Occupational Stress And Coping Strategies Among Indian University Teachers

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ABSTRACT
Education sector is continuously changing curriculum and implementing recent technologies for its students to cater the demand of modern industries. However, all such changes have increased the mental workload on teachers engaged in this occupation. The present study attempted to investigate the occupational stress and related coping strategies among Indian university teachers. Occupational stress index and Brief coping scales were administered on a sample of 80 university teachers comprising both, 40 males and 40 females, having at least two years teaching experience in the university academic environment. The findings reported the teachers with occupational stress and majority of them were in the category of moderate level of the stress. Surprisingly, none of the female teachers appeared in low level of occupational stress. The findings are relevant in occupational stress and increasing demands of academic tasks at university level.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Academic environment, University, Teachers

INTRODUCTION
The fact that occupations are developing cognitively complex at regular is also true in academics. The organizational climate in higher education is deteriorated in private as well as public universities (Rajarajeswari, 2010). Therefore, there is increasing need to update the training and learning. One of such regular change is happening in higher education field where the use of advance technology as well as demand of updated curriculum is continuous. Particularly, teachers in academic institutions are trying to fulfill the learning demands of large numbers of modern students. These changes and demands are contributing to the emergence of occupational stress among teachers.

Stress may simply be defined as any situation that hinder or deter normal functioning of an individual’s daily activities which might be psychological (mental) or physiological (bodily). Hans Selye (1956) suggested general adaptation syndrome model (GAS) including alarm, resistance and exhaustion stages. Causes of stress may include: i) at work or in organization- career concern, rotating work shift, occupational demands, work overload, poor working conditions, technological advancement, work complexity, interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. ii) outside work or organization: career changes, frustration, life changes, civic amenities, personality-type A and type B.

Types of stress - There are different kinds of stress with its own characteristics, symptoms, duration and treatment approaches. Acute stress - is much related with daily hazzles such as rushing to a meeting, meeting deadline of an event, car fault while in hurry, loosing bills, key misplacement as well as all those stressful events that occur within a short period of time. Episodic acute stress - is commonly found or affects those who suffered from acute stress frequently. Personality type A found to suffer with this type as they are always in hurry to handle the situation of demand and pressure. Chronic stress - is much more severe type that makes sufferers down feel constant unhappy which disheartened, depressed and feels more miserable in their life on daily, weekly, monthly even yearly continuously associated with excessive feeling of violence, suicidal attempt, alcohol consumption, etc.

Post traumatic stress disorder - is a form of stress as the name implies that person may be experiencing the trauma after serious stressful situation might occur previously either during childhood or in later life as a result of re-experience of the happenings physically, emotionally as well as psychologically such as child abuse, loss of love ones or relative, rape victims, post war trauma. Occupational stress – is associated with occupation or working environment of the employees. Work
related dimensions develop the occupational stress especially when the employees fail to cope with the occupational demands of a given jobs. Ever increasing use of automated technology in multitasks working environment induces the complacency effect, particularly when it is highly reliable (Sharma, et al., 1997). Mclean (1974) describes job related stress as an occupational problem through which some situational factors at workplace which goes in close relation with employer’s ability to deter the physiological and psychological well-being of the employee at work place to discharge the expected duties appropriately. The occupational stress also deteriorates the quality and amount of performance on given task (Jonyo, 2015).

**Stress management** - for the efficient management of stress there are various ways, although managing stress depends on individual coping and resisting abilities. The more common processes by which individuals manage stress include: **Healthy lifestyles** - often guarantee stress management skills as to develop healthy lifestyle by removing all form of negativity and then positivity will automatically emerged. **Social support** - strong and sound relationship always enhance individual well being while the opposite of such kind of relationship will always bring down individual from being energetic.

**Learning to accept changes** - another way to manage stress is when individuals learn to accept changes and innovation, especially technological advancement. For instance, new methods of teaching emerged which simplify the teaching profession for teachers. **Time management** - is a process by which individual may manage stress by jotting down the events in a manner to complete them systematically and timely to avoid any tension. **Regular exercise** - creates a peace of mind to the brain improving the immune system even if individual is in a state of tension as he/she engages in exercise for that period all sort of worries are suspended promoting healthy lifestyle and well being.

**Use of relaxation techniques** - to deal with stress and to get relief from stress by conscious efforts of the employee is recommended. For example, mindfulness, Yoga, meditation, massage therapy, etc.

**Avoid taking things that go beyond individual’s control** - This is also a way of reducing stress by avoiding all those things that are not in one’s control.

**Coping strategies for stress** –Individuals across the different societies apply various coping patterns to deal with their stress. The strategy to cope with stress also depends upon the level and nature of stress. Two more prominent strategies are as follows: **Emotion focused coping** - is the process that tries to ease the negative expressive response that are associated with stress, ranging from, fear, frustration, anxiety and depression, embarrassment excitement etc. Some of such coping strategies include the Meditation, Mindfulness, Distraction, Praying for guidance and strength your weaknesses, Suppressing and stopping all sorts negative thought or emotions over extended period of time.

**Problem focused coping** - deals with stress in such a way which try to suppress the circumstances or situation that generates stress. Problem-focused approaches primarily targets to reduce if not eliminate the cause of the stressor.

Nowadays, being a faculty member within the university environment is difficult profession with ever increasing workloads, demanding students, and long working hours. Notwithstanding the tremendously prolonged effect of work-related difficulties on the teachers, many educational institutions have not set any tangible measures to reduce the pressure-related conditions. Considering the above discussed situations the current research work is an attempt to study the occupational stress and coping strategies used by teachers community in university environment.

The scope of this study claims to assess the level of occupational stress and effective coping strategies among university teachers. Stress has an increased negative influence on health and well-being, capable of attacking human immune system. The present research may contribute towards understanding the occupational stress and coping strategy among teaching community at universities.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Cooper & Marshal (1976) reported that teachers who experienced high level of occupational stress on their teaching occupation therefore, they have higher chance of heart attack and stroke than their colleague who scored low on occupational stress level and their counterpart in other occupations. Occupational stress, often referred as work-related stress viewed as any negative emotional experiences suffered by individual in a given set of organization (Kyriacou, 2001). Occupational
stress can also be seen as all sort of cognitive dissonance perceived between organizational demands (stressors) as well as person aptitudes in order to meet such expectations or demands (Topper, 2007). The recent scenario of educational arena, stress is said to be increasingly on daily basis due to the fact that coaching young adult is not merely seen as a difficult task but dangerous also (Mehta, 2013). Teachers should employ the appropriate measures or strategies so as to be able to handle their task of imparting the needed skills and educate their students. Khan, et al. (2005) found male and female teachers using the same strategies to cope with job strain in their study on coping strategies and job strain. Kavimi and Alipow (2011) yielded in their study that occupational stress is increasing worldwide in all organizations, professions, employees, families, employers and the societies. Perrewe and Treadway (2006) in one study reveals that occupational stress occurs when employees’ resources have reached to the level of disequilibrium as a function of job related factor, the workers face high level of tension. However, job-related stress may occur in some situations not all that can be faced by others and not all individuals. Michie and Williams (2002) showed that causative factors linked to psychological ill health and absence due to sickness ranges time taken (long hours)of work, work overload and pressure and the effect of these on personal lives. Methods of coping mechanisms used individual’s profile as an indicator which emphasize about the preferential method of coping in which individual may utilized as it varies between one individual to another. Roth and Mothen (1986) identified two coping methods as approach and avoidance. However, as long as different method of describing and analyzing coping styles are available, the methods for identifying the coping may differ. A more in-depth method of coping with stress explains that it depends on the nature and severity of the stressor one may encounter (Moos & Tsu, 1977; Murphy, 1974; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

Most of the above studies dealt with occupational stress but very few of the studies revealed about occupational stress and coping strategies in University environment, particularly, where academic environment is every changing. No single research realized the job related-stress as well as its coping mechanisms among those who teach at university level and whose occupation might be stressful and difficult to manage. Based on the above literature review, it seems that occupational stress has remained a burning topic as it belongs to almost every individual at some extent of time. It was observed that teachers across the world experience occupational stress in one way or the other. Following the demand of industries advance technologies and new paradigm shifts in pedagogy of teaching and learning are being implemented. It is essential to identify changing levels of teachers’ occupational stress in new demands, as well as the coping strategies being utilized. The current research is an attempt to study the occupational stress and coping strategies among university teachers. The following objectives were framed to achieve in the present research.

OBJECTIVES
1. To assess the occupational stress levels of teachers in University academic environment.
2. To compare the levels of occupational stress among male and female teachers.
3. To identify the sources of occupational stress among University teachers.
4. To study the coping strategies used by teachers for managing the stress.

HYPOTHESES
1. Majority of the teachers are likely to experience higher occupational stress in university academic environment.
2. Male and female teachers would be significantly different for their levels of occupational stress.
3. Occupational stress among University teachers would be as a result of many dimensions.
4. University teachers use many coping strategies simultaneously to cope with their occupational stress.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Sample
The present study was an attempt to find out the work related stress among male and female teachers within the Indian university academic environment in which the total of 80 subjects were randomly
selected where as 40 male and 40 female teachers having at least two years experience at different departments of the university comprised the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Teachers</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Distribution of Male and Female University Teachers

Research Tools
The researcher has administered Occupational Stress index Scale on 80 teachers of the university to collect the required data on experience of occupational stress to see how teachers are able to cope with stress irrespective of their gender.

**Occupational Stress index Scale** developed by Dr. A.K Srivastava & Dr. A. P Singh (1984) is designed to measure twelve dimensions contributing to the development of occupational stress including, Role overload, Role ambiguity, Role conflict, Unreasonable group and political pressure, Responsibility for persons, Under participation, Powerlessness, Poor peer relation, Intrinsic impoverishment, Low status, Strenuous working condition, Unprofitability.

**BRIEF COPE (Carver, 1997)** - This is another tool employed by the researcher in order to identify the type of coping strategy utilized by university teachers to deal with their occupational stress. The choice response of the respondent is to be added for two respective items out of the 14 strategies. Thus, on each strategy minimum score may be 2 and 8 may be the maximum score.

Analysis
The obtained data were tabulated and analyzed to find the level of occupational stress experienced by university teachers and to find out the frequency of using the various coping mechanism to deal with experienced stress. Students’ t statistics was computed to explore the differences among male and female teachers for their occupational stress levels. Central tendency measures were employed to reflect the usage of various coping styles. Finally, pictorial presentation of obtained findings was presented to understand the occupational stress levels in the sample of teachers under study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

| Table 2 Occupational Stress level among University Teachers |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Occupational Stress         | N  | Mean  | SD   |
|                             | 80 | 139.59 | 12.44 |

(Scale Norms: Moderate occupational stress: 123-155)

| Table 3 University teachers across the three levels of Occupational Stress |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Occupational Stress Level   | University Teachers         |
|                             | Frequency | Percentage |
| Low                         | 6         | 7.5        |
| Moderate                    | 70        | 87.5       |
| High                        | 4         | 5.0        |
| Total                       | 80        | 100        |
Figure 1. University Teachers distribution among levels of occupational stress

Based on the obtained scores, majority (87.5%) of the teachers reflected moderate level (M=139.59, SD= 12.44) of occupational stress as per the norms of the scale. The present findings of moderate occupational stress among university teachers are in line with the findings of study by Nikolaou, et al. (2002) that teachers had higher level of occupational stress in changing university environment. The first hypothesis is supported by the current findings that majority (92.5%) of the university teachers experienced high or moderate level of occupational stress.

Further, the above findings supported the results of study by Perrewe, et al. (2006) which revealed that occupational stress occurs when employees’ resources have reached to the level of disequilibrium as a function of job related factor. Job-related stress may occur in some situations not in all situations and that can be faced by some individuals and not by all individuals.

Only a few university teachers among the participants yielded low (7.5%) or high (5.0%) levels of occupational stress. The reported occupational stress level in academic work settings could not reach to high level for majority of the teachers which could be because of the coping strategies which teachers are implementing during stressful situations. Teachers’ competency could be another reason to manage their demand of works. Also they are in practice of doing the repeated works which makes the work familiar to them and occupation related stress remained at moderate level. Findings are plotted in Figure 1 above.

Differences for occupational stress among male and female teachers

Table: 4. Occupational Stress Mean and t-ratio for Male and Female Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Teachers</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Teachers</td>
<td>134.15</td>
<td>12.70</td>
<td>-4.33</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Teachers</td>
<td>145.03</td>
<td>9.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=80, df=78, p<.01
Referring to Table 4 it is observed that female teachers were feeling higher (M=145.03, SD=9.56) occupational stress in comparison to their counterparts, i.e. male teachers (M=134.15, SD=12.70). The results of research conducted by Lim and Teo (1996) indicated that female information technology personnel experienced significantly higher score on sources of stress. Thus, findings of current study are confirming the higher level of occupational stress in female as it was in earlier studies. The difference between male and female university teachers’ occupational stress reached to a significant level (t(78)= -4.33, p<.01). The female teachers experienced more stress than male teachers. The hypothesis that male and female teachers would experience significantly different level of occupational stress is retained here as results supported the assumption. Results are demonstrated in Figure 2 above.

Table 5. Percentage of Male and Female Teachers among Low, Moderate and High Level of Occupational Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Stress Level</th>
<th>Male Teachers</th>
<th>Female Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further, a higher percentage (92.5%) of the female teachers was observed with moderate level occupational stress (Table 5), whereas only 82.5 percent male teachers were recorded having moderate occupational stress. Interestingly, among female teachers 7.5% were in the category of high occupational stress in comparison to male teachers (2.5%). Thus, female university teachers (100%) were experiencing comparatively more occupational stress than to the male teachers (85%) as shown in Figure 3.
Figure 3. Male and Female Teachers over occupational stress levels

Exploring the sources/dimensions of occupational stress among teachers

Table 6. Occupational Stress sources among University Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Stress Dimensions</th>
<th>Male Teachers</th>
<th>Female Teachers</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Overload</td>
<td>18.78</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>21.35</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity</td>
<td>11.25</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>12.18</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Conflict</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>15.58</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreasonable Group Pressure</td>
<td>15.13</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>16.83</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for Person</td>
<td>9.18</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>9.93</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under Participation</td>
<td>10.95</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>8.35</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>8.58</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Peer Relation</td>
<td>11.08</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>10.75</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Impoverishment</td>
<td>10.65</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>12.65</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Status</td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>8.35</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strenuous Working Conditions</td>
<td>11.93</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>13.43</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprofitability</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By observing the Table 6 consisting occupational stress dimensions it is clear that Role Conflict, Unreasonable group pressure, Under participation, Poor peer relation, Intrinsic Impoverishment, Strenuous Working Conditions were with higher mean values contributing to occupational stress among male university teachers. However, dimensions of Responsibility for person, Low status, Unprofitability, and Powerlessness are with comparatively low value and hence low contribution to occupational stress among male participant teachers. Whereas in case of female teachers, Role overload, Strenuous working conditions, Unreasonable group pressure were higher to contribute in occupational stress. Sources of Unprofitability and Low status were with low mean value in female teachers’ occupational stress. Differences for contributions of various sources among male and female teachers could not reach to a significance level except of Role overload, Intrinsic impoverishment and Strenuous working conditions. However, none of the dimension of occupational stress is with zero mean value and all dimensions have contributed to teachers’ occupational stress. The hypothesis that occupational stress among University teachers would be as a result of many dimensions is retained here. The results are exhibited in Figure 4 below.
Figure 4. Male teachers occupational Stress Dimensions

Coping strategies used by University Teachers for managing their Occupational Stress.

Table 6. Coping Strategies used by University Teachers for occupational stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BC</th>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self distraction</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Active coping</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Use of emotional support</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Use of instrumental support</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Behavioral disengagement</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Venting</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Positive reframing</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Self blame</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Referring to the above Table 6 for coping strategies utilized by university teachers, the mean and SD scores are projected on the basis of teachers’ response on Brief Coping Strategy scale. The mean scores reflect the active coping strategy (M=5.59, SD=1.61) higher utilization in comparison to the other strategies in the scale. Planning, Religion, Use of instrumental support, and Venting are the other strategies followed by Active coping which university teachers used maximum times. Further, it has to be taken into consideration that utilization of these coping strategies depends on culture and religion to which an individual belongs to. However, personality type of an individual plays a very vital role toward coping resource utilization in a particular situation. Male and female teachers might have used different patterns of using the coping strategies in stressful situations. The assumptions that there are more than one coping mechanisms among teachers to manage their occupational stress is retained here as the scores shown in the Table 6 confirm the utilization of various coping strategies by teachers. The same findings are demonstrated in the Figure 5 below.
CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The conclusions of current research on occupational stress experienced by university teachers are as follows:

- Majority of the teachers were experiencing moderate or higher level of occupational stress.
- Within the total participants large percentage of male and female teachers falls in the moderate category of occupational stress.
- Female teachers experienced the stress in moderate and high level with higher percentage of their total strength rather than in low level.
- More than one source or dimension played the role in accumulating the occupational stress levels among teachers.
- Furthermore, male and female teachers yielded different sources with varied degree of intensity for their occupational stress.
- Also more than one coping strategies were reflected in the results to manage the occupational stress by the Indian university teachers.

Occupational stress has always remained in the focus of social sciences research. In addition to the manufacturing industries, occupational stress also belongs to service industries. Mental illness is predicted as second most important cause for work-disability (WHO, 2001). In ever changing scenario of academics, the faculty members (teachers) are facing new demands to deliver the services to students in the modern universities. The trends of present research findings establish the presence of occupational stress among Indian university teachers, particularly, female teachers. The present study may have important implications for Indian universities to improve their working environment in a manner to reduce the related occupational stress. Both, Govt. and Private sector universities are attempting to deliver the quality education through their teaching staffs. Humans have natural tendency to towards health and away from distress (Brannon & Feist, 2009). The use of coping strategies by teachers again yielded such natural tendency. Teachers’ cultural and demographic characteristics make them specific to use either one or another coping strategy. The female teaching staffs need timely interventions to deal with occupational stress as they all have been noticed with stress levels. The research on university environment and teachers in new context will facilitate the stress free delivery of academic services.

Limitations and implications for future research

The current study was conducted with limited time options and could not explore more variables interacting with occupational stress. The findings are based only on one demographic dimension of the
participants, i.e., gender of the randomly selected participants. The study is limited to northern region of the country and therefore findings could not be generalized for all over the country. The well known fact is that the research is a continuous process. One research solves the current query but raises many other queries for future research. Large level future research may be taken up in the area of occupational stress in ever changing academic environment considering the trends of current findings. Occupational stress levels among male and female teachers may be studied with more demographic characteristics, experience, competency level, age, etc. The study can be extended with larger sample to cover the target population on the topic and enable the generalization of findings.

REFERENCES


**Websites:**