

MANAGEMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS: A REVIEW BASED ON CASE STUDIES

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Abstract:

Teaching is becoming more challenging as a profession. Studies reveal that teachers are at risk of higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of job satisfaction. It is clear that teachers can be exposed to a number of sources of stress. This paper attempts to identify the factors causing stress among the primary school teachers, analyse the consequences of stress exhibited by the teachers and suggest measures to mitigate stress. It is concluded that the private primary school teachers are highly stressed in comparison to the government primary school teacher counterparts.

Key words: Teacher stress, primary school teachers, private school, sources of stress.

Introduction:

Today's world is highly mechanized and materialistic. As a result the life has become quite challenging and competitive at all levels. There are various conditions in the work life like excessive work, poor remuneration, nepotism, corruption and poor superior-subordinate relationship that make the employees unsatisfied and stressed.

The phenomenon of occupational stress of teachers has been receiving increased global attention and concern in recent years. Several studies have been undertaken to examine the prevalence level and major sources of work stress among school teachers. The health of teacher could be seriously affected by stress. Moreover, apart from teachers themselves, work stress suffered by them can also adversely affect their students and the learning environment.

The term 'job satisfaction' was first utilised by Hoppock (1935), referring to a combination of psychological, physiological and environmental circumstances that make a person feel satisfied with their job. The importance of being satisfied with one's job is captured by a quote by Darboe (2003), according to whom, 'a job is not merely life sustaining but life-enhancing and enriching because most people continue to work even if their economic needs are met, suggesting that for most people work

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satisfies various needs, such as a need for individual recognition, achievement, or the pleasure derived from working with other people'. Prolonged dissatisfaction with one's job may lead to teacher stress. According to Kyriacou (2001), 'teacher stress may be defined as the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher'. Teacher stress can also involve a negative emotional experience associated with the level of pressure and demands made on an individual, as well as the degree of mismatch between these demands and his/her ability to cope with those demands. Teacher stress can lead to strain (a reaction to stress) and teacher burnout (a state of emotional, physical and attitudinal exhaustion).

This paper is divided into different sections. In the first section, various case studies are analysed. The second section identifies the sources of stress among the teachers. Consequences of stress among the teachers are discussed in the third section. The final section provides suggestions to minimize stress of the teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the teaching profession has traditionally been regarded as low stress occupation (French et al.,1982) but during the past two decades the situation is somersaulted(Olivier & Venter,2003)Teaching is becoming more challenging as a profession: a more paper work, more bureaucracy and more unruly classes. Worldwide surveys reveal widespread concern about the effects of stress on teachers' sense of well-being and their willingness to stay in the profession. Compared to the general population, teachers are at risk for higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of job satisfaction (Schonfield,

1992). Borg et al. (1991) reported that up to one third of the teachers perceive their occupation as highly stressful. It is clear that teachers can be exposed to a number of sources of stress. There is a pervasive perception among teachers surveyed who have reported their jobs as highly or extremely stressful (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978; Borg and Falzon, 1989; Soloman and Feld, 1989; Pithers and Soden, 1998). Furthermore there is research evidence that indicates that work related stress among teachers has serious implications for their work performance, health and psychological status (Capel, 1987; Cooper, 1986; Pierce and Molly, 1990). Health and psychological outcomes can in turn lead to poorer teaching performance, poor job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, poor decision making and bad judgement (Eckles, 1987; Quick and Quick, 1984). The pupils of stressed teachers have less effective professional and personal attention with negative educational consequences. There is also a general community cost. Therefore, all those factors which influence occupational stress of teachers and its consequences must be

studied thoroughly. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) examined relations between teachers' perception of the school context (supervisory support, time pressure, relations with parents, and autonomy), teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment), and teacher job satisfaction among Norwegian teachers in elementary and middle school. The authors found that teachers' job satisfaction was directly related to emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion was most strongly related to time pressure whereas depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment were most strongly related to teachers' relations with parents. De Nobile and McCormick (2005) investigated the relationships between job satisfaction and occupational stress among Catholic primary schools in New South Wales, Australia. They found that four stress domains (information domain, personal domain, student domain, and school domain) were predictors of job satisfaction. Negative associations were found between job satisfaction and occupational stress. Sources of stress included lack of support from school administration, supervision, job variety, the staff-principal relationship and staff- student relationships. Lee (2006) found that the job satisfaction of primary school teachers in Cambodia was closely associated with salary level and welfare conditions. However, job satisfaction was also intertwined with non-remunerative incentives, such as school management, principal leadership, and professional development.

Objectives:

The main objective of the current study is to:

- Identify the sources of stress among the teachers.
- Ascertain the consequences of stress among the teachers.
- Provide suggestions to minimise stress among the teachers.

Case Studies:

Case Study 1: The main purpose of the research conducted by Jan et al.(2013) was to study the social and family role stress among primary school teachers of District Budgam, Jammu and Kashmir, India . The sample for the investigation consisted of 120 primary school teachers of District Budgam. The sample was further divided into two strata [60 males and 60 females]. Both groups were selected from the universe by using random sampling technique. For the measurement of social and family role stress among primary school teachers, The Social and Family Role Stress Scale (SFRS) by S. Sultan Akhter and Priti Vadra were administered. The analysis of the data

showed that Female primary school teachers were found to have more stress as compared to male primary school teachers of District Budgam. Private male primary school teachers were found to have more stress as compared to Govt. male primary school teachers of District Budgam. Further, the research showed that private female primary school teachers were found to have more stress as compared to Govt. female primary school teachers of District Budgam. The main reason is that private female teachers feel insecurity in terms of safety, job, pressure from home and society.

Case Study 2: In the present study an attempt was made by Hasan (2014) to compare teachers' occupational stress of primary government and private school teachers of Tehsil Laksar, District-Haridwar. A sample of 100 teachers was selected, 50 each from government and private schools. Teachers' Occupational Stress Scale constructed and standardized by Dr. Sajid Jamal and Dr. Abdul Raheem was administered. Findings revealed that in general, the primary school teachers have been found to be highly stressed. Moreover, the private primary school teachers have been found to be highly stressed in comparison to their government primary school teacher counterparts. This may be due to low salary and more burden of work in the private schools. The next finding of the study revealed that there is no significant difference in the level of occupational stress of male and female primary school teachers. Further from the result it is clear that no significant difference has been found in the level of occupational stress of government male and government female primary school teachers.

Case Study 3: The aim of the study by Eres and Atanasoska (2011) is to determine the stress level of Turkish and Macedonian teachers living in different socio-cultural and economic situations. The scale used in the study has been developed by researchers. 416 Turkish teachers and 213 Macedonian teachers have participated in the study. At the end of the study it was seen that Turkish teachers have mild stress levels and Macedonian teachers have moderate stress levels. There is a meaningful difference in the stress level points of Turkish and Macedonian teachers. Policy makers are advised to analyse the teacher training and assessment system with the assumption that personal and social characteristics and working conditions may have an effect on teacher stress. The highest level of stress in Turkish teachers is in poor colleague relations. The lowest stress level is in parent and

student misbehaviour. The study revealed that the stress of Macedonian participants related to behaviour of school principals, colleague relations, participation in decisions and professional development is of moderate level. The stress related to parent and student misbehaviour and professional status was mild. According to the results, Turkish teachers have a mild level of stress whereas Macedonian teachers have a moderate level of stress. The stress level of Macedonian teachers is higher compared to Turkish teachers.

Sources of Stress:

Kyriacou (2001) reported that the main sources of teacher stress are:

- teaching students who lack motivation
- maintaining discipline in the classroom
- confronting general time pressures and workload demands
- being exposed to a large amount of change
- being evaluated by others
- having challenging relationships with colleagues
- administration, and management
- being exposed to generally poor working conditions, unsatisfactory working conditions
- ambiguity of the teacher's role
- poor relationships with colleagues, pupils, and administrators, and
- job insecurity

Overall, the factors that have been found to impact on the job satisfaction of teachers can be divided into three broad categories: micro level (teacher background factors); meso level (school level factors); and macro level (factors associated with society and the education system). Meso-level factors can further be divided into different domains, namely, school, teacher and student domains. In addition, teacher stress has both economic and personal implications – it can lead to stress-related employee absenteeism and may also result in teacher burnout and affect pupil outcomes (Kyriacou, 1987). Acknowledging the importance of this issue, many studies have sought to identify the determinants of teacher stress. These can be personal (gender, age, experience), school-level (student issues, administration/staff issues, lack of autonomy) or system-level factors (salary and recognition of teaching profession). In addition, students' being late to school, their failure and students' not doing homework may cause stress in teachers (Adams 2001; Joseph, 2000). It is

important for educational institutions to study and manage effectively the sources of stress of the teachers who have the important duty of educating individuals.

Consequences of Stress:

It is clear that certainly higher level of teachers' occupational stress generates

- an attitude of apathy
- non-involvement
- non-cooperation
- low quality of education
- increase in cost
- low efficiency
- strained relation of the teachers with the management and with fellow teachers.

Conclusion:

It is not wise to neglect the talents of the teachers because the teacher is one of the pillars of the society and the country. Without good teachers, a country cannot progress. The importance of teachers in the life of a nation cannot be overlooked. The teacher moulds the young minds into various forms. Studies reveal that there is higher level of dissatisfaction and frustration among private school teachers. Working conditions in private schools are appalling. It is very sad that the persons in charge of education are themselves quite ignorant. They look down upon teachers as mere employees and nothing else. In such conditions, the teacher feels helpless and frustrated.

Suggestions:

Kyriacou (2001) highlighted the positive impact of working in a school with a positive climate in terms of social support. The author noted that teachers and senior managers in schools must avoid creating unnecessary sources of stress through poor management (e.g. setting unrealistic targets for the completion of tasks or failing to communicate adequately with others). He listed characteristics of a healthy school as including: good communication between staff; management decisions based on consultation; consensus established on key values and standards; whole school policies in place; roles and expectations clearly defined; teachers receiving positive feedback and praise; a good level of resources and facilities to support teachers; support available to help solve problems; policies and procedures being easy to follow; red tape and paperwork being minimised; additional duties being matched to teachers' skills; building an environment which is pleasant to work in; senior

management making good use of forward planning; and induction and career development advice being given. Support measures could also include a counselling service for teachers and a teacher helpline (e.g. as in the UK: teacherline www.teacherline.org.uk). In addition, in-service workshops aimed at helping to reduce stress have been found to support teaching staff. Kyriacou (2001) observes that there are various coping strategies that teachers can use in coping with stress and distinguishes between two main types: direct action techniques and palliative techniques. The former refers to things that teachers can do that eliminate the source of stress, including identifying the source of stress and then carrying out some form of action to combat this. Palliative techniques refer to lessening the feeling of stress that occurs, relieving the tension and anxiety that has built up. Overall, the techniques that teachers use include trying to keep problems in perspective; avoiding confrontation; trying to relax after work; taking action to deal with problems; keeping feelings under control; devoting more time to particular tasks; discussing problems and expressing feelings to others; having a healthy family life; planning ahead and prioritising; and recognising one's own limitations. Studies have identified a number of ways to prevent low levels of satisfaction and high occupational stress. These include creating a positive and supportive school environment, an effective approach to management, good communication and sense of belongingness among staff, adequate school facilities and resources. These are the effective ways to improve levels of job satisfaction and reduce occupational stress levels among teachers.

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