a Roman Catholic family, became Buddhist for a while and is not currently a member of any organised religion. She says she has studied many religions and takes aspects from all. “I believe I am a spiritual being having a human experience, that my soul has had many lives” she reveals.

The third most common reference relates to taking some time out and engaging in a religious activity shifting focus from the stressor. A religious focus such as a place, ceremony or object can serve to shift a focus from a stressor and provide support (Pargament et al., 2000). “Attending mass keeps me in touch with my faith, I sing in a gospel choir,” remarks one respondent; “Doing something I enjoy has a positive effect.” Thirteen references were made about sacred spaces such as churches and oratories often linked to words such as peace and calm. “I love to spend time in an empty church and light a few candles. I find the time very therapeutic and come out much lighter than when I go in. I need to make the time to do it more,” reflects a survey respondent.

**Meaning.** One coping strategy involves the reappraisal of the stressor as something benevolent or potentially beneficial. When this struggle to find meaning from stressful situations involves religious faith, it then becomes a religious coping strategy. Often these reappraisals will involve the belief there is a greater plan we are not privy to at the moment. “God has a plan for us all,” says a primary teacher who experiences a moderate amount of stress.

Often the potential benefit is identified as making one stronger or better in some
way. “I feel we are all placed in situations from which there are lessons to be learned, and I trust in God to give me the wisdom & strength to learn that lesson” writes one teacher in her fifties.

Finding meaning from stressors also includes recognising God does not have the power to influence all situations. “God gives me the patience, strength, and peace I need. It is not always easy, and it isn't always perfect, but nothing in this life is,” reflects a primary teacher who occasionally suffers work-related stress.

Religion helps people find meaning by providing ways of making sense and responding to difficult situations (Pargament, 1997).

**Others- intimacy and closeness.** This religious coping strategy involves seeking support, comfort and reassurance from the congregation and members of the clergy. Teachers mentioned asking for others to pray for them. “Knowing I can ask for prayer support” helps one respondent. Orlaith actively seeks prayer from her religious community. “If things were challenging or there was someone close to me sick/ in trouble, I would go to a local order of enclosed nuns and ask them for prayers. Just doing this makes me feel better and makes me feel that the power of their prayer may help me, or whomever the prayers were for, to cope with the difficult situation,” she says.

Others benefit from being part of a community; the congregation can provide emotional support (Pargament, 1997); “It makes me feel I am part of a community... something that brings people together and provides support.” Another gives an example of how their religious community differs from other communities; “The ability to say, 'God bless' and have it said in return gives me strength and hope.”

Religious faith also helps people keep a connection with deceased family members. Four teachers mentioned this. One feels comforted by “thinking that loved
ones who have passed away are looking over me.” People care about loved ones. While defining religion, Pargament describes religion as “building, changing and holding on to the things people care about in ways that are tied to the sacred” (1997, p. 32).

Closing paragraph. In Chapter 2, Cancio et al. discussed how the quality of teaching can be impacted by teachers experiencing work-related stress, and how, ultimately, it could mean them leaving their job (Cancio et al., 2018). Cancio describes how SETs are likely to stay in their job if they consider their workload manageable (Cancio et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, table 4.22 shows 53.3% of participants in the survey agreed or strongly agreed with a statement made by one of the journallers where he considers leaving special education teaching.

Table 4.22 Career plan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"I and some of my colleagues are starting to believe that special education teaching may be too difficult to be in at present and that mainstream teaching is so much easier... more than ever before."
Chapter 5 Conclusions and Implications for Practice

As discussed in Chapter 2, work-related stress impacts on student achievement, quality of teaching, participation in professional learning experiences and teacher retention (Cancio et al., 2018). Religious coping strategies, in addition to a wider range of coping strategies, can be used by an individual to help alleviate the physical and emotional impact of work-related stress (Gall & Guirguis-Younger, 2012).

This study set out to explore how SETs in Ireland associated their religious faith with coping and work-related stress. First, it was necessary to identify if work-related stress was a phenomenon experienced by SETs. Secondly, likely stressors needed to be identified. Thirdly, a discussion was needed to explore all the strategies employed by SETs in coping with work-related stress. A discussion of the nature of religious faith was then necessary to explore the factors possibly impacting on the use of religious faith as a coping strategy. Finally, the association of religious coping strategies by SETs in coping with work-related stress could be explored. This section sets out the conclusions emerging from the study and their implications for practice.

Figure 5.1 Visual summary of findings
Visual Summary of Findings

A visual summary of the findings is presented in Figure 5.2. This image shows the top ten stressors identified through the qualitative data. The numbers on each bar quantify the number of times the stressors were referenced. The SETs are supported through the use of coping strategies illustrated as ‘pillars’ below. The first pillar shows the top eleven general coping strategies and how often they were referenced in the general discussion on coping strategies. The second pillar illustrates the association some SETs make between their religious faith and work-related stress. The paragraphs below discuss the findings within these three aspects and their implications on practice.

Work-related Stressors

Table 4.8 shows over 50% of special education teachers in Ireland are suffering from moderate or significant work-related stress. The data provide convincing evidence work-related stress is a phenomenon experienced by SETs in Ireland.

Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection resulted in different and complementary evidence. For example, the qualitative data identified ‘colleagues’ and ‘management’ as top contributors to work-related stress. Previous studies have equally cited colleagues and management as potential stressors (Haydon et al., 2018; Kyriacou, 2001). The quantitative data shows a different result. Workload and lack of time were ranked as top contributors to work-related stress. The use of a qualitative approach was useful in discovering emerging themes within the population which would not be possible using a more prescriptive quantitative approach.

Combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection in this mixed-methods approach has been employed to support validity.
**Implications for SETs.** Both ‘colleagues’ and ‘management’ as stressors are unusual in they can also serve as a coping strategy. SETs should consider ways to transform these negative stressors into positive coping strategies.

SETs can individually attempt to use their time more effectively to deal with the workload and lack of time, however, the fact that the vast majority of SETs experience the same stressor to a considerable extent would appear to be more telling about the system than the individuals.

**Implications for school management and support bodies.** Evidence SETs are likely to experience work-related stress has implications for policymakers and school management. Under current Irish health and safety legislation, all “employers should consider any workplace hazard where there is a reasonable probability that it could cause work-related stress” (Health and Safety Authority, 2016, p. 4). Employers are also tasked with having a safety statement which details the risks and the “control measures put in place to eliminate or reduce them” (Health and Safety Authority, 2016, p. 4).

SETs need more support in managing their workload and time, or policymakers and school management need to recognise the workload is too onerous, and the time available to deal with it effectively, insufficient. In reality, both issues need to be addressed on a system-wide basis by the Department of Education and Skills.

Paperwork and administration were found to form a large part of the substantial workload. State agencies, such as SENO, NEPS, and NCSE, should work together to reduce the level of paperwork needed. A national portal could be developed to hold records of students with additional learning needs, diagnostic assessments, interventions and other vital information. This would prevent replication of work and provide a more consistent standard of reporting as well as a greater coherence at policy level.
Information could be available in real-time to those authorised to access it. This could also assist in the timely deployment of resources to where they are needed.

**Considerations for future studies on work-related stress.** Comparison of levels of work-related stress across sub-groups of the teaching population is difficult. No common standard of measurement is used to measure the phenomenon. Future research would benefit from identifying or developing a standard instrument that can be used to measure and compare levels of work-related stress within sub-groups. A shared understanding of the term *stressed* would need to be shared with the participants before studies which used such a measure.

Careful consideration should be given to the range of options offered to participants when reporting on the extent of stress. They should evenly reflect the possible levels of stress and not favour one or other disposition. A 5-point Likert scale is recommended for this reason.

**Coping Strategies**

SETs in Ireland use a wide range of coping strategies to deal with work-related stress. The use of positive strategies, as opposed to negative strategies, were widely identified as being used by SETs. Exercise, social support and active-planning were the strategies most used, leading one to presume these could be the most successful strategies in this population. Further study could determine if this is the case.

**Implications for practice** SETs and leadership within schools could use the identified strategies in supporting their staff through stressful times, for example, by providing opportunities for a ‘Couch to 5k’ program or mindfulness after school sessions. One of the journaling group said “Just knowing I have so many useful coping strategies for stress makes me feel less stressed!” In keeping with the current wellbeing
focus, referred to in Chapter 1, developing exercise, social support and active planning structures within schools could benefit both staff and students.

Religious Faith

Impact on coping with work-related stress.

Development of faith. The impact of different stages of faith development on work-related stress was described throughout the data. Some SETs tentatively describe dealing with their faith struggles, yet being tasked with living the ethos of a faith school. Others richly described the strong links they make between their religious faith and their lived experience of special education teaching. Their religious faith was recognised as an overarching way of life permeating every aspect of their life. Others who use their faith to deal with issues outside work, did not recognise this valuable aspect of their faith can be used for work-related issues too.

Support. The main association SETs with religious faith made between their faith and work-related stress was one of support. While it has been shown many SETs feel isolated in dealing with issues in work, they can receive emotional and social support from their personal relationship with God and their religious community. The literature supports this finding. Pargament et al. believe those who use positive religious coping strategies benefit from “a secure relationship with a transcendent force, a sense of spiritual connectedness with others and a benevolent world view” (2011, p. 51).

Additional perspectives. Participants also identified how they benefit from their religious faith by having additional perspectives to reappraise and understand stressors. When one considers a stressor, they typically consider if they can deal with it. This does not always manifest itself in an ability to fix a situation. Sometimes the stressors are outside the control of the individual, and the best strategy to use could be one of acceptance. This can be seen in many of the responses given by the participants with
religious faith when they consider the meaning of the difficult situations they experience. They can reappraise the stressor as part of God’s plan to strengthen them, or as part of some whole plan that they are not yet privy to.

**Prayer.** Participants describe using prayer to support them psychologically and emotionally. A close relationship exists between prayer, meditation and mindfulness, which are strategies frequently utilised by SETs.

**Implications for practice.** Religious faith can offer additional coping strategies for work-related stress, particularly in feeling supported emotionally and psychologically. It can also be particularly useful in processing uncontrollable situations and in finding meaning.

The findings described above could have implications for practice within faith schools in particular. When the development of religious faith is stalled, the opportunity to benefit from these advantages is hampered. Faith schools could be in a position to facilitate spiritual development opportunities to staff that may welcome the prospect. Future research could explore how a greater consciousness of a personal religious faith would impact the practice of teaching within a faith school.

Where an explicit faith ethos exists, frequent, consistent use of meditation and prayer may make these strategies more available to both teachers and students when needed. As has been discussed in Chapter 2, the more aware people are of religious faith strategies, the more they use them, and the more available the strategies are to them when required (Pargament, 1997).

**Concluding Paragraph.**

This study set out to explore the association SETs in Ireland made between religious faith and coping with work-related stress. It has identified SETs in Ireland do largely, experience work-related stress. It contributes data on the extent of work-related
stress experienced by SETs in different settings not available previously. It identified the top stressors contributing to the phenomenon among SETs in Ireland which can be comprehended by policymakers and school management, and utilised in alleviating stressors. It established that SETs mainly use positive strategies in coping with work-related stress. Finally, a range of associations between religious faith and work-related stress were identified between religious faith and work-related stress in the SET population.
References


Fimian, M. J., & Santoro, T. M. (1983). Sources and Manifestations of Occupational Stress as Reported by Full-Time Special Education Teachers. Exceptional
RELIGIOUS FAITH, WORK-RELATED STRESS & IRISH SET

Children, 49(6), 540–543. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440298304900608


Work Related Stress A Guide for Employers.pdf


National Council for Special Education. (2012). The education of students with challenging behaviour arising from severe emotional disturbance/behavioural disorders. Trim: NCSE.


World Health Organisation. (2019). Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon”:

Appendix A  Invitation to participate in journalling group

Shoutout for participants in Phase 1: Journalling group

I am looking for help with a research study that investigates work-related stress among Special Education teachers in Ireland. The research project involves learning more about how teachers cope with work-related stress and also to discover whether they make associations between their religious faith (if any) and coping mechanisms.

I hope you will be willing to participate because your responses are important and a valued part of the study.

ABOUT THE STUDY
There are two parts to the study: (i) a guided reflective journalling group and (ii) an online survey questionnaire.

This information form relates to participation in the guided reflective journalling group.

FORMAT OF THE JOURNALING GROUP
Approximately 5-7 people from a variety of Special Education settings in Ireland will be selected (based on demographic balance) to take part in this initial stage. A briefing note on reflection will be sent to everyone selected. Over about two weeks, writing prompts will be emailed to participants. They will be invited to respond to writing prompts such as 'What is the best/worst part of your school day?' and will respond via a form like this one, photo, messaging or another form of electronic communication. A few days later they will receive a second writing prompt. Five/six prompts will be sent in total. Submissions can be as short or as long as the participant wants. The staggered release of the question-prompts should allow for time for reflection.

The areas to be explored with this group are (a) the identification of work-related stressors, (b) successful means of coping with them and finally (c) the association of teachers' religious beliefs on their ways of coping with stress.

HOW WILL THE SUBMISSIONS BE USED?
Statements which reflect the emerging themes will be drawn from these submissions and other Special Education teachers will be invited, in an online survey questionnaire, to agree or disagree with them and be allowed to add their reasoning.

WHY GET INVOLVED
I hope that the findings of the study will inform national policy around stress factors involved in Special Education and identify school policies which would support teachers in developing successful coping strategies for work-related stress.

CONFIDENTIALITY & DATA RETENTION
Your participation will remain strictly confidential. Your name will not be attached to any of the data you provide - a pseudonym will be used instead. You are welcome to discontinue participation in the study at any time and without giving a reason, should you wish to do so.

To ensure your identity is protected, (a) the journal entries you submit to me will be kept in a secure, encrypted file without your name attached to it; (b) the data will be retained only for the purposes of the current study and (c) once the study is completed, the data will be destroyed within one year following the examination of the dissertation.

You will be asked to submit a consent form indicating an agreement to participate in the study.
Risks and Benefits
The risks of participation in the study are very low and linked to feelings of stress when thinking or writing about your own experiences in dealing with previous stressful situations, how you coped with those situations or attitudes towards your personal faith. Teachers who are experiencing personal and work-related problems e.g. health, relationships, addictions, bereavements, stress, trauma etc. can get direct access to advice and support from the Employee Assistance Service helpline which can be contacted 1800 411 067. This service is provided free of charge to employees of the Department of Education and Science. The benefits of participation include improved skills in reflective journaling and contributing to the research base.

* Required

1. I am a teacher fully registered with the Teaching Council and working as a Special Education Teacher in Ireland, either providing or organising special education... *
   - [ ] In Primary
   - [ ] In Post Primary (less than 11 hours in Special Education)
   - [ ] In Post Primary (11 or more hours in Special Education)
   - [ ] In a Special School
   - [ ] In another setting
   - [ ] Other

2. Gender? *

Enter your answer

3. To which age group do you belong? *
   - [ ] 20-29
   - [ ] 30-39
   - [ ] 40-49
   - [ ] 50-59
   - [ ] 60+
4. Which of the following qualifications do you hold? (Please tick all that apply) *

- A primary school teaching diploma or certificate, or other primary school qualification
- A primary degree in education (B.Ed)
- A primary degree in another subject
- A postgraduate diploma in education
- A qualification in learning support, special education or resource teaching
- A higher degree in education (PhD, Masters etc.)
- A higher degree in another subject (PhD, Masters etc.)
- No qualification
- Other [ ]

5. How many years have you been teaching? *

Enter your answer

6. How many years of designated special education experience do you have? *

Enter your answer

7. As part of this research, the journaling group will explore associations between their coping strategies and their religious faith. What is your current religion, if any? *

Enter your answer

6. Phase 1 of this research only requires a small number of participants that reflect as wide a range of settings as possible. Phase 2, however, will be open to all who want to participate.

Final selection of participants will take place on Thursday the 30th of January 2020. The journaling group will take place from the 3-15th of February.

Please enter your email address below if you want to participate in phase 1- the journaling group.

A reply will be sent to the email address below, indicating whether or not you have been selected. *

Enter your answer

Submit
Journal Entry 1: Monday (Week 1)

This journal entry has a broad focus in order to set the context.

* Required

1. Describe a typical workday. *
   Please do not use any identifying information such as real names.
   
   Enter your answer

2. What are the best parts of your job? *

   Enter your answer

3. What are the worst parts of your job? *

   Enter your answer

4. Enter your email address below so I can match this submission with the rest of your details and submission. *

   Enter your answer

Submit
Journal Entry 2: Wednesday (Week 1)

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) defines work-related stress (WRS) as "stress caused or made worse by work" and more specifically "when a person perceives the work environment in such a way that his or her reaction involves feelings of an inability to cope. A 'stressor' refers to the cause, trigger, event, stimulus that results in a stressful experience.

Consider each of the themes below.

* Required

1. 'Workload' can refer to the amount of work to do or the difficulty of the work.

   What, if any, stressors have you or your SET colleagues experienced regarding workload? Please describe.

   Enter your answer

2. Role ambiguity is used to describe situations where the job description and expectations for the role are not made clear.

   What, if any, stressors have you or your SET colleague experienced in this area of your work? Please describe.

   Enter your answer

3. SET often work within teams, with SNAs, with class teachers, and with management.

   What, if any, stressors have you or your SET colleagues experienced with work colleagues? Please describe.

   Enter your answer
4. As schools undergo periods of change in curriculum content, assessment and teaching methodologies teachers sometimes feel stress regarding their capacity/skills.

What, if any, stressors have you or your SET colleagues experienced regarding skills/capacity? Please describe.

Enter your answer

5. “At an individual level, teacher wellbeing is concerned with a need for autonomy, having a sense of competence, a capacity for emotional intelligence, a positive attitude and a healthy work-life balance.” (NCCE, 2017)

What stressors, if any, have you or your SET colleagues experienced regarding wellbeing? Please describe.

Enter your answer

6. Please describe any other stressors you or your SET colleagues have experienced, that do not fit into the above categories.

Enter your answer

7. Enter your email address below so I can match this submission with the rest of your details and submissions.

Enter your answer
Journal Entry 3: Friday (Week 1)

Acute stress can stem from a specific event or situation e.g. a presentation at work. Chronic stress stems from repeated exposure to acute stress or long term stressors, such as a toxic work environment or bad relationships.

Think about a recent stressful work-related scenario that happened recently or is happening.

1. Which of the words below best describes the stressful situation you are about to describe? *
   - Acute
   - Chronic
   - I can't think of any stressful scenarios.
   - Other

2. Describe the situation. *
   Please do not use real names or identifying features.

   Enter your answer

3. What was it about the situation that made it stressful? *

   Enter your answer
4. Think about how you dealt with the situation. Did you have the capacity to deal with it yourself? *

   If other, please specify.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No
   ○ Other

5. Coping is what you do in response to the stressor. Coping strategies are part of the process people use to help them manage difficult situations.

   What did you do to cope with this situation? *

   Enter your answer

6. As explained previously, part of the focus of this research involves religious faith.

   The terms religion, faith and spirituality are often used interchangeably; however, there are difficulties associated with defining these words, whose meanings vary at intensely personal levels.

   Please define what the term religious faith means to you? *

   Enter your answer

7. Do you consider any of the coping strategies you described in response to Q 5 above to be associated with your religious faith? What makes you say that? *

   Enter your answer

8. Enter your email address below so I can match this submission with the rest of your details and submissions. *

   Enter your answer
**Journal Entry 4: Monday (Week 2)**

In today’s journal, you will be identifying the coping strategies you use through the Brief COPE. This questionnaire is a 28-item multidimensional measure of strategies used for coping in response to stressors. The answers you give will identify the extent to which you use specific coping strategies. I will email this information back to you individually.

* Required

1. Think about how you try to understand and deal with major problems in your life. To what extent is each involved in the way you cope? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I turn to work or other activities to take my mind off things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I concentrate my efforts on doing something about the situations,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I say to myself “this isn’t real”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I use alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I get emotional support from others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I give up trying to deal with it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I take action to try to make the situation better.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I refuse to believe that it has happened</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I say things to let my unpleasant feeling escape.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I get help and advice from other people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I use alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I try to see it in different light, to make it seem more positive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I criticise myself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I try to come up with a strategy about what to do.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I get comfort and understanding from someone.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I give up the attempt to cope.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I look for something good in what is happening.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I make jokes about it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I do something to think about it less, such as going to movies,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I accept the reality of the fact that it has happened.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. 21-28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. I express my negative feelings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I try to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I try to get advice or help from other people about what to do.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I learn to live with it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I think hard about what steps to take.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I blame myself for things that happened.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I pray or meditate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I make fun of the situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. In general, people who do use religious coping strategies such as prayer, are more likely to use them when an event is assessed as harmful, unmanageable, challenging, or threatening to them or others. *

Is prayer something you would use in such situations? And why? If not, how do you cope with uncontrollable situations?

Enter your answer

5. Enter your email address below so I can match this submission with the rest of your details and submissions. *

Enter your answer

Submit
Journal Entry 5-Wednesday (Week 2)

The literature recognises that religion can be a difficult topic for many to talk about. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, when people are discussing the value or nature of religion, they may be talking about very different things; one may be speaking of being a good person and having a feeling of closeness to the sacred, another may be talking about going to church and believing in the truth of religious claims.

Secondly, religion can be described as dynamic; fluctuating in response to life experiences over time. Some of you referred to this when asked about your religion during the selection process. Many of us do not actually know the depth of our religious resources until we face stressful times, particularly uncontrollable situations such as critical illness and death.

Thirdly, we can find it difficult to verbalise what we believe in, it’s easier to say what we don’t believe in.

The Brief RCOPE below is a 14-item measure of religious coping with major life stressors. This form was constructed from a Christian perspective to include individual and institutional expressions of faith. Some questions refer to God and the devil; keep in mind that people’s understanding of these terms differ and please answer the questions through the lens of your understanding of these terms.

* Required
1. Think about how you try to understand and deal with major work-related problems in your life. To what extent is each involved in the way you cope? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I see my situation as part of God's plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder what I did for God to punish me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel punished by God for my lack of devotion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe the devil made this happen.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to put my plans into action together with God.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seek God's love and care.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I focus on religion in order to stop worrying about my problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask forgiveness for my sins.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look for a stronger connection with God.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder whether God had abandoned me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I question God's love for me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder whether my church had abandoned me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seek help from God in letting go of my anger.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I question the power of God.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Has your understanding of religious coping changed over the last week or so? * [3]

- Yes
- No

Submit
Appendix G  Journal prompt 6

Journal Entry 6- Friday (Week 2)

Final thoughts:

- Required

1. “The workload is unmanageable”, “There’s simply not enough time”, “Juggling! The never-ending lists!”, “I am unwilling to let my teaching or planning slide so I just keep working extra hours to try to keep on top of it all.”

What advice would you give to these teachers?

Enter your answer

2. “You cannot tell colleagues with more experience and authority what to do, even though to do the job properly you need to ensure they are doing necessary planning and paperwork, it’s a very tricky situation”, “She has now taken to sending me emails about the situations rather than coming and talking about it.”, “Huge amount delegated from senior management, we deal with very complex issues and yet, we are not management as such, as we don’t have posts”, “working collectively with great staff, we lift each other up”

Colleagues treated almost equally as both stressor and support. In your setting, which features most strongly and why do you think this is so?

Enter your answer

3. “Difficult parents, more demanding in recent years”, “an ongoing situation with a particular parent. It feels like she is constantly simmering ready to pounce so I’m always on edge.”

Is this something you experience? Any advice on how to deal with it?

Enter your answer
4. “The worry and stress of being alone making decisions regarding a student’s future, questioning if I’m doing the right thing”, “I feel I’m fighting alone for her (the student’s) best interests”

Do you feel alone? How do you cope with feeling alone? What do you think these teachers should do?

Enter your answer

5. “Colleagues incl management not understanding we don’t wear capes... we can’t wave a magic wand for students and all will start working out”

If you did own this magic wand and had only one wish, what would you wish for?

Enter your answer

6. “I and some of my colleagues are starting to believe that the Special Education teaching may be too difficult to be in at present and that mainstream teaching is so much easier... more than ever before.”

Tell me about your career plans.

Enter your answer

7. “Just knowing I have so many useful coping strategies for stress makes me feel less stressed!!”, “I don’t feel like I have to identify with the religion I grew up in. However, I can still benefit from what I have learnt from it”, “I have learned I need to let more go, throw it away and not let it in on me.”

These are reflections from some of the journaling groups. Think about a colleague you know that is affected by work-related stress. What would your top piece of advice be?

Enter your answer

8. Final comments, thought? What should I have covered, mentioned, done differently???

Enter your answer

9. Enter your email address below so I can match this submission with the rest of your details and submissions.

Enter your answer

Submit
Appendix H  Online survey

Survey on Work-Related Stress and Coping for Special Education Teachers

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research. Your participation in this project is sincerely appreciated. I understand that your time is valuable.

This questionnaire has four parts:

Section 1: Demographic variables:
Background information such as gender, school setting, confirmation that you are a special education teacher, years teaching, years teaching SEN, qualifications and training in SEN, additional responsibilities within the school...

Section 2: Explores Stressors and Coping Strategies

Section 3: You will be asked to agree or disagree with some statements created by other Irish Special Education teachers.

Section 4: Explores the impact of religious faith on coping (for those who have religious faith)

In total it takes about 10 mins to complete the questionnaire.

You are under no obligation to complete the questionnaire, however, I hope you will be willing to participate because your responses are important and a valued part of the study.

Your participation will remain strictly anonymous. Your name will not be attached to any of the data you provide. Your IP address will not be collected. You are welcome to discontinue participation in the study until you submit your responses, should you wish to do so, however, once your responses are submitted there will be no way of tracking them.

The responses will be retained only for the purposes of the current study. Once the study is completed, the data will be destroyed one year after the completion of the project. There are no risks or direct benefits in completing the questionnaire.

Should you have questions regarding your participation, please contact me at natalie.brady@mil.ie. You may also contact my advisor for the project, Dr Michael Redmond at michael.redmond@im.hic.

This study has been considered from an ethical perspective by the Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact MERC@mie.ie

If you consent to participate in the study by completing the questionnaire described above, please continue.

Signature of Investigator: Natalie Doyle Bradley  Date: 29/02/2020
1

I am a teacher, fully registered with the Teaching Council, and working as a Special Education Teacher in Ireland, either providing or organising special education...

Please specify other e.g. jobshare, recent SET experience

- In Primary
- In a Special Class in Primary
- In a Special School
- In Post Primary (less than 11 hours in Special Education)
- In Post Primary (11 or more hours in Special Education)
- In a Special Class in Post Primary
- Other

2

Other than your Special Education Teacher role, do you have another role within the school?

- No
- Teaching Principal
- Teaching Deputy Principal
- AP1
- AP2
- Subject Teacher
- SENCO duties (outside management structure)
- Other
3. Which of the following qualifications do you hold? (Please tick all that apply) * ☐

- A primary school teaching diploma or certificate, or other primary school qualification
- A primary degree in education (5 Ed)
- A primary degree in another subject.
- A postgraduate diploma in education
- A qualification in learning support, special education or resource teaching
- A higher degree in education (PhD, Masters etc.)
- A higher degree in another subject (PhD, Masters etc.)
- No qualification
- Other

4. For how many years have you been teaching? *

- Up to 5 years
- Between 6 and 7 years
- Between 8 and 10 years
- 11 or more years
- 11-20 years
- 20+
5. Approximately, how many years of designated special education experience do you have? *

- This is my first year.
- 2-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11 years or more

6. Please give your gender.

Select your answer

7. To which age group do you belong?

Select your answer

8. Work-related stressors and coping strategies

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) defines work-related stress (WRS) as "stress caused or made worse by work" and more specifically "when a person perceives the work environment in such a way that his or her reaction involves feelings of an inability to cope." *

How often does work-related stress affect you?

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- A moderate amount
- A great deal
A ‘stressor’ refers to the cause, trigger, event, or stimulus that results in a stressful experience.

Consider each of these stressors identified by a group of Irish special education teachers recently. (A stressor in one context may be a support in another context)

Please rank these in order of their impact on you - your biggest stressor on top, your least stressor at the bottom.

- Workload
- Lack of skills
- Lack of time
- Colleagues
- Student behaviour
- Role ambiguity
- Parents
- Assessments
- Outside agencies
- Management

Other stressors? Please specify.

Enter your answer
Think about how you try to understand and deal with major problems in your life. To what extent is each involved in the way you cope?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active-coping and planning, for example, taking steps to eliminate the problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support: e.g., seeking advice or sympathy from others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive reinterpretation; e.g., reframing the stressor in positive terms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance; e.g., learning to accept the problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial; e.g., refusing to believe the problem is real</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning to Religion; e.g., using faith for support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on venting emotions; e.g., want to express feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distracting oneself from thinking about the problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using alcohol or drugs to reduce distress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour: for example, making light of the problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other ways of coping? Please specify □□□

Enter your answer
The following are statements made by special education teachers working in Ireland while participating in a reflective journaling group exploring the idea of work-related stress. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements.

13

“The workload is unmanageable”, “There’s simply not enough time”, “Juggling! The never-ending lists!”

Select your answer

14

“Difficult parents, more demanding in recent years”, “an ongoing situation with a particular parent. It feels like she is constantly simmering ready to pounce so I’m always on edge.”

Select your answer

15

“The worry and stress of being alone making decisions regarding a student’s future, questioning if I’m doing the right thing”, “I feel I’m fighting alone for her (the student’s) best interests”

Select your answer

16

“I, and some of my colleagues are starting to believe that the Special Education teaching may be too difficult to be in at present and that mainstream teaching is so much easier... more than ever before”

Select your answer
Religious faith and coping with work-related stress

17
Part of this study explores associations between coping strategies and religious faith. What is your current religion, if any?

Enter your answer

18
Has your declared religion changed throughout your life?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Not applicable

19
Please expand on your previous answer.

Enter your answer

20
(a) "I don’t identify with the religion I grew up in.
(b) "However, I can still benefit from what I have learnt from it."

Which statement below best describes you?

- Agree with (a) and (b)
- Disagree with (a) and (b)
- Agree with (a) but not (b)
- Agree with (b) but not (a)
- Not applicable
- Other

21
“When things are going well, I may not dwell much on my religious beliefs. However, if I am faced with a difficult situation in either my personal or professional life, I will use prayer as a way of keeping calm, seeking help and as a way to cope.”

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
Please describe any other ways your religious faith helps you cope with work-related stress.

Enter your answer.

Thank you for your participation!

Your participation in this project is sincerely appreciated. I understand that your time is valuable. I will make the results of my study available on the Special Education Teachers Ireland Facebook page. Natalie.

Any other comments?

Enter your answer.

Submit
### Appendix I  Results from the Brief RCOPE administered to the journalling group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Religious Faith</th>
<th>RCOPE sub-scale construct name</th>
<th>Presbyterian (non practicing)</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Catholic with mindfulness</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Catholic upbringings and Buddhist adulthood</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Orlaith</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel punished by God for my lack of devotion.</td>
<td>neg</td>
<td>Punishing God reappraisal</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I decide the devil made this happen.</td>
<td>neg</td>
<td>Demonic Reappraisal</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder whether God had abandoned me.</td>
<td>neg</td>
<td>Spiritual reappraisal</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I question God’s love for me.</td>
<td>neg</td>
<td>Spiritual Reappraisal</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder whether my church had abandoned me.</td>
<td>neg</td>
<td>Interpersonal Religious Reappraisal</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I question the power of God.</td>
<td>neg</td>
<td>Reappraisal of God’s Powers</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see my situation as part of God’s plan.</td>
<td>pos</td>
<td>Benevolent Religious reappraisal</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.</td>
<td>pos</td>
<td>Benevolent Religious reappraisal</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to put my plans into action together with God.</td>
<td>pos</td>
<td>Collaborative coping</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seek God’s love and care.</td>
<td>pos</td>
<td>Seeking Spiritual support</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>A great deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I focus on religion in order to stop worrying about my problems.</td>
<td>pos</td>
<td>S/R Focus</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask forgiveness for my sins.</td>
<td>pos</td>
<td>S/R purification</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I look for a stronger connection with God.</td>
<td>pos</td>
<td>Spiritual connection</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seek help from God in letting go of my anger.</td>
<td>pos</td>
<td>S/R forgiving</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix J  Combined qualitative data codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Files</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity to cope;</td>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career plans</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Coping Strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active coping and planning</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appraisal of priority</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for help</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing stayed calm</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't cope</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and alcohol Substances</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May leave SEN</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medication</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Files</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness and meditation</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affirmation</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reinterpretation</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritise self and family</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on self</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage work-life balance</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruminate internally</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN related knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapy and professional support</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time off</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning to Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venting</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Stress</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New insights</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Faith</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Park!</td>
<td>Miscellaneous to code later</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Files</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith within school</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining Control through Religious methods</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Religious Surrender</td>
<td>Did my best and then handed over to God</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Religious Coping</td>
<td>act with God, partnership with God, God working with me, Working with God to relieve my worries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Religious Deferral</td>
<td>Did not try to cope- just left it in God’s hands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleading for Direct Intercession</td>
<td>Asked God to make things turn out okay, Prayed for a miracle, Bargained with God to make things better, Made a deal with God that he would make things better,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Directed Religious Coping</td>
<td>Used individual initiative rather than help from God</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God-Comfort and Closeness</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marking Religious Boundaries</td>
<td>stuck to the teachings and practices of my religion, ignored advice that was inconsistent with my faith, stayed away from false religious teachings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Focus</td>
<td>prayed to take my mind off my stress, thought about spiritual matters to stop thinking about</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Files</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Purification</td>
<td>searched for forgiveness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Spiritual Support</td>
<td>sought God's love and care, trusted that God would be by my side, looked to God for strength, support and guidance, trusted God was with me, sought comfort from God</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Connection</td>
<td>look for a stronger connection to God, my life part of a larger spiritual force, relationship with a higher power, tried to experience a stronger feeling of spirituality</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Discontent</td>
<td>Wondered if God had abandoned me, angry God has not answered prayers, Questioned God's love for me or others, Wondered if God cares, felt angry God not there for me</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent Religious Appraisal</td>
<td>Situation benevolent, potentially beneficial. Part of God's plan, a lesson in it, God may be trying to strengthen me, might bring me closer to God, or beneficial spiritually</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonic Reappraisal</td>
<td>Devil</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishing God Reappraisal</td>
<td>Wonder what I did for God to punish me, was it because of</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Files</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>my lack of devotion, because of my sins …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reappraisal of God's Power</td>
<td>Questioned the power of God, things beyond his control, God cannot answer everything, Even God has limits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation and Mindfulness</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others-Intimacy and Closeness</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Religious Discontent</td>
<td>disagreed with what the church wanted me to do or believe, felt dissatisfaction with the clergy, wondered whether the church abandoned me, felt my church was ignoring me, wondered whether my clergy were really there for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Helping</td>
<td>prayed for others, offered spiritual support to others, tried to give spiritual support to others, comfort others through prayer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Support from Clergy or members (also deceased)</td>
<td>support from clergy, congregation, asked others to pray for me, looking for love and concern from members,</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred spaces, ceremonies and items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Conversion</td>
<td>Tried to find a new life through religion, looked for a spiritual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Religious Faith

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Files</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reawakening</td>
<td>sought complete transformation, tried to change my whole way of life and follow God's path</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious forgiving</td>
<td>sought God's help in letting go of my anger and bitterness and resentments, sought God's help in trying to forgive others,</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking</td>
<td>asked God to help me find a new purpose in life, prayed to find a new reason to live, prayed to discover my purpose, looked to God for a new direction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressor</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin and paperwork</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in curriculum needs methodologies</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of students</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspections</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of counselling</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Files</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-teaching duties</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and home</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Demands</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull away from your work plan</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills and knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students upset</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-life balance</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K  Full list of stressors identified

Name, Number of Coding References

Admin and paperwork, 62
Assessments, 8
Change in curriculum, needs, methodologies, 31
Colleagues, 97
Death of students, 1
Guilt, 17
Inspections, 22
Isolation, 19
Job security, 2
Lack of counselling, 1
Management, 77
Non teaching duties, 7
Outside Agencies, 61
Parents and home, 45
Physical Demands, 1
Pull away from your work plan, 29
Resources, 67
Role Ambiguity, 16
Setting challenges, 10
Skills and knowledge, 44
Student Behaviour, 46
Students upset, 2
Time, 48
Work life balance, 28

Workload, 57