

UNDERSTANDING OCCUPATIONAL STRESSORS AND PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AMONG ACADEMIC FACULTIES OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES IN INDIA

Alka Shrivastava¹, Prof. Narendra Shukla²

¹Research Scholar, UIMC, R.D.V.V., Jabalpur, (India)

*²Professor, Dept. of MBA, Gyan Ganga Institute of Technology & Science and Dean, University
Institute of Management, R.D.V.V. Jabalpur, (India)*

ABSTRACT

The growing level of stress has become a popular topic among academicians throughout the world for their research studies. Numerous studies have explored the psychological, sociological, and medical effects of occupational stress on contemporary employees. Teaching is no longer a 'low stressful' job; it has become a highly stressful profession. The nature and organization of the work makes teaching inherently difficult. The occupational stress is also increasing among teaching faculties of higher education in India.

The overall purpose of the present paper is to understand the phenomenon of stress and stressors among academic faculty members and to find out the organizational approaches to combat stress operatively and strategically in higher educational institutions in India. Based on literature available, this paper concludes that managing occupational stress should be taken as a primary strategic and operational concern in higher educational institutes in India because of the direct relationship between good employment practices and successful outcomes.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Stress Management, Stressors, Organizational Strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Based on various surveys and studies, it is confirmed that occupational stress has become a big problem throughout the world and steadily increasing. These studies are mainly finding potential sources of stress (stressors), factors of individual differences (moderators/mediators), and consequences of stress. The United Nations Report [1] marked job stress —The 20th Century Disease.

Teaching profession was earlier viewed as a 'low stressful occupation' because of regular job, light workloads, flexibility, fixed job responsibilities and other attractions such as foreign trips for conferences and study leaves for higher study and research. However, some recent studies reported that university faculty is among the most stressed occupational group. Research evidences have shown that there is high stress prevailing among teachers of higher educational institutions.

Contemporary management practices, globalization and privatization, increasing use of new technology and knowledge base economy are emerging issues that force universities and higher educational institutes to become internationally competitive. The situation of attaining, maintaining and retaining the competitive advantages leads many challenges to faculty members. These challenges have increased work stress among teaching staff of higher education and forced them to work beyond their schedules. According to Ravichandran and Rajendran [2], Stress has become a major dilemma amongst teachers due to quick changes in education system during 1980-1990.

The teaching faculties of higher education in India are facing stress due to in-class environment and stress due to heavy demand of other academic and non-academic activities. The present paper discusses the various emerging issues of occupational stress among faculties of higher education in India and required management strategies to handle them. According to Reddy and Poornima [3], "Success in managing and preventing stress will depend on the culture in the organization. At university level, the culture of openness and understanding, rather than of criticism, is essential".

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Detailed literature survey was done to study the occupational stress on academic faculties in India before describing the causes of stress and suggested management strategies.

Ansari and Singh [4] made an attempt to explore the role of demographic variables to the nature of stress experienced by the faculty member in an agriculture university. The study comprised a sample of 235 faculty members (23 professors, 74 associate and 138 assistant professors). The professors were either in moderate or in high stress categories as compared to associate and assistant professors.

Upadhyay and Singh [5] compared the occupational stress level experienced by the 20 college teachers and 20 executives. The teachers showed significant higher levels of stress than executives on intrinsic impoverishment and status factors. They experienced stress because their personal wishes and strong desire for better and prosperous career were felt to be blocked by others.

Chand and Monga [6] examined the correlates of job stress and burn out among 100 faculty members from two universities. Respondents with internal locus of control, high social support and high job involvement experience less stress. Results also revealed that, maximum stress is reported by professors and minimum by assistant professors.

Nema Geeta et al. [7] study various work related stressors that causes stress to teachers in educational institutes in Indore, M.P. Factor analysis was used to analyse data. The results shows that the teachers are unsatisfied with their job due to changing job environments, insecurity of job, poor salary, biasness in promotions, work overload, role conflict, powerlessness, motiveless, harassment etc.

Bakshi Poonam and Kochhar Veeran [8] studied different stressor responsible for stress in faculty members of professional institutions in Haryana. The study was conducted on a random sample of 200 (100 each of male and female) faculty. The result shows that stress is already there in educational institutions but maximum number of faculty members belong to low stress category.

Manvel Raj et al. [9] considered fifteen Chennai based self-financing Engineering Colleges with 1200-1800 students. They analyzed both the external and internal causes of teacher's stress (stressors). They recommended

their results to the college psychologist in the prevention and coping with the professional stress. Reddy and Poornima [3] conducted a study to investigate the occupational stress and the professional burnout of South Indian University teachers. The sample of the study included 9 state universities from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The results of the study revealed that majority (74%) of the university teachers are experiencing moderate and high levels of occupational stress and 86% of teachers have professional burnout. The prevention and management of workplace stress requires organizational level interventions, because it is the organization that creates the stress. Further, several stress management techniques such as emotional intelligence training, cognitive behavioural management techniques, social supportive systems, counselling services, yoga and sports activities should be introduced.

An attempt is being made by Singh Pabla Maninderjit [10] to study the occupational stress amongst teachers of professional colleges in Punjab affiliated to Punjab Technical University, Jalandhar and recommend suitable interventions to alleviate the occupational stress level. The statistical analysis revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers with respect to occupational stress level, however there is a significant difference between teachers teaching in the professional colleges located in rural and urban areas and the teachers employed on Ad-hoc and Permanent basis. To reduce the level of occupational stress deliberate efforts has to be made to greater job security, accountability, workload, provisions for timely promotions, medical facilities and provisions of perks.

Senthil Kumar et al. [11] performed the same research in the field of engineering and technology. Their study sets out to investigate various causes of work stress among 478 engineering faculty members of 58 self-financing engineering and technology colleges and four deemed universities in the Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu. The results of the study showed a significant association among gender, type of institution, location of the college, current working status and average number of working hours with causes of stress.

Sindhu K. P. [12] studied work stressors among college teachers in degree college of Kerala State. From the analysis it is clear that majority of the teachers experience stress in their work. Indoo Singh [13] studied level of occupational stress and perception of various occupational stressors among the faculty members of private medical and engineering colleges of Uttar Pradesh. It was found that there is no significant difference of stress across gender or between medical and engineering faculty members. In the current study role conflict, role ambiguity, intrinsic impoverishment, group pressure, under participation, strenuous working conditions and role overload were found to be most significant predictors of occupational stress among faculty members.

Pattnaik and Mishra [14] explored the effects of work stress in Indian context. They collected data from the employees of seven different sectors like; Banking, Manufacturing, Teaching, Outsourcing, Health & Medical, Software and Construction. The study consists of employees' perception towards stress, and to suggest measures to both management and employees to deal with stress. The finding of the paper reveals that more or less stress is being experienced by the individuals at workplace. Excessive workload and organisational conflict are the major causes of workplace stress. The papers also suggested some measures to both management and employees to deal with stress.

III. FACTORS OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

All the sources of occupational stress can be broadly classified in two categories.

1. Individual variables
2. Work setting variables

3.1 Individual Variables

An employer's age, sex, health, status, experience and socio cultural back ground have been found to influence the experience of occupational stress. "Employees responses to work demands and pressures are largely influenced by personality characteristics, psychological and behavioural patterns, coping skills, cognitive patterns" Jagdish and Singh [15]. The feelings and demotions of employees associated with anxiety can cause stress, enhancing its severity by influencing their cognitive appraisals. Srivastava and Krishna [16] noted that "employees with external locus of control experience higher degree of occupational stress and lower job satisfaction". Employees' job attributions also determine the extent of stress they experience in their job life. Gupta and Kulkarni [17] noted that employees attributing their efforts, to the nature of job activities, work conditions and managerial policy for their success or failure in job life experienced higher role stress as compared to those who attributed to chance or luck for their achievements and failures at work.

3.2 Work Setting Variables

Various factor of stress have been discussed by several researchers. The following factors are summarized based on the work done by [3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], [13] and [14].

3.2.1 Work Environment: Teaching profession always needs a pleasant and peaceful working environment. Academic faculties are still having poor infrastructure, small class rooms and large class size, inadequate teaching aids to teach and inappropriate student-staff ratio. Due to these constraints, they found it stressful profession. Working conditions of jobs have been linked to physical and mental health. The poor mental health is related directly to unpleasant work conditions and the good performance cannot be achieved.

3.2.2 Changes in Roles and Tasks: Academic faculties' roles and responsibilities are changing continuously. They have to do multitasking besides teaching and research. More and more managerial responsibilities are included into their duties. As roles and tasks change, there is a potential for stress-producing job ambiguities like involvement in admissions, marketing of courses, accreditations and certification related activities etc. These are the potential stressors caused by changes in role and/or tasks.

3.2.3 Work overload: The work factor is closely associated with the level of stress experienced by the academician in higher education. They have high pressure of work load. With regard to teaching, the increasing number of courses that the faculty is expected to design and teach because of shortage of faculty members. The introduction of new web-based teaching, quick continuous advance in research and publications and whole year teaching because of semester system have significantly increased workload.

3.2.4 Professional identity: Professional identity is big factor for the academic faculty and is built on research, publications, presentations to conferences, project grants, and fellowships. Faculty stress increases if they are lacking in achieving their academic recognition. Lack of research funding and inappropriate distribution of funds for research result in negative academic feelings. Shortage of time due to other non-academic activities hinders the work of knowledge enhancement. At the same time and no motivational efforts and no timely promotions increases the dissatisfaction on academic staff.

3.2.5 Student dealings: Faculty members find themselves in conflict with students in teaching to indisciplined students. Faculties face a big challenge to teaching to inadequately ready or not interested students. Poor student's behaviour and their negative attitude towards study, complaints by students and unreasonable expectations from students are big sources of stress among faculties of HEI's.

3.2.6 Heavy use of Information Technologies: It has been observed that most of the institutes deploy automatic systems of recording employees' attendance using Biometric attendance systems. Faculties are rushing to mark their attendance on time otherwise they will be marked late/absent. Due to changing environment of global competitions, many colleges and universities are adopting more "business-like" approaches to accomplish their work. This may mean streamlining or greater use of technology (including less in-person contact and more online interactions). It generally requires employees to learn new skills and commit themselves to continuous learning. The demand of heavy use of Information technologies increases frustration and an extra stress on them.

3.2.7 Teaching Performance: The tension and stress have been associated with teaching faculties because of their teaching performance. The poor performance of students in examination certainly gives stress pressure on teaching faculty. The teaching faculties feel uncomfortable when they have been given subjects other than their choice or lack of choice in their courses.

3.2.8 Time Pressure: The first and basic factor of time pressure is to complete the course and all course-related work in due time. Most of the faculties complain that they want to do more research work but are unable to do their research and publication work on time due to more workload and shortage of time. Strict deadlines lead to unpleasant tension which leads to work stress.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES TO MANAGE ACADEMIC STRESS

Based on the existing literature, the following are the key points an educational institute can take:

4.1 Build Understanding Among Faculty Members

There should be distributed and participative decision-making structure where upward communication is more. The faculties should be given chance to participate in policies making and they should be provided more job control. The organizational culture should be such that, innovative thinking is encouraged even if it leads to failed ideas, this also helps in bringing down the stress experienced by the faculty members.

4.2 Supportive Infrastructure

Need for improvement in equipment used and their good physical working conditions are in much demand in present tech-savvy world, and undoubtedly this will become one of the best stress coping strategies at organizational level. Therefore, organizations should provide all resources to get better output and avoid frustration.

4.3 Awareness About New Technology

The use of the computer and other software technology has been inevitable and necessary. Therefore all the teaching faculties should be exposed to various computer tools, and the proper training should be held on continuous and regular bases.

4.4 Stress Counselling

The stress counselling should be provided to faculty members for helping them to deal with work related and personal problems in order to understand and solve stress related problems to control mostly behavioral and emotional outcomes of employees.

4.5 Career Development and Refresher Courses

Plan and develop career paths and provide educational programs especially tailored to suit their job profiles. Various refresher course, training and development programmes are necessary to increase the innovativeness of the college teachers.

4.6 Life Style Modification Programs

The organizations should organize certain programmes or motivational packages which will reduce stress level of faculty. The employees can be given weekly sessions of Yoga and other such relaxing exercises so that they are able to deal with stress in a more constructive manner.

4.7 Organizational Recreational

An informal get together would help in creating personal bonds between the various individuals belonging to the organization and this will definitely contribute towards better relations at the work place. This can also be achieved by arranging educational tours and visits.

4.8 Stress-Assessment

There is a need of periodical assessment programmes to reduce stress among the teachers. Conducting stress-audit at organizational level to understand what causes stress and its impact on themselves. This leads to design the best suitable strategies for managing the stress.

4.9 Work Balance Initiatives

Companies have introduced a variety of strategies to help employees achieve work – life balance in India. They include flexible time options, Job sharing, work from home, use of telecommuting in fulfil the job, and child care support.

V. CONCLUSION

The occupational stress is increasing among teaching faculties of higher education. In India, this phenomenon is also observed and experienced by many researchers but studies relating to academic staff stress have not been carried out on large scale. This paper shows the brief of literature review of different research studies on occupational stress among faculty members of higher educational institutes in India. Teaching is a different profession where the peace of mind is must. Therefore, a good strategy to provide a pleasant academic environment is required. Actions to reduce job stress should be given top priority in order to prove good management and good organization. It is essential that a mutual understanding between academic staff and management should be created and developed.

REFERENCES

- [1] United Nations (1992), *Stress: The 20th Century Epidemic*, Paris: UNESCO
- [2] Ravichandran R. and Rajendran R., Perceived Sources of Stress among the Teachers, *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, 33 (1), 2007,133-136.
- [3] G. Lokanadha Reddy and R. Poornima, Occupational Stress and Professional Burnout of University Teachers in South India, *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration*, 2 (2), 2012, 109-124.
- [4] Ansari, M. R. and Singh, R.P., A study on nature and extent of stress in teachers and impact of moderators on stress, *Journal of Extn. Edn.*,8(2), 1997,1623-1625.
- [5] Upadhyay, B.K. and Singh, B., Experience of stress: Differences between college teachers and executives, *Psychology Studies*,44(3), 1999, 65-68.
- [6] Chand, P. and Monga, O.P., Correlates of Job stress and Burn out, *J.Com. Gui. Res.*,24(3), 2007, 243-252.
- [7] Nema Geeta, Nagar Dhanshree, Mandniya Yogita, A study on the causes of work related stress among the college teachers, *Pacific Business Review*, Udaipur, 3(2), 2010, 1-7, ISSN No. 0974-438X.
- [8] Bakshi Poonam and Veeran Kochhar, A Study And Evaluation Of Stress Role On Faculty: An Analysis Of Professional Institutions In Haryana, *IJRIM*, 2(6), 2012, 71-79.
- [9] Manvel Raj T., Mohamed Siddique A. and Shalini Rani T., Professional Stress among Engineering College Teachers And Their Coping Strategies, *International Journal of Management*, 3(2),2012, 80-97.
- [10] Singh Pabla Maninderjit, Occupational Stress Amongst Teachers of Professional Colleges in Punjab, *PARIPEX - Indian Journal of Research*, 1(9), 2012,112-114, ISSN - 2250-1991.
- [11] Senthil Kumar A., Mohan S., and Velmurugan R., Causes of Work Stress of Teachers in Engineering Education, *Asian Journal of Management Research*, 3 (2),2013, 406-419.
- [12] Sindhu K. P., A Study on Stressors among College Teachers, *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)*, 16 (7) Ver. III, 2014, 37-41.
- [13] Indoo Singh, Predictors of Occupational Stress among the Faculty Members of Private Medical and Engineering Colleges: A Comparative Study, *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 3 (2), 2014,406-413.
- [14] Pattnaik Lopamudra and Mishra Ashamayee, *Effect of Workplace Stress: A Study In Indian Context*, (2014), Available via: http://www.internationalseminar.org/XV_AIS/TS%205B/11.%20Ms.%20Lopamudra%20Pattnaik.pdf
- [15] Jagdish and Singh R.P., Hierarchical level as a moderator of the relationship between Occupational Stress and Strain, Cited in Kumar Anita (2011); *Developing Human Relations and Ethnic Understanding*, Hardwar; Gurukul Kangri University.
- [16] Srivastava A. K. and Krishna A., Employees' Job Involvement and Mental Health in Public and Private Sector Organisations: A Comparative Study, *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 28(1),1992, 62-70.
- [17] Gupta S. and Kulkarni A.V., Job satisfaction; Job Involvement and Organisational Role Stress, *Psychological Review*, 56(4),2001, pp. 41-46.