

Comparative Study of Occupational Stress among Teachers of Private and Govt. Schools in Relation to their Age, Gender and Teaching Experience

Surinder Kaur

Research Scholar, Singhania University, Rajasthan, India

Today's life is full of challenges. In everyday life we come across many situations. The work of a teacher is a physically and mentally challenging. A teacher needs to use a lot of energy in his daily chores in the classroom coupled with his personal and family commitments. This trend which is a routine for a teacher forwards a lot of stress to the teacher. More than ever before work is not seen as the root of infinite satisfaction and fulfillment, but rather a source of stress, discontentment and humiliation.

This increase negative orientation to work is probable due to the fact that man no longer finds meaning or a sense of him/herself in the community or as Freud (1962) once suggested, but which does not seem to exist today, his work at least gives him a secure place in a portion of reality in the human community. It is because of the dramatic changes that have taken place in society over the last decade or two that work and life stress have become more immediate focal points of interest. This interest has reflected itself in an ever increasing research orientation into occupational stress, the impact of life events, stress with a burgeoning and desperate range of investigations being undertaken into the sources and manifestation of stress, it was felt that we should 'step back' and reflect on what should or needs to be done, that is to focus on priorities or issues or problem areas of importance.

Stress

Stress is a term in psychology and biology, first coined in the biological context in the 1930s, which has in more recent decades become commonly used in popular parlance. It refers to the consequence of the failure of an organism – human or animal – to respond appropriately to emotional or physical threats, whether actual or imagined.

Stress symptoms commonly include a state of alarm and adrenaline production, short-term resistance as a coping mechanism, and exhaustion, as well as irritability, muscular tension, inability to concentrate and a variety of physiological reactions such as headache and elevated heart rate.

Stress is a feeling that's created when we react to particular events. It's the body's way of rising to a challenge and preparing to meet a tough situation with focus, strength, stamina, and heightened alertness.

The events that provoke stress are called stressors, and they cover a whole range of situations — everything from outright physical danger to making a class presentation or taking a semester's worth of your toughest subject.

The human body responds to stressors by activating the nervous system and specific hormones. The hypothalamus signals the adrenal glands to produce more of the hormones adrenaline and cortisol and release them into the bloodstream. These hormones speed up heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, and metabolism. Blood vessels open wider to let more blood flow to large muscle groups, putting our muscles on alert. Pupils dilate to improve vision. The liver releases some of its stored glucose to increase the body's energy. And sweat is produced to cool the body. All of these physical changes prepare a person to react quickly and effectively to handle the pressure of the moment.

This natural reaction is known as the stress response. Working properly, the body's stress response enhances a person's ability to perform well under pressure. But the stress response can also cause problems when it overreacts or fails to turn off and reset itself properly.

Teachers not only have the stress of dealing with so many diverse children on a daily basis. They are also charged with educating and helping to mold these children into productive members of society. With rules, regulations, guidelines, and performance expectations all around teachers can have very high levels of stress. The job is very demanding in that it has hardly any end.

Quite often teachers must take their work home overnight or on the weekends in order to be prepared for the next class section. The traditional summer break that so many teachers once looked forward to has begun to disappear as well with most schools beginning to adopt block schedules which require nearly year long school sessions with no more than one nine week vacation built in.

Good Stress and Bad Stress

Stress is a word that everyone avoids but it cannot be. Everyone has some stress with varying degree. The word 'Stress' is defined as the status of psychological upset or disequilibrium in the human being caused by frustration conflicted and other internal as well as external strain and pressures.

Now a days, everyone seems to be talking about stress. You hear it not only in daily conversation but also through Television, Radio, the newspaper's and the ever increasing number of conferences, stress centres and university courses are devoted to the topic.

Stress is a non-specific response of the body to any demand. In some responses every demand made on the body is unique, that is specific. The first thing one should then bear in mind about stress is that a variety of dissimilar situations are capable of producing stress; and hence that no single ones can, in itself be pinpointed as the cause of the reaction as such. In all forms of life, there are common pathways which must mediate any attempt to adapt to conditions and sustain life.

Man is ventured to study the stress in great detail since he is aware that his survival may depend on his ability to deal with it or get out of its way. On the other hand stress can cause fatal illness. Stress has also consigned rather large number of people to mental institutions, psychiatrists couch, prisons and hospitals.

According to Seyle (1950) “*Stress has been defines as the state manifested by the specific syndrome which consists of all the non-specific induced changes with in a biological system*”

Methods of Identifying Stress

Identification is the first step towards correction; with this belief in mind it is strongly advised that a teacher should understand the implications of stress on his personal health and social life. The best ways to have stress identified easily is to remain active in his social circle and readily accept any recent psychological or behavioral change observed by the others.

It is also possible to keep a track of own changes by maintaining a self checklist[i] (Appendix 1) this will help in establishing changes in ideas and opinions over a period of time. This will show a clear picture of how the work place environment have affected your thinking gradually and with the help of your friends, collogues and relatives, you can change the effects of stress on your life.

Self Analysis

The best way is to keep a check on your own health, attitude and behavior. Any change in these should be noted and necessary remedial measures be taken immediately to overcome this situation. The self stress checklist given at appendix 1 can be a helpful aid in determining the change in attitude which can be useful for determining the own state.

Mutual Analysis

Another way is to maintain close liaison with other members of the faculty and discuss the irritants that are creating problems or are likely to create stress for the teachers. This is one way to identify and eradicate the issues which are likely to become the cause of stress beforehand. The faculty members or an organization of teachers can benefit the affected teacher with each other’s experience.

Organizational Role

The organization can also play a positive role in helping their teachers in identifying the causes of stress within their schools. Problems such as isolation and disruptive behavior on the part of students and their parents can very conveniently be handled at the top level by the management amicably without putting the teacher in a stressful situation.

Occupational Stress

Occupational Stress is stress at work. Stress is defined in terms of its physical and physiological effects on a person (or thing). Stress is mental, physical or emotional strain or tension or it is a situation or factor that can cause this. Occupational stress occurs when there is a discrepancy between the demands of the

environment/workplace and an individual's ability to carry out and complete these demand. Often a stressor can lead the body to have a physiological which in turn will result on a strain on a person physically as well as mentally. One of the main causes of occupational stress is work overload. Occupational stress is often caused by an increased workload without the addition of employees to take on that additional work. Instead the increased amount of work is given to the current employees to finish in the same time span that they would be asked to finish their regular or standard workload

But stress doesn't always happen in response to things that are immediate or that are over quickly. Ongoing or long-term events, like coping with a divorce or moving to a new neighborhood or school, can cause stress, too.

Long-term stressful situations can produce a lasting, low-level stress that's hard on people. The nervous system senses continued pressure and may remain slightly activated and continue to pump out extra stress hormones over an extended period. This can wear out the body's reserves, leave a person feeling depleted or overwhelmed, weaken the body's immune system, and cause other problems.

Occupational stress can be defined as the physical and emotional response that occurs where worker perceives an imbalance between their work demands and their capability and/or resources to meet these demands or in simple words it is the harmful physical and emotional response that can happen when there is conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control and employee has over meeting these demands.

Occupational stress is a term used to define ongoing stress that is related to the workplace. The stress may have to do with the responsibilities associated with the work itself, or be caused by conditions that are based in the corporate culture or personality conflicts. As with other forms of tension, occupation stress can eventually affect both physical and emotional well being if not managed effectively.

According to Margolis and Kores (1974) “ Occupational stress is a condition worth interacting with worker characteristics is to disrupted psychological and physiological homeostasis. The causal situation conditions are job stressors and the disrupted homeostasis is job related stress.”

By all definitions the profession of teaching has a very prestigious place in all professions. A teacher is a kingpin in the entire system of education. Almost all cultures of the civilized world have considered their teachers in a very high esteem. They are very often been given names like “Master” “Mentor” and “Guru”. To achieve this status teachers throughout the history of civilization have come up to the expectations of the world around them. Most thinkers and philosophers of the past who are still remembered are because they had their disciples and students.

Times have changed and the societies and cultures have drastically diversified, but the tasks of a teacher are primarily the same, which is the transfer of knowledge to the next generation. With change in cultural norms and traditions in the societies there has been a drastic change in the expectations from a teacher. Some of these changes have limited the measures which a teacher in the past could exercise in disciplining a student and some have put additional burden on teachers in respect their preparation of lessons and adopting and maintaining their teaching styles. This is because most of the school systems prefer to maintain uniformity in all of their branches.

Teaching has now become a very demanding occupation with a lot of stresses for a teacher who has a lot of deadlines to meet and a lot of responsibilities to shoulder besides teaching a child what are in a text book.

Overview of a Teacher's Responsibilities

Primarily the role and responsibility of a teacher is multitasked in the present day school system. This was altogether different just a few years ago. With the change in the type of teaching culture and added managerial responsibilities for teachers include planning and executing instructional lessons, assessing students based on specific objectives derived from a set curriculum, and communicating with parents. A teacher has to take on his responsibilities in the following capacities:

- Lesson planning and teaching.
- Accountability for student performance.
- Classroom management and discipline.
- Supervisory role.
- Extracurricular activity conducting and monitoring

Teachers and Stress

In relation to the profession of teaching, where a teacher is viewed as dispensers of knowledge; teachers are increasingly perceived as facilitators or managers of knowledge. They work in a constant socially isolated environments surrounded by hostile views and sometimes threat of physical abuse, and at the same time under a constant fear and threat of accountability for each and every action of both own self and that of the pupil. This alone can be a sufficient cause for stress for an individual. But in the case of a teacher it is multiplied by other factors as well

Teaching has been identified as one of the most stressful professions today. The reasons for that are quite similar to other stressful occupations in the world. In a survey assessing the stress levels of various jobs by the Health and Safety Executive, teaching came out top. The report, *The Scale of Occupational Stress: further analysis of the impact of demographic factors and type of job*, published in 2000, found that 41.5% of teachers reported themselves 'highly stressed', while 58.5% came into a 'low stress' category, while 36% of teachers felt the effects of stress all or most of the time. This is indeed an alarming state and visibly also the biggest reason for school teachers quitting at a very high percentage or seeking professional help to fight back stress. The figures from teacher's support line,

USA, show different reasons that cause distress to teachers:

- stress, anxiety and depression 27%
- conflict with managers or colleagues 14%
- pressure of workload and excessive changes 9%
- loss of confidence and performance anxiety 9%
- relationship, marital and family problems 5%

This shows that the highest percentage is job related stress that can wreck a professional teacher personally while discharging his duties.

Occupational Stress and Teacher

Occupational stress has become increasingly common in teaching profession largely because of increased occupational complexities and increased economic pressure on individuals. A major source of distress among teachers is result of failure of school to meet the social needs and jobs demands of the teachers.

The teacher must be aware of his clear role to build up the nation. Teachers are over burdened with regular teaching load. Occupational satisfaction is a necessary condition for a healthy growth of teacher's personality. A teacher at present has a vulnerable position. College teachers protest that they are not paid enough. The importance of pay or a factor in occupational has been greatly over emphasized.

In general, occupational stress arises from the working conditions/environment of a system, when we talk of stress among teachers. Many factors cause stress among teachers. School teachers face high amounts of stress during teaching and handling students; Classroom in developing countries remain overcrowded and teacher face intensive verbal communications, prolonged standing, high volume of work load.

Teachers are also over burdened with regular teaching work and non-teaching work as election duties, duty in census; populations counting etc. the teachers are often heard of complaining about.

Teaching profession occupies important and prestigious place in society. Teachers are considered as the creators of leaders, scientists, philosophers, advocates, politicians and administrators. Teacher is the principle means for implementing all educational programmes of the organizations of educations.

With the changing socio-economic scenario and increasing unemployment, the values of teacher and their professional concerns associated with the job have undergone a change, increasing stresses and hassles of teachers.

According to Schwab and Iwanicki (1982), occupational stress in teachers can lead to a variety of negative outcomes including emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalization, and a sense of failure with one's personal accomplishment--a condition the authors refer to as "burnout." Burnout is one of the major reasons that teachers leave the teaching profession, a loss that results in added costs in training and hiring for the field of education (Niles & Anderson, 1993). In other words, the negative outcomes of teachers' occupational stress can be both internal and external.

Because of the negative outcomes associated with occupational stress, many studies have attempted to better understand the phenomenon of occupational stress as it relates to education. These studies have found that degree of stress can differ as a function of several variables. For example, Mo (1991), in a study examining for relationships among secondary school teachers' levels of occupational stress, personality type, and social support, found that burnout was greater among teachers new to the profession, teachers with more personal (non-job related) stress in their lives, teachers who lacked strong social support systems, and teachers with Type A personalities.

Similarly, in his study of occupational stress and teaching, Borg (1991) identified four factors that contributed to teachers' level of occupational stress.

Most people never realize the amount of stress that teachers deal with on a daily basis. They think, "Wow, my kids can be holy terrors. It's a good thing I can drop them off at school and get a break." What they never stop to consider is the poor

teacher at the other end of that ride to school who has to deal with everyone else's holy terrors.

They don't just have one or two problem children. They usually have an oversized classroom full of them. While a child may be relatively behaved at home they may become quite unruly while at school due to the lack of enforceable reprisal. So how about some stress management for teachers?

Job stress can be defined 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. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury. This will discuss the areas from which occupational stress originates. Next, the outcomes of stress will be discussed, followed by an examination of the classifications of stressors. The remainder of the discussion will be focused on the aspects of organizational communication and recommendations for prevention of occupational stress and stress management.

Causes of Stress

General Factors

Working with national curriculum, teacher appraisal, lack of authority and sanctions for disciplining students, threats of school closure, media portrayal of teachers and inability to reconcile different roles i.e. of teacher, guide, counselor and social worker, conflict at home and work, attack on pride by rude pupils, financial pressures, and declining status in the community.

The Role of Management

Feeling of being used or manipulated, being seen as willing workhouse, lack of flexibility in times of need, too much emphasis on paper work, lack of support from management, sexual discrimination and not knowing if you are doing a good job, lack of good pay and promotional aspect etc.

School Policy and Ethos

Lack of consultation, fear of speaking one's mind, no clear boundaries of responsibility, adopting to change, fear of abuse from parent, break, lunch and after school duties, covering for absent colleagues, fear of losing your job etc.

Working Conditions

Large Classes, crowded staff areas, poorly lit rooms, lack of resources, working on school matter during vocations, rewards don't match efforts.

The Pupils

Lack of co-operation from pupils, racial problems, pupils using bad language, pupil answering back, verbal abuse from pupils towards staff and attitude of pupils towards authority, attack on pride by discourteous students.

Causes of Stress for Teachers

From the outside teaching seems all together a different job with summer vacations,

winter vacations and spring breaks. But considering everything that a teacher has to go through everyday all these days off do not do much to get a teacher back in the right frame of mind. According to a research the major causes of teacher stress are:

- Excessive working hours
- Excessive workload
- Rising class sizes
- Pressures due to OFSTED inspection
- Changes in curriculum & courses
- Changes to assessment & testing requirements
- Poor management
- Workplace bullying
- Crumbling schools
- Pupil misbehavior
- Risk of violence from pupils, parents and intruders
- Lack of support with bureaucracy, form filling and routine tasks
- Lack of job security due to redundancy and fixed term contracts
- Lack of control over the job
- Burden of providing cover
- Threat to early retirement arrangements
- Denigration of profession by politicians & media
- Lack of public esteem

Effects of Stress

Stress is considered as an involuntary response to a dangerous situation. When we face a situation which our brain is incapable of handling, it puts the body on alert by producing hormones which are required in fight or flight situation, which are:

- Increased blood pressure.
- Rapid heartbeat.
- Reduced blood supply to the skin.
- Cessation of digestive activities.
- Increase perspiration.
- Additional release of sugar and fat into the system to coup up with the additional energy requirement.
- Decrease in immune system's functions to preserve it for later action.

All these actions are a perfect requirement if we come across a physically stressful situation, like being attacked by a large predator, but most unbecoming in a classroom scenario.

All these actions which are mentioned above have a very long lasting negative effect if these stressful situations are to become frequently occurring feature. They may lead to the following serious and even fatal conditions:

- Depression and anxiety.
- Alcoholism.

- Drug dependency.
- Congenital heart diseases.
- Stress related Diabetes.

Remedial Measures

Some elements of stress are intrinsic while others are situational in the profession of teaching. The teacher has to understand how to cope with those which are intrinsic, while the situational ones can be managed with experience and common sense.

Individual Measures

When a person decides to adopt the teaching profession, he or she during the training phase must realize the demands of this profession in terms of effort involved and in terms of time investment. The workload on a teacher will always be great and everything will always be bracketed by a very tight time schedule. A teacher has to be punctual and able to meet the deadline without fail. A teacher will have to always face the criticism of parents of the weak students and face the school board with a different set of problems.

A sensible teacher must know where to draw a line to prevent his social and personal life from being absorbed by his professional life. Though it is very difficult to leave the stresses of the school in the office and not let it affect their personal life, but there are methods which can help a teacher to reduce these effects.

Adopt a Hobby

It is very important for a teacher to have a hobby which is totally different from he teaches at school. Music, gardening, hiking and painting are a few examples of hobbies which a teacher may adopt. These can give them an outlet and take their minds off from the problems that they face at school. This is one way of getting the day's stress off from their minds.

Adopting Healthy Habits

It is very important for a teacher to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Cutting back on bad habits like drinking and smoking will not just make you a healthy person, but will also make you a role model for your students and other faculty members as well. For a healthy living follow the following:

- Stop smoking as it will help you stay healthy.
- Reduce caffeine intake will help you stay focused and reduce stress
- Eat breakfast as it is the most important meal of the day as it will help you stay healthy
- Avoid junk snacks and eat right
- Don't let your life just roll by itself. Set realistic goals in life and then pursue them.

- Make it a point to visit the guidance counselor, as it can help you identify any underlying psychological or behavior problem related to workplace stress.
- Worrying unnecessarily can be a big source of stress. So cut back on worrying as that will reduce your stress.
- Learn and practice anger management as it will help in managing stress.

References

- [1] Mills Sandra, H (2002) – Stress Management for teachers, New Delhi, Madhuban Educational Books.
- [2] Mishra, P.K (1996) – Quoted in pestonjee, D.M (1999), Stress and coping, New Delhi, SAGI Publications.
- [3] Monica (2004) – “Occupational stress of teachers “, M.Ed. Dissertation, DCS Punjab University, CHD.
- [4] Mcgrath, J.E(1976) – Stress and behaviour in organization in M.D. Dinette (Ed.), 1976 Handbook of industrial and organizational Psychology, paloalt, C.A. Counseling psychological stress.
- [5] Mahapatra, C.(1992) – Job. Stress, mental Health and copying. A study on professionals “. Reproduced from fourth survey of Educational Research. Vol. I NCERT, New Delhi.
- [6] Mohanty, S.(1992) – “Occupational stress and Mental Health in Executives”. A comparative study of the Public and private sectors, Reproduced from fourth survey of Educational Research, NCERT, New Delhi.
- [7] Nigam and Bhatia (1985) – As cited in Amandeep (2004), “ A study of Burnout in relation to stress Among college Teachers”. Unpublished M.Ed. Dissertation, Pb. Uni. CHD.
- [8] Panday, R(2003) – “A study of job stress among secondary school teachers in contact of Educational Reasearch, Vol. 22, No. 1, January-June.
- [9] Pithers, R.T. And Soden R.(1998)-“Scottish ad Australian teachers stress and strain. A comparative study. “British journal of Educational Psychology 68,
- [10] Quick, J.C.dn Quick J.D.- Organizational stress and preventive management, McGrawHill, New York,N4, 1984.
- [11] Sharma(1995) – “Effect of Mastery Learning strategies on the learning out comes of Secondary students in Relation to stress”. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Panjab Uni. CHD.
- [12] Singh, A.P. and Mishra- “Occupational stress as a Moderator variables of job Involvement- Job satisfaction Relationship “. Asian Journal of Psychology and Education, Vol. 19.
- [13] Singh A.P & Srivastava, A.K(1981) – “Manual of OSI,”The occupational stress index Manaviyan Parikashan Sansthan, Varansai.
- [14] Singla Geetika(2006) – “A study of the occupational stress among Employees from different careers of chandigarh, M.Ed. Dissertation, DCS,Punjab Uni. CHD>
- [15] Sultana(1995) – Quoted in pestonjee, D.M(1999) stress and coping, new delhi, SAGE publications.