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Classroom Instruction and FFA/SAE Responsibilities Creating the Most Stress for Female Teachers in the Southeast

Diana L. King
K. Jill Rucker
Dennis W. Duncan
University of Georgia

Teacher attrition research in agricultural education has found that teachers are at high risk of leaving the profession early in their careers (Kelsey, 2006; Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2005; Heath-Camp & Camp, 1990). In addition, female teachers are more likely to leave the profession than male teachers (Kelsey, 2006; Thompson, 1986). Identified dis-satisfiers include lack of administrative support and working long hours (Boone, 2003; Moore & Camp, 1979). Lazarus's Theory of Psychological Stress indicates that once a teacher appraises a stressor they will seek to master, tolerate, or reduce the demands of the stressor (Lazarus, 1991). If mastery is not deemed possible, toleration and/or reduction of stressor demand could result in attrition from the profession. By identifying specific stressors related to classroom instruction and FFA/SAE responsibilities, coping strategies may be developed to aid in reducing stress for female teachers. Results indicated that preparing proficiency applications, planning FFA banquet, preparing CDE teams, paperwork/reports, creating new curriculum, and lack of teaching materials were the FFA/SAE responsibilities and classroom responsibilities creating the highest amount of stress. Time management strategies, especially related to planning spring semester events when FFA banquets are held and applications are due, may be useful for the teachers in this study.

Keywords: female teachers, job stressors, attrition, FFA, SAE

Many studies have focused on teacher attrition and indicated teachers are at risk of leaving the profession early in their careers (Kelsey, 2006; Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2005; Heath-Camp & Camp, 1990). Female teachers have a higher likelihood of leaving the profession than their male peers (Kelsey, 2006; Thompson, 1986). Studies seeking teacher dissatisfaction factors have found multiple contributors. Boone (2003) found administrative support to be a major dis-satisfier for beginning teachers. Other aspects of the school environment such as lack of collegial and parental support and insufficient involvement in decision making have also led to teacher dissatisfaction (Billingsly & Cross, 1991). Gonzalez (1997) found characteristics of teachers who left the profession commonly included being less than 30 years old, being female, having few years of teaching experience, and lacking coping strategies. Moore and Camp (1979) found working long hours was the primary reason teachers gave for leaving the profession, which is supported by a recent study showing that agricultural education teachers in Georgia work an average of 57 hours per week and female agriculture teachers shoulder twice as much responsibility for family and household responsibilities as male agriculture teachers (Murray, Flowers, Croom, & Wilson, 2011). Overall, Croom (2003) found agriculture teachers were not victims of burnout. However, statistics still show a large amount of attrition and a shortage of qualified teachers (Kantrovich, 2010). Therefore, the research suggests the rate of teacher attrition should be explored and supports looking specifically at female teachers.

Theoretical Framework

High stress has been shown to play a part in teachers leaving the profession (Brown & Uehara, n.d.). With a lack of coping mechanisms for stress also linked to teachers attrition (Gonzales, 1997), learning which job responsibilities result in the most stress may be beneficial in tackling the issue of teacher attrition.

Lazarus's Theory of Psychological Stress views stress as an interaction between an individual and their environment which is significant to the individual's wellbeing and places demands on their resources (1991). Identifying the stressor is a two part process involving an appraisal, which itself is divided into primary and secondary appraisal, followed by a coping process. Within primary appraisal, an individual determines three things: the extent to which they care about the stressor, known as goal relevance; the extent to which the stressor impacts them, known as goal congruence; and their personal commitment to dealing with the stressor, known as ego-involvement (Lazarus, 1991). Once identified, the individual progresses into secondary appraisal where they seek to determine the potential for blame or credit and assess their level of responsibility relative to the stressor. In addition, the individual evaluates their potential for coping with the stressor and also the future expectations of needing to deal with the stressor (Lazarus, 1991).

Once appraisal is complete, the individual can make a determination about whether the stressor is a harm, threat, or challenge. This determination depends upon whether the individual has already suffered loss due to the stressor, expects to suffer loss, or anticipates mastering the stressor. Once a stressor is identified as harm, threat, or challenge, the individual progresses to the coping stage where they make effort to master, tolerate, or reduce the demands of a stressor (Lazarus, 1991). In the case of an agricultural educator, mastery may involve developing strategies and procedures for dealing with a stressor. Tolerating a stressor may involve working through undesirable situations until the individual either finds a better solution or gives up. Reducing the demands of a stressor may equal leaving the teaching profession for a less stressful job. Ideally, this study will aid in identifying stressors female agricultural educators tend to tolerate or for which they seek ways to reduce the stress. Identification of those stressors may lead to the development of resources to support teachers in mastering those stressors. Figure 1 is a model of Lazarus's Theory of Psychological Stress.

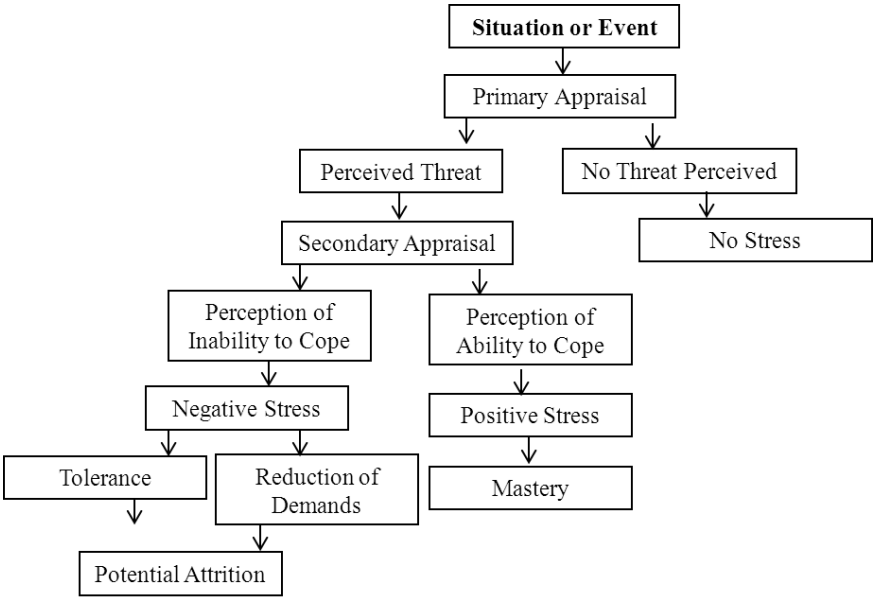

Figure 1. Model of Lazarus's Theory of Psychological Stress

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of challenges that female agricultural education teachers face throughout the Southeast (NAAE Region V) so university teacher educators and state department of education staff can identify future in-service training needs that will meet the teacher's needs and reduce stress and attrition among female teachers. This study looked at two constructs (FFA/SAE and classroom teaching) to determine which specific items are associated with the highest levels of stress by the most participants. Specific research objectives for this study are to:

1. Describe female agriculture teachers in the Southeast
2. Determine what job responsibilities related to FFA and SAE are considered stressful
3. Determine what job responsibilities related to classroom teaching are considered stressful

Procedures

The study attempted a census of all female agricultural education teachers in Region V (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee) as defined by the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE). Region V was a desirable choice for this research because it was the second largest NAAE region based upon membership and all included states maintained up-to-date teacher databases that were accessible to the researchers (NAAE, 2010). Because the study is a census, the results may not be generalized beyond the population. However, demographics, roles and responsibilities, and challenges female agricultural education teachers face may be similar throughout the NAAE regions. Therefore, cautious generalizations may contribute to future studies beyond NAAE Region V.

The questionnaire was developed and modified from previous research on female agricultural education teachers by Foster (2001). Reliability of the instrument occurred through an analysis of results of a pilot survey using a small group (n=14) of female agricultural education teachers in Georgia. Reliability coefficient alphas were calculated for all 46 items ($\alpha = .82$). Therefore, no changes were made to the instrument.

Teacher educators in each state represented in NAAE Region V were contacted to provide access to directories of agricultural educators in each state from which contact information was obtained for all female teachers. Participants were contacted via email during the summer of 2011 with a link to an online questionnaire developed using the Dillman, Smyth, & Christian (2009) Tailored Design Method. The initial invitation to participate was sent to 505 teachers via email. Eighty-two accounts bounced back, resulting in an accessible population of 423 teachers. Follow-up prompts for participation were delivered at two week intervals through the month of October. In all, 244 (58%) of the accessible population of female agricultural education teachers participated in the survey.

The data associated with the research was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 14.0) and Excel. Analysis of non-response bias is important in determining a sample's representativeness of the population from which it was drawn. Miller and Smith (1983) determined when responding to surveys, non-respondents are similar to late respondents. Lindner, Murphy, and Briers (2001) conclude "both early/late comparison and follow-up with non-respondents are defensible and generally accepted procedures for handling non-response error as a threat to external validity of research findings" (p. 51). If no significant difference is found between early and late respondents, Radhakrishna and Doamekpor (2008) indicate the findings from the sample may be representative of the population. For this study, non-response bias was evaluated by comparing responses provided in the first two weeks of data collection (early) with responses provided during the last two weeks of data collection (late) through an independent samples t-test. Statistically significant differences were found on one item – "Paperwork/Reports." Based on these findings, the sample data was determined to be representative of the population from which it was drawn.

Findings

Demographic data provided by participants indicated the average teacher was a married, white woman between the ages of 25 and 34 with a Master's degree. She was married with children and teaching high school in a rural community. Participant responses indicated 94% of respondents were white, 3% were Black, 3% were Hispanic, and less than 1% identified themselves as other. Only 9% of respondents were less than 25 years old. The largest age category was 25-34 years (46%), followed by 45-54 years (20%) and 35-44% (19%). The smallest group by ages was the 55+ category with 6% of participants. Master's degrees were held by the greatest number of participants (47%) followed by Bachelor's degrees (42%), Specialist degrees (9%) and finally, Doctorates (2%). The majority of participants were currently married or in committed relationship (75% combined). Single women comprised 16% of respondents and 9% indicated that they were divorced. Sixty-one percent of respondents had children, while 39% did not. The majority of respondents taught in a rural community (51%), while 35% taught in suburban areas and 14% taught in urban areas. The majority taught just high school students (79%), but 16% taught middle school students and 6% of the respondents taught both middle and high school students. Complete demographic results can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Female Agricultural Educators in the Southeast

Characteristic	***f***	**%**
Ethnicity		
White	219	94
Black	7	3
Hispanic	6	3
Other	2	<1
Age		
<25	20	9
25-34	107	46
35-44	45	19
45-54	47	20
55+	13	6
Level of Education		
Bachelor's	98	42
Master's	109	47
Specialist	21	9
Doctorate	5	2
Marital Status		
Married	167	71
Single	37	16
Committed Relationship	9	4
Divorced	21	9
Children		
No	92	39
Yes	141	61
Size of Community		
Rural	119	51
Suburban	82	35
Urban	32	14
Grades Taught		
6-8	37	16
9-12	183	79
Both	13	6

Note: Not all participants answered every question. Frequencies for every category are not equal.

Research objective two sought to determine which individual items associated with FFA and SAE responsibilities caused the greatest amount of stress. Teachers were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale how much stress each item caused where 1=very low stress and 5=very high stress. Preparing Proficiency Applications was identified as the most stressful item with 60% of respondents indicating they caused high or very high stress. This was followed by Planning FFA Banquet, which 58% of participants found to create high or very high stress. Rounding out the

top five were Preparing CDE Teams (57% high or very high stress), Organizing Fundraisers (47% high or very high stress), and Preparing Degrees (35% high or very high stress). Only three items were indicated to cause very low or low stress by over half of respondents; FFA Chapter Alumni Meetings (59% very low or low stress), Officer Trainings (55% very low or low stress), and FFA Summer Camp (70% very low or low stress). A complete list of FFA and SAE items and the frequency that participants indicated each level of stress can be found in Figure 1. Items are listed in descending order by the number of respondents who indicated an item as causing very high stress.

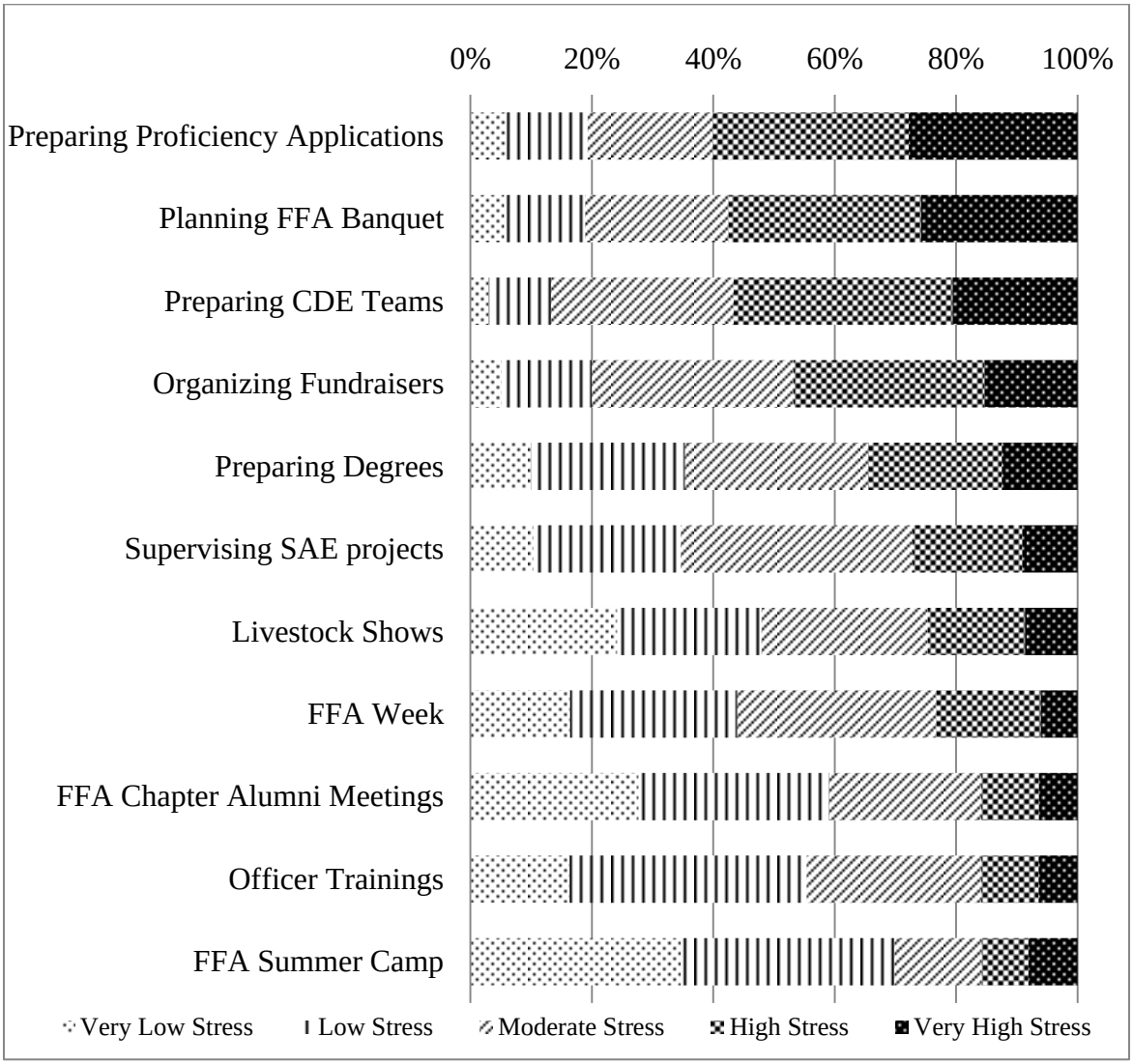

Figure 1. Degrees of stress indicated by participants for FFA/SAE responsibilities

Objective three sought to determine which individual items associated with classroom teaching responsibilities caused the greatest amount of stress. Teachers were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale how much stress each item caused where 1=very low stress and 5=very high stress. Paperwork/Reports was identifies as the most stressful item with 54% of respondents indicating it caused high or very high stress. This was followed by Creating New

Curriculum, which 35% of participants found to create high or very high stress. Rounding out the top five were Lack of Teaching Materials (34% high or very high stress), Managing Student Behavior (33% high or very high stress), and Teaching New Content (35% high or very high stress). Only two items were indicated to cause very low or low stress by over half of respondents; Student Engagement (53% very low or low stress) and Creating Evaluations (58% very low or low stress). A complete list of Classroom Teaching items and the frequency that participants indicated each level of stress can be found in Figure 2. Items are listed in descending order by the number of respondents that indicated an item as very highly stressful.

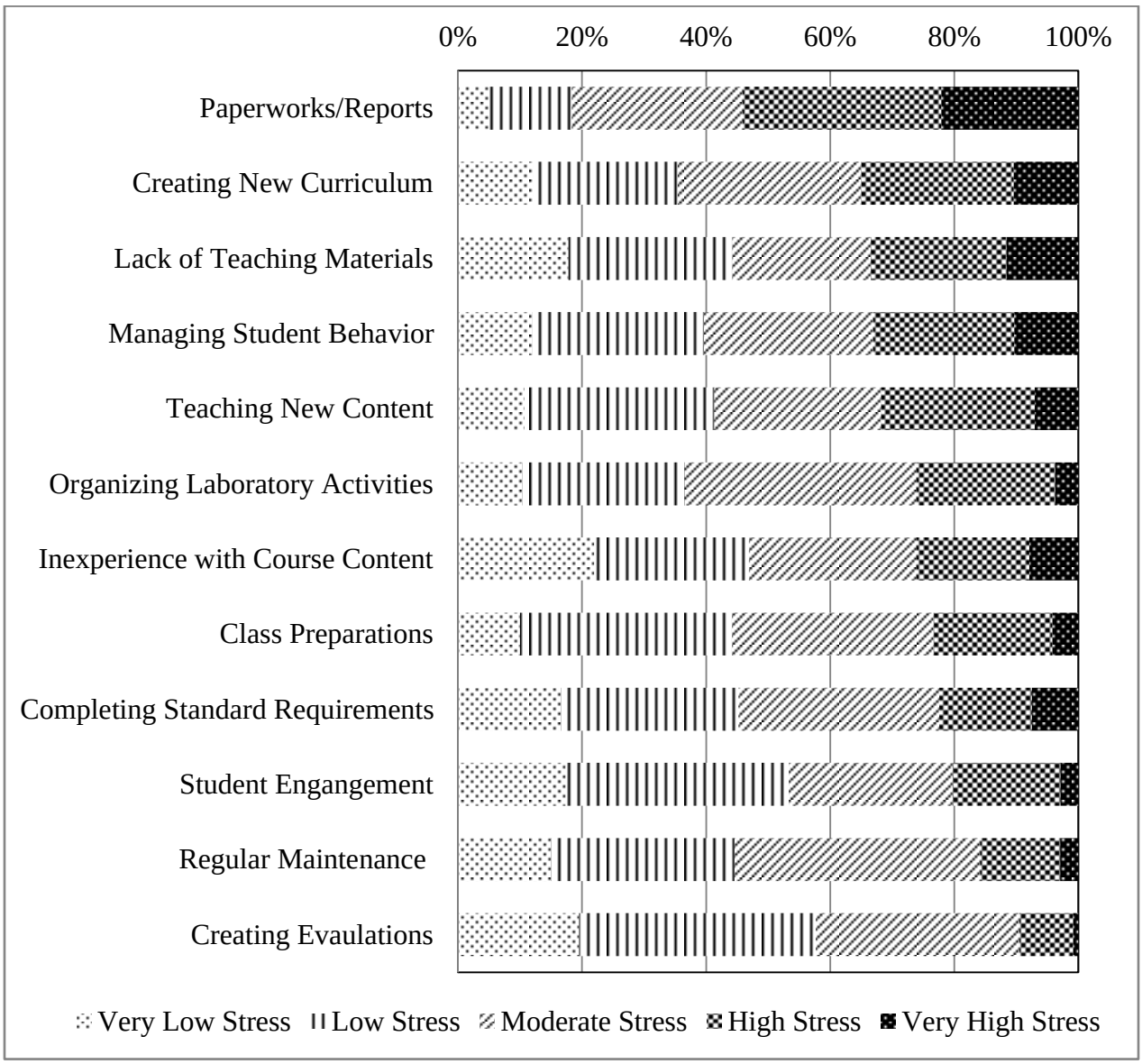

Figure 2. Degrees of stress indicated by participants for classroom instruction responsibilities

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study creates a profile for female agricultural education teachers in Region V, which include the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The researchers found the majority (54%) of the women were ages 34 or younger. In a study conducted by Chenevey, Ewing, and Whittington (2008), the researchers found older agricultural education teachers were less stressed than young agricultural education teachers. Perhaps the younger age of participants in this study affected the amount of stress levels reported.

It is also worth noting that the majority of the female participants in this study were married (71%) with children (61%). Therefore, these women have several roles: wife, mother, and professional. As found in a study by Okpara, Squillance, and Erondu (2005), women face the challenge of splitting their time between professional and family responsibilities, which can significantly increase stress levels. Hence, a recommendation to assist female agricultural education teachers would be to offer workshops that focus on achieving balance in one's personal life at future in-service trainings. Such workshops could provide coping mechanisms suitable for handling many simultaneous demands such as the many applications and reports due at the end of the school year. Research conducted by Torres, Lawver, and Lambert (2009) support this finding and recommend including topics such as time management and stress reduction during professional development opportunities.

The participants in this study identified high stressors related to curriculum issues including creating new curriculum, lack of teaching materials, and teaching new content. Torres, Lawver, and Lambert (2009) state "job stress can occur when the requirement of the job does not match teachers' resources or capabilities" (p. 108). Additional research should delve deeper into this issue to determine if teachers are lacking resources in particular content areas or having trouble budgeting for necessary materials. If needs exist for professionally developed content materials, state curriculum materials services may be solicited to focus on such development. If suitable materials already exist, teachers should be better notified about what is available to eliminate duplicate efforts. Also, participants should be encouraged to engage in the NAAE communities of practice to share ideas and reduce time spent developing curriculum from scratch. If funding for materials in a common issue, grant programs designed for classroom teachers may need to be pursued and better advertised. A follow-up study comparing early career teachers who have experienced professional growth opportunities such as the DELTA conference and CASE Institutes with teachers who have not experienced such opportunities could provide insight into the value and effectiveness of early career professional development.

Other high stressors identified included completing paperwork/reports, preparing proficiency applications, and preparing degrees. These stressors have been identified in previous studies, which site excessive paperwork, working overtime, meeting deadlines, and not enough personal time as contributing to job stress (Torres, Lawver, and Lambert, 2009; Klassen & Chiu (2010). Based on the findings, it would be beneficial to focus in-service training and other personal development opportunities around these topics. Using professional development opportunities, such as in-service training, has the potential to increase skills and the self-efficacy of educators. Therefore, professional development opportunities may reduce job stress and enhance satisfaction from teaching (Klassen and Chiu, 2010). Additionally, paperwork requirements should be reviewed to determine what teachers are submitting to the local school district, the state agriculture teachers' association, National FFA, and other affiliated parties to identify redundancy and opportunities to improve efficiency.

Participants identified high stress levels for the FFA/SAE banquet, proficiency applications, and degree applications. It is worthy to note, that all three of these activities take place during the spring semester. Moreover, secondary education teachers are also charged with task of allotting time for standardized testing during the spring semester in addition to accommodating students who must miss class because of spring sports such as softball, baseball, and track. Therefore, the spring schedule is packed with competing activities and hence, makes banquet

planning, proficiency applications and degree applications much more stressful than if each of these activities were scheduled during a less hectic time of year. Perhaps, it would be beneficial to review the academic calendar as well as the school sanctioned activities calendar and make some logistical adjustments to potentially reduce stress.

This study identified several stressors experienced by female agricultural education teachers in Region V. In order to reduce the rate of teacher attrition, future research should be continued in this area. Studies should continue to focus on determining the best topics for in-service training and professional development opportunities for female agricultural education teachers. Klassen and Chiu (2010) found that "a one-size fits all" training, such as professional development or in-service training, to be ineffective. Therefore, this type of research is important as it will help the state department of education and university teacher educators tailor training to the specific needs and skill development of agricultural educators. In order to continue to find ways to reduce stressors for female agricultural education teachers, research should be further conducted to specifically compare the women by age. According to Lazarus' Theory of Psychological Stress, this study focused solely on the "appraisal" part of the theory. However, conducting further studies that focus on comparing female participants by age would provide perspective for the "coping" part of the theory and allow researchers to determine if as women get older they find more/better means of coping with stressors.

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DIANA L. KING is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication at the University of Georgia-Tifton Campus, 2356 Rainwater Rd. Tifton, GA 31793, dlking@uga.edu.

K. JILL RUCKER is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Leadership in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at the University of Arkansas.

DENNIS W. DUNCAN is a Professor of Agricultural Education in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication at the University of Georgia, 142A Four Towers, Athens, GA 30602, dwd@uga.edu.