

Analysis of Occupational Stress Among High School Teachers in Coimbatore District

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ABSTRACT

Stress is an unavoidable phenomenon in human life. Though the type of stress may differ but almost any aspect of life can lead to stress, be it lack of friends, lack of money, unemployment or even employment. Rapid industrialization, increasing urbanization and receding support over the last few decades have contributed to rise in stress level. Few years ago, it was not considered as an important public health problem in many countries but recently stress has gained worldwide attention due to its potential hazards. In this paper objective is to identify level and associated factors of occupational stress among secondary school teachers of Coimbatore district.

Keywords: Stress, Factors and Coimbatore district.

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress is generally recognized as an unpleasant emotional state. According to Kyriacou (1978), stress is result of prolonged pressures that can't be controlled by the coping strategies that an individual has. Olson et al (1989) defined stress as "a state of tension that arises from an actual or perceived demand that calls for an adjustment or adaptive behavior". Stress can attribute to poor performance, absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, accidents and various health problems. Distress can lead to hypertension, diabetes mellitus, stroke and ulcers among other illness. In 1983, Time magazine described stress as "The Epidemic of the Eighties". According to American institute of Stress, stress is America's number one health problem. On estimation, 75 to 90 % of all visits to primary care physicians are found to be related to stress. One of the important types of stress is occupational stress

Major objectives

To study the level of occupational stress among secondary school teachers of Coimbatore District of Tamilnadu State.

To find out factors related with occupational stress among school teachers.

Occupational Stress: A Worldwide Phenomenon:

Occupational stress has been considered as leading stressor among adults. According to International Labour Organization (ILO), occupational stress affects all countries, all professions and all categories of workers. World Labor Report of 1993 identified occupational stress as one of the most serious health issues of the twentieth century while few years later World Health Organization (WHO) termed it as "World Wide Epidemic".

Occupational stress is defined by National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH, USA) as, "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities,

resources, or needs of the worker". Occupational stress is also known as "job stress", "work related stress" or "work stress". World Health Organization defines this in a similar way as, "a pattern of reactions that occurs when workers are presented with work demands not matched to their knowledge, skills or abilities and which challenge their ability to cope".

Level of Occupational Stress varies widely even in identical situation. According to recent WHO report nearly 75 percent of the world's labor force works in developing countries but many developing countries are not in position to provide even the basic facilities to workers leaving them to work in hazardous environment. Nearly 20 to 50 percent of workers in developed countries are subjected to hazardous exposures at work and the figure is expected to be higher in the developing countries. This type of working environment contributes to disease burden and injuries.

Occupational stress can lead to poor health make people feel sick, both at workplace and at home. Usual early signs of job stress include headache, sleep disturbance, stomach upset and difficulty in concentration. Later this leads to major diseases like cardiovascular diseases (for example stroke, myocardial infarction) mental health problems (for example depression and burnout) and musculoskeletal disorders (for example involvement of back and upper extremity). In addition to physical and psychological signs and symptoms, occupational stress can also lead to behavioral symptoms like loss of appetite; increased consumption of alcohol, drugs and tobacco; isolation from others; poor job performance and change in close family relationships. Besides, workers who are stressed are more likely to be less productive, poorly motivated and less safe at work. According to another survey report by a leading company, 80 percent of workers felt stress on the job and nearly half wanted help to manage stress. Nearly 30 percent considered conditions at work as

unpleasant or unsafe and further stated that workload is the main cause of stress in their life.

Teachers Stress

In many countries teaching is often considered as one of the most stressful profession. According to Kyriacou (2000) teachers stress can be defined as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant negative emotions such as anger, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness, resulting from some aspect of their work”. Kyriacou and Schutcliffe defined teachers stress as, “a response syndrome of negative effects (such as anger or depression) usually accompanied by potentially pathogenic physiological changes (such as increased heart rate) resulting from aspects of the teaching job and mediated by the perception that demands made upon teacher constitute a threat to his/her self-esteem or wellbeing and by coping mechanisms activated to reduce the perceived threat.” Vandenberg he (1999) states that, teachers stress is the “general term to describe negative emotions of teachers that are reflected in aversive demands to their work”.

Forlin defines stress in a similar way, as “an interactive process which occurs between teachers and their teaching environment which leads to excessive demands being placed on them and resulting in physiological and psychological distress. So, teachers stress can be considered as a state of unpleasant emotions resulting from some aspect of their work. There is one related phenomena known as burnout. According to Friedman (1995), burnout is a type of ‘unmediated stress’. He claims that stress in teaching is ‘the onset of the burnout processes. Spector (2000) defines burnout as, ‘distressed psychological state’. So burnout can be understood as a consequence of chronic stress.

Though the stress can have positive influence, most of times it is negative. Distress is the term used to describe the negative or destructive aspects of stress. Distress is essentially, “a negative psychological response to a stressor, as indicated by the presence of negative psychological states.”

Level of teachers stress

Teachers all over the world are facing the problem of occupational stress, though extent of the problem varies. According to Kristensen (2005) about 10 to 40 percent of teachers are suffering under extreme stress or burnout, in European countries.33 Maslach (2001) argues for even higher stress level among teachers of Asian countries. In UK, 43% of head teachers described their work as ‘Very’ or ‘extremely’ stressful.35According to a cross sectional study by Kyriacou (2004), 3 percent teachers were found to be suffering from ‘very high’ or ‘extreme’ stress in Taiwan. In Pakistan 23.9% teachers were either ‘highly’ or ‘extremely’ stressed. In a cross sectional study reported from India using a Psycho Social Stress Scale, 42% of teachers showed high to very high level of stress. However this study was conducted among female teachers only.

Secondary versus other school teachers

There have been few studies comparing stress level among teachers working in secondary schools with those working

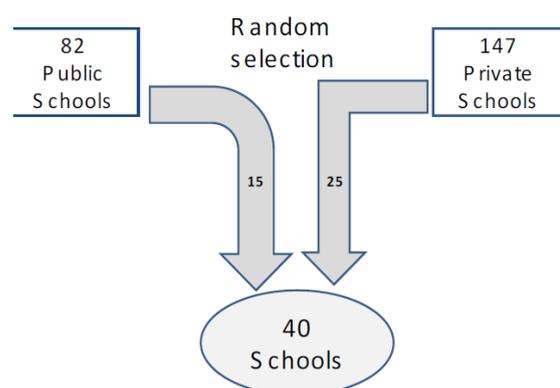
elsewhere. Though results have been inconclusive, most have found higher stress levels among secondary school teachers. Wang Z (2001) found significantly higher level of stress among secondary schoolteachers than those in primary school teachers. Beer J (1992) also found similar results with higher prevalence of stress among secondary school teachers than grade school teachers. Van Horn (1997) reported higher scores among secondary school teachers than elementary school teachers on Maslach Burnout Inventory which measures three dimensions, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishment. These studies supported results found by Laughlin.

Determinants of Teachers stress

According to one cross sectional study reported from Taiwan, 26% of teachers reported that being a teacher was either ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ stressful while 48% found this ‘moderately’ stressful. No differences in stress levels were found based upon the sex or teaching experience. Changing education policy of the government, additional administrative work and students’ misbehavior were found to be among most significant factors related to occupational stress. Reducing the teacher’s workload was found to most effective control strategy.

Sample frame

Sample frame consisted of a list of all schools of secondary level. The list was obtained from district office of Department of Education, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. The list was up-to-date according to education session 2016-17. The list included names of all schools of secondary level situated inside Karauli district. The list classified the schools according to type of school (government or private). Out of total 229 schools mentioned in the list, 82 were government schools and the rest 147 were private schools.



This was pre tested among five teachers of same district and was modified based on the feedback. The questionnaire was self-administered by the researcher. The questionnaire included two scales namely Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and General Health Questionnaire-12 items (GHQ-12) to measure social support and occupational stress respectively.

Data Analysis

SPSS version 15.0 was used for analysis of data. Univariate analysis was done to identify baseline characteristics of study

population. It was followed by bivariate analysis using cross tabulation and Chi-square test, to identify association between occupational stress and independent variables. P value of <0.05 was considered as statistically significant. Association was also considered as statistically significant when the null value for the effect measure fell within 95% Confidence Interval (95% CI) limits. Factors found to having significant association with occupational stress during bivariate analysis were further analyzed using multiple logistic regression to identify most significant predictors after adjusting for other variables.

Baseline Characteristics of the Sample

| Variable | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Type of school | | |
| Government | 109 | 36.2% |
| Private | 192 | 63.8% |
| Area of school | | |
| Rural | 154 | 51.2% |
| Urban | 147 | 48.8% |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 226 | 75.1% |
| Female | 75 | 24.9% |
| Income | | |
| Upto 6000Rs | 194 | 64.5% |
| 6001 Rs or more | 107 | 35.5% |
| Teaching Experience | | |
| Upto 10 yrs. | 184 | 61.1% |
| More than 10yrs | 117 | 38.9% |
| Nature of employment | | |
| Temporary | 195 | 64.8% |
| Permanent | 106 | 35.2% |
| Level of Education | | |
| No Professional degree | 57 | 18.9% |
| Have Professional degree | 244 | 81.1% |

More than 58 percent of the teachers were working for more than six hours per day at school while around 42 percent were working for up to six hours. More than half teachers had class size less than 55. About 60 percent of the teachers were required to achieve more than 80 percent of result. More than half of the teachers performed better than expectations last year while about 35 percent had satisfactory result last year and about seven percent could not satisfy expectations of school authorities.

Non-Teaching Activities

Most common non-teaching activity, in which teachers were involved, was checking exams papers. More than 80 percent of the teachers were involved in organizing exams and maintaining registers. Around one third of the teachers were involved in census survey. Separately taken, at least about a quarter of the teachers were involved in each non-teaching activity namely inspection, National Literacy Mission,

admissions, school health program, mid-day meal program and election duty.

Work Information of Teachers: Basic Information

| Variable | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Total Working hours | | |
| Up to 6 hrs. | 176 | 58.5% |
| More than 6 hrs. | 125 | 41.5% |
| Class size | | |
| Upto 55 | 154 | 51.2% |
| More than 55 | 147 | 48.8% |
| Minimum Results Expected | | |
| Up to 80 | 123 | 40.9% |
| More than 80 | 178 | 59.1% |
| Performance of last year | | |
| Better than expectation | 173 | 57.5% |
| Satisfactory | 107 | 35.5% |
| Could not satisfy expectation | 21 | 7.0% |

Working environment

Above 90 percent of the teachers had adequate light, adequate ventilation, clean drinking water and toilet facility available at schools. Above 80 percent of the teachers had sufficient teaching aids available. Only 35 percent had library at school. Taken separately, rest of the facilities were available only for less than 20 percent of the teachers.

Students' Behavior

About three fourth of the teachers described students' behavior as good while rest of the teachers reported misbehavior by students.

Social support

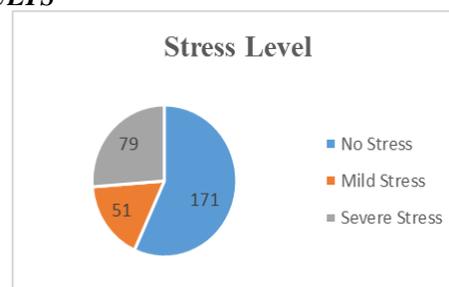
More than 90 percent of the teachers had adequate social support while about seven percent were having inadequate social support.

Occupational stress among teachers

| Variable | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------|-----------|---------|
| No Stress | 171 | 56.8% |
| Mild Stress | 51 | 16.9% |
| Severe Stress | 79 | 26.2% |

Among all teachers, around 57 percent had no stress, 16.9% had mild stress and more than a quarter of the teachers were suffering from severe stress. Total proportion of teachers having any form of stress (both mild and severe) was about 43 percent.

2. RESULTS



Strengths and limitations of the study

This is one of the earliest study reported from India about occupational stress among teachers. A tool used to measure stress was already validated in India. Social support was also measured using a well-recognized scale. Data were collected by a single investigator, thereby decreasing the chance of inter observer variations.

Study design adopted is not sufficient to establish causal relationship. Another limitation of the study is that the stress was measured only at a given point of time which may in fact vary during course of year. As the researcher got opportunity to meet only the 'survivor population', those having severe symptoms might either have been absent since long time or left the occupational. Lastly, as the data was collected using a certain section of teachers, findings may not be generalizable to whole profession.

3. CONCLUSION

The study reported high level of stress among teachers. More than two of every five teachers were under stress. The figure is closer to the level reported in other studies from India and outside. Workload was found to be most significant risk factor of occupational stress among the teachers. Students' behavior and individual teacher's performance of last year were the other important risk factors associated with stress. The study did not find significant association between level of stress and working environment. Similarly, no significant association was found between stress and level of perceived social support. Teaching experience had protective effect. No sex difference was found in level of stress. Rather, among the biographic variables, only teaching experience was found to have significant association with occupational stress. There is a need for more empirical observations with appropriate methodology to establish causal relationship to provide more details on stress. The study calls for immediate attention of the policy makers to control occupational stress among teachers. Reduction in stress level will help to improve efficiency which will ultimately lead to better education. In the next section, author tries to suggest some measures to counter the problem.

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