

## **A STUDY ON DETERMINING FACTORS THAT LEAD TO STRESS AMONG SCHOOL TEACHERS: EVIDENCE FROM INDIA**

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### **Abstract**

*Modern life is full of stress especially for those who are in service. Workplace often tends to have challenges and coupled with personal life, can cause stress to anyone. This stress can have disastrous consequences both for the individual as well as for the organization. It becomes necessary to understand the factors that contribute to persons' stress levels and devise ways to overcome them. Researchers have been repeatedly making attempts to identify and explain these things and sufficient literature exists on the subject.*

*Objective: This paper attempts to study the stress level of schools teachers and rank the factors that lead to such stress.*

*Methodology: The sample size was 125 and a reliable, validated questionnaire was administered. The identified factors were ranked using Friedmann Test and co relations were made between age and gender with respect to the factors causing stress. Conclusions: The stress level among the teachers is high and workload is the biggest reason followed by job satisfaction that leads to stress. Further Scope: The study can be extended with a larger sample size and a different universe.*

**Keywords:** *Stress, School Teachers, Job Satisfaction, Workload*

### **Introduction**

**Modern life is full of stress. All around, be it personal or professional life, people find themselves facing stress. While the reasons are not far to seek, most people blame their jobs for causing stress. The term itself might have a negative connotation but at times it is positive too. Known as eustress, this causes people to work hard, meet deadlines and keep going in a highly competitive world. Nevertheless, it does not take much time for eustress to turn into distress. Hence the term, almost always, is used in the negative sense.**

Kyriacou, & Sutcliffe (1978) have defined occupational stress as the experience of unpleasant emotions, like anger, frustration, tension, depression and anxiety. Newman & Beehr (1979) defined job stress as “a situation wherein job-related factors interact with the worker to change his or her psychological and/or physiological condition such that the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning.” Performance at workplace is, thus, negatively impacted by stress.

At workplace, individuals may behave differently but stress caused by personal reasons lead to behavioural, psychological and physiological problems, all of which hinder performance. In the interest of the organization, it becomes imperative to have employees with minimum levels of stress. This leads to identification of reasons causing stress and remedies for them.

#### Brief Review of Literature

Workplace stress is extremely common today. It is associated with demands and resources at workplace and there are several reasons and factors that cause stress in organizational settings (Robbins et al., 2012) and each new stress builds up on the existing level (Selye, 1956). In literature, various theories have been propounded that try to explain stress arising at workplace. These include transactional theory of psychological stress and coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), job characteristics framework (Hackman and Oldham, 1980), effort-reward imbalance concept (Siegrist, 1996) person-environment fit theory and job demand-control model (Karasek, 1979).

The reasons are not far to seek. According to Motowidlo et al., (1986) stress is due to both conditions related to job and characteristics of an individual. A study by Cambridge University (2011) reports several causes of workplace stress including workload, job aspects, security related to job, relationships at workplace, control, resources and communication, a proper balance between work and personal life and pays and benefits. Some environmental factors like downsizing and privatization and organizational specific things like shift work; hiring freeze and contingent work have also been added by PEF Health and Safety Department of US (2006). Further Babatunde (2013) claims prominent

sources that have been found to be major sources of work stress are those dimensions that have to do with the content and context of work.

Although workplace stress and reasons have been studied for people of different occupations like nursing (O'Connor, 2002), BPO professionals (Pattnaik, 2013), accountants (Ozkan and Ozdevecioglu, 2013), software professionals (Kausalaya, 2009), people working in the hospitality industry (Naik and Sankaranarayanan, 2014) and business executives (Mahmood and Bisaria, 2008), there have been substantial studies for teachers at different levels across the world.

Chan (1998), in a study of 412 Chinese secondary school teachers of Hong Kong concluded stress is prevalent and suggested strategies to counter the same. Abel & Sewell (1999) found that poor working conditions, time pressures predicted burnout for rural school teachers; while pupil misbehavior and poor working conditions predicted burnout for urban school teachers in their study in USA. Litt & Turk (1985) surveyed 291 high school teachers and reported salary, status, perceived role and the school climate, particularly the relationship with administrators to be important in job stress, but pupil misbehavior, was not found to be a factor.

Betore (2006) found interference and hindrance in pedagogy and personality characteristics to be vital among Spanish secondary school teachers while Borg and Falzon (1989) had reported moderate level of stress among Maltese state school teachers. According to Chaplain (1995), stress and job satisfaction are negatively correlated. The primary school teachers of England in this study were most satisfied with their professional performance and least satisfied with teaching resources. Even Payne and Furnham (1987) in a study of 444 secondary school teachers in Barbados, found classroom instructional and management demands were perceived by the majority of teachers to be the most stressful aspects of their work. Oliver and Venter (2003) also studied, in the George area, aspects of the teaching profession that are related to stress.

In India, Rani and Singh (2012) conducted one of the earliest studies regarding workplace stress among primary school teachers. Accordingly, the stress levels among teachers were moderate. While some studies in other countries found males to be more

stressed (Chaplain, 1995), this study found no difference in stress levels based on gender. They also reported no difference in stress levels among government and private school teachers.

### **Objectives**

While so much literature exists on the matter, the objective of this paper is threefold:

- a) To study the stress levels of school teachers in certain Indian cities.
- b) To analyze the impact various factors at workplace that leads to stress among them
- c) To understand the relationship between age and gender with respect to the factors causing stress among school teachers.

### **Research Methodology**

After a review of literature, several factors could be extracted that lead to occupational stress among teachers. A Stress Scale designed by Rao (2010) was used. This scale was checked for reliability. Picking up from here, certain interviews were conducted with teachers and students as focus groups. Thus a comprehensive list of variables was obtained which, probably, led to occupational stress among school teachers. Next, these variables were formed into a questionnaire and checked for validity. The final questionnaire had 36 items which were same as the ones reported by Rao (2010). Besides, the respondents were also asked to score their responses on a five point scale. The data obtained was checked for reliability and construct validity was used for validating data.

### **Sampling**

The study was conducted in certain Indian cities and the teachers were drawn from both government and private schools. The technique used was Mixed Sampling combining Stratified Random Sampling and Convenience Sampling techniques and the sample size was 125. Initially, 200 questionnaires were administered but only 160 filled questionnaires, at the rate of 80%, were obtained back. All of these questionnaires were self-administered. Out of these, only 125 questionnaires were found to be completely

filled in all aspects. After the data was collected and checked for completeness and accuracy it was fed into and analyzed with the help of statistical software SPSS 15.0.

#### Data Analysis & Interpretation

The findings from the study and their interpretation are reported in this section. The sample was taken in accordance with the Sampling Technique discussed above and can be considered representative of the population. A brief profile of the respondents is given in Table 1 below:

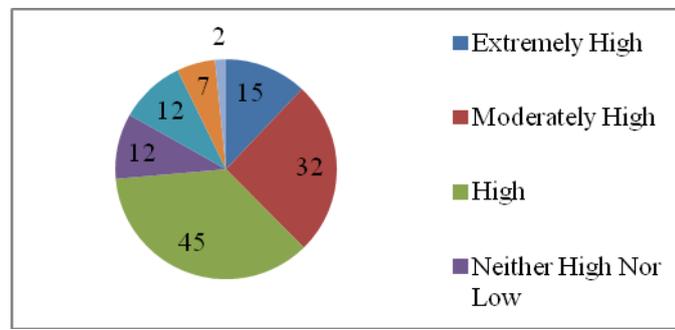
**Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

Variable	N = 125	Percent
<b>Service (in years)</b>		
<3	3	2.40
3-8	24	19.20
8-15	38	30.40
15+	60	48.00
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Under Graduate	1	0.80
Graduate	22	17.60
Post Graduate	99	79.20
Any Other	3	2.40
<b>Age (in years)</b>		
<30	8	6.40
30-40	44	35.20
40-50	53	42.40
50-60	20	16.00
<b>Annual Income (in Lakh Rupees)*</b>		
<1.5	3	2.40
1.5-3	13	10.40
3-5	41	32.80
5+	68	54.40
<b>On Current Post (in Years)</b>		
<1	24	19.20
1-3	35	28.00
3-5	30	24.00
5-8	10	8.00
8+	26	20.80
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	28	22.40
Female	97	77.60
<b>Number of students in a class</b>		
<30	8	6.40
30-40	34	27.20
40-50	35	28.00
50+	48	38.40

\*1 million=10 Lakhs

The respondent scored on a seven point scale and this score was added up to gauge their stress levels. While 12% (n=15) had extremely high stress levels, 25.6% (n=32) had moderately high level of stress. 36% (n=45) had a high degree of stress. Therefore, a total 73.6% (n=92) were found to have a high degree of stress in varying degrees. Similarly, 9.6% (n=12) had low stress and 5.6% (n=7) had moderately low levels of stress. Only a negligible 1.6% (n=2) were found to have extremely low stress. Thus, a total of 16.8% (n=21) were found to have low stress levels again in varying degrees while 9.6% (n=12) had neither high nor low level of stress. The results are shown in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: Stress Level of School Teachers (respondents)**



All the responses were grouped into six broad categories as suggested by Rao (2010). The six categories along with their items are as follows:

a) **Workload:** Too much work to do, working long or unsociable hours, Too many demands on time, too little work to do, Time Pressure & Deadlines and Not having Right Skills for the job.

b) **Role:** Many Different Roles to Play, Role Expectations, Few Clear Objectives, Changes in Work, Lack of Variety & Simulation and Little Feedback about Performance

c) **Responsibility:** Responsible for others, Decision Making, Conflict Handling, Work Politics, Fear of Making Mistakes, Meetings & Presentations

d) **Relationships:** Interpersonal Relations with peers, superiors, Encouragement & Support, Lack of Colleagues to confide, General Morale

e) **Job Satisfaction:** Salary, Job that does not stretch, Career & Promotion, Unpleasant Physical Environment, Lack of Satisfaction, Threat of Redundancy

f) Home Interface: Continuing Work at home, Switching off at home, Demands of work at home life, Prioritizing, Partners' Attitude to Work, Change outside work finance illness.

The respondents were asked to rank them so as to get a fair picture of these aspects. They were asked to rank all the options on a scale of five. Friedmann test was conducted on these and the responses are reported in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Significance of Friedmann Test for ranking stress factors**

Variables	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Stress related variables	330.080	.000

Since the significance is below 0.5, the results can be considered accurate. Ranking the stress factors, workload is found to be the biggest factor that causes stress among school teachers. This gets an overall ranking of 2.43 on a scale of 5. Clearly, this stands out from all other factors that cause stress. Job Satisfaction is ranked second with a mean rank of 3.38. Relationships at workplace and Home Interface are very closely ranked while Responsibility is next with a mean rank of 4.27. Role is the factor that least causes stress as it has a mean rank of 4.98. The results are shown in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Mean Ranks of Variables Causing Stress**

Variables	Mean Rank
Workload	2.43
Job Satisfaction	3.38
Relationships	3.97
Home Interface	3.98
Responsibility	4.27
Role	4.98

The effect of demographic features of age and gender on stress factors was also studied. The hypotheses framed were:

H1: There is a significant difference between various age groups with respect to the factors causing stress

H0: There is no difference between various age groups with respect to the factors causing stress

H2: There is a significant difference between males and females on different factors causing stress

**H0: There is no significant difference between males and females on different factors causing stress**

For studying the relationship between age and stress factors, Kruskal Wallis test was conducted. The results are shown in Table 4 below:

**Table 4: Relationship between Age and Factors causing Stress**

Age	Workload	Job Satisfaction	Relationships	Home Interface	Responsibility	Role
<30	68.82	56.34	56.46	51.77	59.05	64.80
30-40	60.41	66.22	57.32	74.32	73.89	49.07
40-50	42.35	83.95	56.50	81.45	54.70	55.90
50-60	38.00	97.00	59.50	90.00	20.50	83.50
Asymp. Sig.	.001	.000	.273	.011	.024	.001

The results show a significant difference between various age groups with respect to the factors causing stress except for relationships where the mean ranks are quite close. Thus Hypothesis H1 is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected. The respondents in the 50-60 age group feel more stress due to workload followed by the 40-50 group. This proves that with advancing age, school teachers start feeling stress due to work load. This relationship is inverse in case of job satisfaction where the junior most group (<30) is most stressed while the 50-60 age group is least stressed. The same is true with home interface also. Interestingly, when it comes to responsibility, the senior most group (50-60) feels most stressed while the 30-40 age group is least stressed.

Moving further, the relationship between gender and various stress factors have been studied and for this purpose, Mann-Whitney test was conducted. The results are shown in Table 5 below:

**Table 5: Relationship between Gender and Factors causing Stress**

Age	Workload	Job Satisfaction	Relationships	Home Interface	Responsibility	Role
Male	70.28	62.12	60.39	69.44	67.18	57.96
Female	56.28	63.82	65.41	57.05	68.37	58.42
Asymp. Sig.	.024	.785	.423	.022	.125	.444

Results show there is no significant difference between males and females on different factors except Workload and Home Interface. In both the cases female teachers are more stressed than their male counterparts. Thus the alternate hypothesis H2 is rejected whereas as the null hypothesis is accepted.

### **Discussions & Conclusions**

The following conclusions can be drawn from the results obtained that are reported in the previous section:

a) The school teachers are quite stressed out and have varying degrees of stress. The stress can be called as high among them. Earlier studies by Borg and Falzon (1989) and Rani and Singh, (1986) had reported secondary and school teachers had moderate levels of stress. This is not in accordance with the current findings. This may be because the study by Borg and Falzon (1989) was conducted in Malta whereas the current study has been conducted in India. Moreover, both the studies quoted above were conducted in the 1980s when the education pattern was different than modern times. Also working styles and expectations from school teachers has undergone substantial change in the past few decades. This explains why, the stress level reported in the current study stands more than what was reported in previous studies. Another study by Chan (1998), with 412 Chinese secondary school teachers of Hong Kong had reported stress among them but the

levels were not specified. Almost all studies done on school teachers have reported stress which is in accordance with the current study.

b) The biggest factors causing to the respondents in the current study was found to be their work load and related problems. This contained the school teacher's perceptions that they had too much work to do, the working hours were long or unsociable, there were too many demands on time, at times there was too little work to do, there was time Pressure with deadlines and they found they did not having right skills. The workload was also reported to be the biggest factor causing stress in a study by Cambridge University, (2011). A similar observation was also made by Babatunde, (2013) in his study.

In the current study, job Satisfaction is ranked second while relationships at workplace and home interface are ranked third and fourth respectively. Role is the factor that least causes stress. Although not ranked, Litt and Turk (1985) in their survey of 291 high school teachers had also reported salary, status, perceived role and the school climate, particularly the relationship with administrators to be important in job stress. Most of these are covered in the current study. Similar observations have also been made by Abel and Sewell (1999) and Payne and Furnham (1987) in different parts of the world. However, the study by Chaplain (1995) reports that stress and job satisfaction are negatively correlated which is exactly opposite of the findings of the current study. Cultural differences may justify the contradiction as the study quoted is in a different country.

c) School Teachers of different age groups feel stressed out due to different factors. In other words, the impact of one factor may be more than another depending on the age of a respondent. This way the teachers under 30 years of age feels least stressed out due to workload. The respondents in the 50-60 age group feel more stressed out due to workload followed by the 40-50 age group. This proves that with advancing age, school teachers start feeling stressed out due to work load. This relationship is inverse in case of

job satisfaction where the junior most group (<30) is most stressed while the 50-60 age group is the least stressed. The same is true with home interface also. Interestingly, when it comes to responsibility, the senior most group (50-60) feels most stressed while the 30-40 age group is least stressed.

Similarly, the stress levels between males and females are no different. The impact of various factors causing stress is also the same except in the case of Workload and Home Interface. In both the cases female teachers are more stressed than their male counterparts. Traditionally, in India, females are expected to handle more responsibilities at home which explains their stress being more than their male counterparts in case of Home Interface. The study by Rani and Singh (2012) is in accordance with the current study as they found no difference in stress levels based on gender. However the study by (Chaplain, 1995) found males to be more stressed. Also, a study by Antoniou et al., (2013) among Greek School teachers found females to be more stressed and having lower sense of achievement than males. Once again the cultural boundaries explain this contradiction as even the study done in India by Rani and Singh (2012) is completely in accordance with the conclusions of the current study.

### Recommendations & Implications

The implications of the study are as follows:

a) There is a high level of stress among school teachers. Training programs and anti-stress initiatives and interventions need to be implemented for them at workplace. The management needs to take care of the rising stress levels lest they be transferred to students as well.

b) Diversity, especially in age groups, need to be understood and appreciated. Needs may differ from individual to individual and stress conditions may differ. Some kind of diversity training may help in this regard.

c) The employers need to initiate work life balance and relook into the workload assigned to teachers in order to reduce their stress levels.

### Limitations and Further Scope of Study

a) The study is concentrated in certain Indian cities with a sample size of 125. The research can be extended with a larger sample size of school teachers and a different universe from different cities and states.

The sampling frame in this study are school teachers on whom the scale has been used. The scale can be used to determine stress causing factors among individuals from other areas like corporate professionals and government employees as well.

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