

Study of Occupational Stress among Teachers of Private and Government schools

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Abstract

We are living in the challenging and competitive world. In everyday life we come across many challenging situations. Stress is one of the most challenging situations. Stress is a common feature in our daily lives, especially when the pace of development increases. Work is a common term which is applied for all sorts of occupation. It is a basic condition for most people and is an important component of the atmosphere for human survival. It is also a major element for the development of the individual as well as the economy of the nation. Many adults spend half of their lives in work related activities. It is natural to experience work related stress on tension or strain in the body or the mind. A famous phrase “stress collapses everything” has a prominent place in the minds of millions. It is a silent killer in the modern age. 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. Like before work is not seen as the root of infinite satisfaction and fulfillment, but rather a source of stress, discontentment and humiliation. 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 is attempt to study occupational stress among teachers of private and government schools.

INTRODUCTION

The word, stress is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “a state of affairs involving demand on physical or mental energy”. In medical parlance „stress“ is defined as a perturbation of the body’s homeostasis”Extreme stress conditions are detrimental to human health. But in moderation stress is normal and in many cases, proves useful. An occupational stress can be caused by too much or too little work, time pressure and deadlines, fatigue from physical strains of work environment, excessive travelling, long hours, having to cope with changes in work. An occupational stress is any force that pushes a psychological or physical factor behind its range of stability, producing a strain within the individuals. Knowledge that stress is likely to occur constitutes a threat to the individual. A threat can cause a strain because of what it signifies to the person. As occupational stress begins to take toll on the body and mind, a variety of symptoms can result. Working in organizations not only provides individuals with life sustaining income but also exerts its own pressures on them. This can ultimately have negative consequences both for achieving the goals of the organization and meeting the needs of the individuals working in them. Thus, the work environment is a source of social and psychological stress, which has harmful effects on the well-being of the employees.

Occupational stress is a costly issue, in today’s workplace as evidence suggests that stress is the major cause of turnover in organizations. Occupational stress cause for different psychological and other problems; depression, anxiety, dissatisfaction, fatigue, tension etc.

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 yearlong school sessions with no more than one nine week vacation built in.

Stress

The word stress is derived from the Latin word *strictus*, which mean tight or narrow. Its an omnipresent part of life. Stress is an inevitable part of life. All of us recognize the feelings of being overwhelmed much work, lack of balance or presence from various factors. All these stressors are compounded by the realities of everyday life during the 21st century traffic, noise, family issues, health problem etc.

One may be familiar with some other terms which are used synonymously because Of their meaning beings similar stress. These terms are stress, strain, conflict and pressure.

Inanceivch and mettson have defined stress as “An adaptive response, mediated by individual characteristics and or psychological processes that are consequences of any external action, situation or event that places special physical and or psychological demand upon a person”.

Stress: The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly

The Good

Stress is actually one of the healthiest things for us. Wait, what? That's right, stress is so good for us it's impossible to be human without it.

We require stress to develop adaptive responses from things like being able to breathe oxygen once we leave our mother's womb, to developing and growing our brain tissue, to triggering our body to lay down new muscle. Without resistance, we don't grow stronger. And that's just the way it is.

The term [hormesis](#) refers to beneficial biological adoptions from exposure to low doses of toxins or other stressors. Hormedic stressors like resistance training temporarily hyper-stress several functions in our body. If you were to see the lab work of a really fit individual who just finished lifting weights, you would actually think they were incredibly unhealthy.

Inflammatory markers would be up, stress hormones would be elevated, there would be extensive micro-trauma to muscle cells, and various other evidence that they are not as healthy as to act as a buffer to the pain you were just exposed to. Your body comes back stronger and better equipped to deal with the stress so that it won't feel that it is incapable anymore. Our bodies are truly a miracle of engineering. And it's time that we start to see them as such.

The Bad

Your sympathetic nervous system (also known as your “fight or flight” system) is designed as an evolutionary impulse to help you save yourself from a wild animal attack or fend off rival tribesmen

Most people in our high-stress world today are perpetually living with the lights on and never allowing their body and mind to get out of that stressed state. Unpaid bills, looming exams or projects, etc all trigger the same stress response in your body as if you were in danger. According to the [HeartMath Institute](#), “A typical stress reaction, which most of us experience dozens of times each day, begins a cascade of 1,400 biochemical events in our body. If these reactions are left unchecked we age prematurely, our cognitive function is impaired, our energy is drained, and we are robbed of our effectiveness and clarity.”

The Ugly

In the 1900’s the vast majority of physician visits were for acute infection, influenza, trauma or child-birth. Today, upwards of **90 percent** of doctor visits are for stress related illnesses. That, my friend, is insane.

The American Medical Association has noted that stress is the basic underlying **cause** of more than 60% of all human illness and disease. So not only is stress a component and instigator of disease, it literally makes diseases fresh out of the oven for you like grandma’s chocolate chip cookies.

Even though it’s not life or death most of the time, the same psychological worries we carry around constantly bathe our cells in stress hormones that: Raise our blood pressure, Increase blood sugar and decrease insulin sensitivity, Restrict our breathing, Depress our digestion, Tighten and constrict our muscles (including the important one in your chest), Elevate stress hormones to unhealthy levels, Inhibit our immune function.

Causes contributing to job stress

Policies

- Performance
- Job relocation frequency
- Unrealistic job specification
- Shifts and long working hours

Expectation

- Performance
- Society
- Economic conditions

Style

- Conflict
- Absenteeism
- Strike and dispute
- Negative real politick system and procedures

Processes

- Poor communication
- Improper performance measurement / feed back
- Ambiguous/conflicting goals
- Improper communication
- Unfair control processes

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Every one reacts to stress differently. But there are common symptoms of stress. People may shake uncontrollably breathe faster, deeper than normal or even vomit. Stress can trigger an asthma attack.

Intellectual symptoms:

- ♣ Difficulty in taking decision

- ♣ Confusion
- ♣ Poor judgment
- ♣ Lack of concentration

Physical symptoms

- ♣ Sleep disturbance
- ♣ Fatigue
- ♣ High Blood pressure
- ♣ Heart palpitations

Emotional Symptoms

- ♣ Restlessness and anxiety
- ♣ Depression
- ♣ Anger and resentment
- ♣ Irritation

Behavioral symptoms

- ♣ Sleeplessness
- ♣ Isolation
- ♣ Neglecting responsibilities
- ♣ Overreacting to unexpected problem

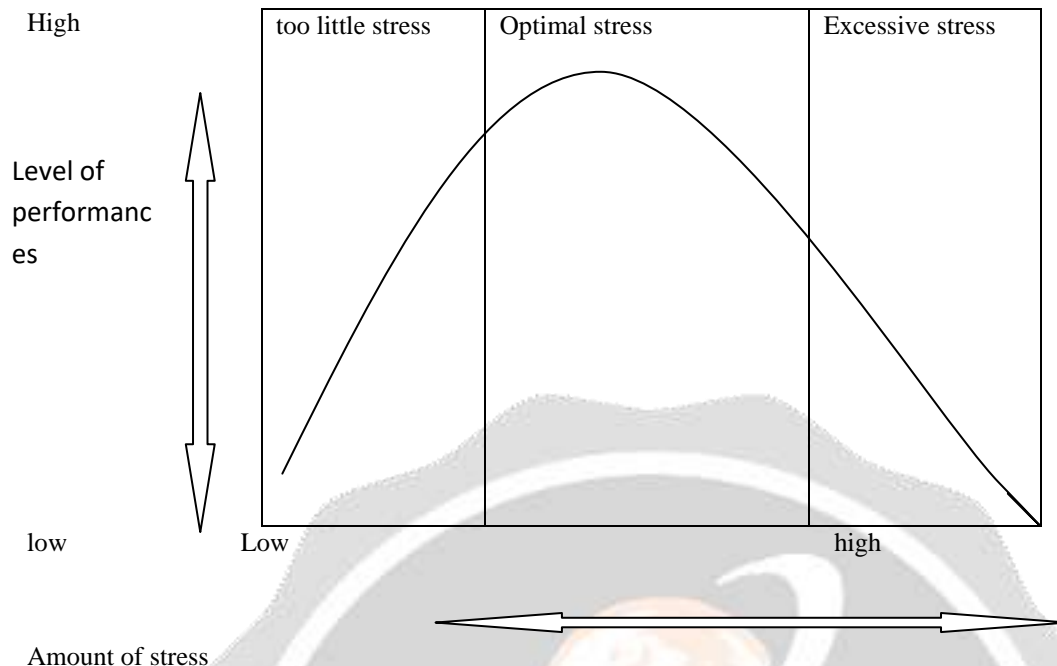
Managing Stress

If one is suffering from stress, the aspect of life that causes it has to be identified. Changes in lifestyle or other small strategies can help to deal with stress. The work can be delegated or shared and avoid confrontation with problematic colleagues. Learning to be assertive, taking regular exercise, avoiding alcohol, drug can reduce stress. On the other hand, eating a healthy, balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, finding humor in stressful situations, time management, talking to friends or family and sharing thoughts and fears can fight stress. The person who is stressed should never take up more work that he knows or can cope with. Listening to music or relaxation tapes, tensing and relaxing muscles are some of the simple ways to manage stress.

Stress and job performance

While examining the relationship between stress and job performance, it can be said that there are both positive and negative effects. At low levels of stress, the employee may not be alert enough to give a good performance which may marginally improve up to a point (optimal point of stress) and beyond this point the performance will begin to deteriorate. When at excessive levels of stress, their performance will be low because they may be too agitated or aroused to give their best to the job.

A typical relationship between performance and stress is displayed below:



Occupational Stress

"Workplace stress" then is the harmful physical and emotional responses that can happen when there is a conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands. In general, the combination of high demands in a job and a low amount of control over the situation can lead to stress. Fear of job redundancy, layoffs due to an uncertain economy, increased demands for overtime due to staff cutbacks act as negative stressors. Employees who start to feel the "pressure to perform" can get caught in a downward spiral of increasing effort to meet rising expectations with no increase in job satisfaction. The relentless requirement to work at optimum performance takes its toll in job dissatisfaction, employee turnover, reduced efficiency, illness and even death. Absenteeism, illness, alcoholism, "petty internal politics", bad or snap decisions, indifference and apathy, lack of motivation or creativity are all by-products of an over stressed workplace. In the workplace, stress can be the result of any number of situations.

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.

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

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 • Changes in curriculum & courses • Changes to assessment & testing requirements • Poor management • Workplace bullying • 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.

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.
 - Permanency in employment reduces exhaustion there by reducing stress.
 - Well ventilated class room should be provided
 - Cut in pay for leave has to be reduced
 - Better communication with colleagues should be encouraged
 - Practice yoga and exercises.
 - Be positive

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