

## **Stress, Stressors, and Coping Strategies of Female Private School Teacher to Deal with Occupational Stress**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Mental health is the least prioritized subject in Pakistan though stress, anxiety and depressive disorders have been indicated as root cause of several chronic disease. Stress arises when an individual observes that he/she cannot cope with the demands placed on them or perceives a threat to his well-being. However, utilizing effective coping strategies can help to manage stress. The current study is a quantitative cross-sectional study aimed to assess the prevalence of occupational stress, stressors, and coping strategies of female private school teachers (n=1,386) working in Hyderabad city. Data was analysed using SPSS version 22.0, descriptive analysis was calculated and p-value <0.05 was considered as significant. The results revealed that majority of teachers were experiencing higher level of occupational stress. The stressors of teachers were sorted as work-related distress, professional growth, managing their work within given time, inadequate salary, emotional and fatigue manifestations were more obvious for teachers. Teachers were found to use dysfunctional and emotional coping strategies most often. The study concluded that overall working conditions of private school teachers were observed challenging. There is immense need to promote healthy working environment for better performance of teachers and ultimately resulting in succeeding and advancing educational organizations.

**Keywords:** private school teachers, occupational stress, stressors, coping strategies

### **1. Introduction**

Service or occupational stress is the most common of all types of stress and is a known risk factor for chronic diseases and work disability (Chang et al., 2005; Cheptea et al., 2021). The job stress is not only the main factor contributing to poor health, but it costs societal burden, reduction in contributing to poor health, and it also costs societal burden and reduces productive ability. Its negative impacts on workers' health and well-being are significantly observed problems throughout the industrialized world (Parveen, 2009). Due to the challenging environment at the workplace, individuals fail to deal with stress which results in exhaustion, resulting in psychological and physical effects (Suleman et al., 2018). Unpleasant emotional effects of stress include fear, anxiety, irritation, anger, and misery, eventually ending up in depression (Motowidlo et al, 1986). Stress and depression are becoming a public health issue and need prompt strategies to work on the subject, the effective promotion of good mental health and reducing psychological distress and disorders has never been addressed appropriately (World Health Organization, 2000). This suggests a significant health burden needing urgent strategies and plans to face major health challenges.

### **1.1. Research objectives**

- i. To determine the prevalence of occupational stress and stressors of female private school teachers
- ii. To analyse female private school teachers' most adapted coping strategies for coping with occupational stress.

## **2. Literature Review**

The teaching profession is one of the most important and highly impactful professions as it is directly associated with the personality development of children; and is reflected as the nation-building profession. Thus, teachers' mental and physical health is significant in fulfilling their job responsibilities (Siddiqui & Soomro, 2019), as the teacher's performance is the most vital contribution to the field of education (Suleman et al., 2018). Where positive behaviour of teacher leads to better performance and produce pupils, who are motivated to learn, enthusiastic and generate self-confident generations who can face the challenges and hardships (Khurshid, 2011). At the same time, stressed teachers have been seen to demotivate students and negatively affect students, self, and an organization's performance (Thangjam et al., 2020).

According to recent statistics, stress and psychological strains are commonly found among the working population, particularly teachers, and several stressors have been highlighted. Chaudhry (2012), in his study, discussed the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction has elaborated that low literacy rates and poor educational resources directly affect teachers, and they remain unsatisfied in such situations. The author further elaborated that extra responsibilities upon teachers besides their main task diversify their primary attention from teaching and ultimately become the cause of their stress. In a study done by VanDijk and Wagner (2001) to analyse job-related stress of teachers and sorted the stressors as workload, poor relations with colleagues, more pupils in the class, job dissatisfaction, low salary and mobbing as the potential factors of stress. Whereas Kyriacou (2001) discussed the stressors of teachers, the dominant stressors were teaching students who are less motivated and maintaining discipline in the classroom, workload, confronted with frequent changes in tasks, low wages, evaluations, going through relationship issues with teachers and heads and underprivileged working situations. Farber (1984), discussed in his study to assess stress and burnout among suburban teachers, highlighted the factors associated with stress were perceived insensitivity and criticism of administrators and the population in their surroundings at the workplace. However, Hasan (2014) found that career growth, promotion opportunities and limited resources for their lessons, and poor working conditions were potential factors of higher levels of stress among primary school teachers. Similarly, in their research study focusing on Swedish teachers, Arvidsson et al., (2016) found that the big sized classrooms, role ambiguity, student behaviour, rapid curriculum changes, and high demands from school administration were associated factors of rising stress and most of the respondents thought of quitting job. Whereas Tsai et al. (2006) explored the factors and manifestations of stress in female kindergarten teachers, the authors found that time management, intensification, and accountability were highly associated with the stress among the study population.

### **2.1. Effects of occupational stress and burnout on employees**

According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (2013), adverse effects such as physical indications and emotional responses occur when the job responsibilities do not match the worker's potentialities, available resources and needs. Yahaya et al. (2010) discussed that work-related stress is a condition where the employees feel unwanted and are at hazard at the workplace. It is highly linked to depression and mental dysfunction, along with several physical

indications that are also associated with burnout such as headache, gastrointestinal disorders, muscles pain, cold, flu and sleep disorders (Dawkins & Burdess, 2020). Employees are confronted with stress due to several workplace situations associated with their job responsibilities and fail to cope with stress, which results in burnout and chronic illness (Khattak et al., 2011; Ruisoto, 2021).

## ***2.2. Coping with teacher's stress***

As an individual, when teachers are confronted with stressful events, they need restructuring skills to cope (Sabri et al., 2013). Restructuring skills refer to increased levels of commitment to school goals, greater sensitivity by teachers towards the diverse needs of their students and, an expanded and more flexible instructional repertoire, better working collaboration with fellow teachers as well as with pupils and parents of the pupil. Whereas cognitive restructuring and positively reappraising have also been helpful for teachers to alleviate physical and emotional exhaustion and enhance a sense of personal achievement among teachers (Selvam & Chamundeswari, 2015). Kyriacou (1987), in his study, showed that the most frequently used coping actions included trying to keep things in perspective and avoiding confrontation with stressful events. Furthermore, the teachers mentioned that they could manage their stress even in extremely stressful working conditions if their concerns and issues were considered while taking important decisions related to their job. In a study, Borrelli et al. (2014) discussed that when teachers had awareness regarding stress and burnout and had updated information about the nature, signs, causes, and symptoms of stress, they could manage occupational stress.

## **3. Methodology**

The current research study is a quantitative cross-sectional design. The research population recruited for this study included female teachers working in private schools in Hyderabad, Pakistan. Teachers working in private schools were selected according to the selection criteria of the study, teachers were invited to take part in the study and based on their willingness they were included. The research locale was Hyderabad city. The probability sampling technique was used as the researcher has set criteria for sample selection. Further, a simple random sampling method was used where investigators invited teachers which were selected according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

### ***3.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria***

- a) The study population was female teachers working in private schools in Hyderabad.
- b) The primary and secondary both schools were included.
- c) Married and unmarried female teachers both were included in the study.
- d) Junior and senior teachers were included in the study.

### ***3.2. Research instrument***

Two research instruments were utilised in the present study. The instrument to measure teacher's stress and stressor Teachers Stress Inventory (Fimian, 1984) was used. The Brief COPE inventory (Carver et al., 1989) was used to measure coping strategies.

### ***3.3. Data analysis***

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics for windows, version 22.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp) was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used, and data was presented as frequency distribution with the number and percentage of respondent responses

to each category. The  $\chi^2$  test was used to test the significance and a p-value  $<0.05$  was considered as significant.

### **3.4. Ethical considerations**

All the participants were requested to take part in the study. Informed consent was taken from all the participants. The respondent's response to the questionnaires was voluntary and will not affect their progress in their schools. The researchers throughout the execution of the research project followed all the ethical protocols from the university ethical review committee. Throughout the data collection process, several ethical aspects were considered. The respondents were given the choice to withdraw from the study at any time if they wish to, to ensure the true spirit of the informed consent and voluntary participation. Nobody was forced to provide information against her will. Anonymized data was entered, and personal information will always be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be further ensured by securing the information anonymized and kept private.

## **5. Result**

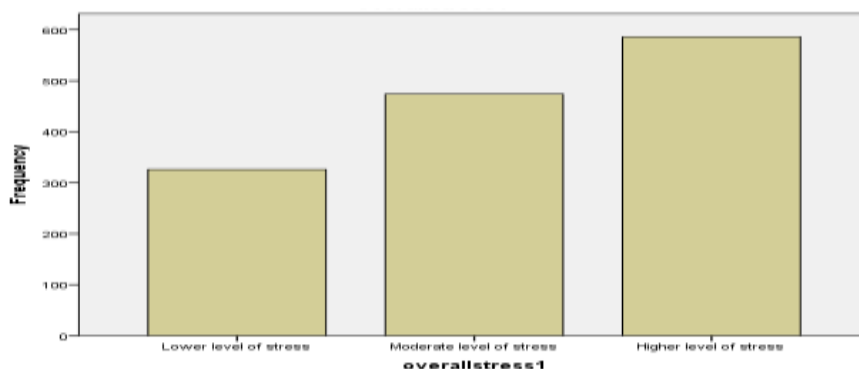
### **5.1. Prevalence of occupational stress**

The Table (1) and Figure (1) presents the frequencies of level of stress among female private school teachers. Overall stress was classified into three levels i.e., lower level of stress, moderate level of stress and higher level of stress. Based on the results obtained from the descriptive statistics (cut-off ratio) of overall stress, the highest number of respondents (n=586, 42.3%) were experiencing a higher level of stress. Followed by a moderate level of stress (n=474, 34.2%) whereas (n=326, 23.5%) percent of teachers were experiencing lower level of stress.

Table1: The frequencies of level of stress perceived by female teachers

| <b>Level of stress</b>   | <b>N</b> | <b>Valid percent</b> |
|--------------------------|----------|----------------------|
| Lower level of stress    | 326      | 23.5                 |
| Moderate level of stress | 474      | 34.2                 |
| Higher level of stress   | 586      | 42.3                 |

Figure 1: Frequencies of level of stress among private school teachers



### 5.2. Descriptive statistics of Teacher's stress inventory

The descriptive analysis was calculated to find out which stressors have higher influence on teacher's stress (Table: 2). The items related time management (Mean=21.66 SD± 9.42) followed by work related distress (Mean=16.22, SD±7.19), discipline and motivation (Mean=16.09, SD± 7.15), fatigue manifestations (Mean= 13.27, SD± 6.00), emotional manifestations (Mean=13.46, SD±5.98) and professional distress (Mean=13.19, SD± 5.98) were identified as stronger factor to influence occupational stress among teachers. In contrast, behavioral manifestations (Mean=7.98, SD±3.75) and cardiovascular manifestations (Mean=7.93, SD± 3.60) had the lowest scores, which reflects that behavioral and cardiovascular indications are less observed by the female teachers. Overall, the results presented in table 1 reveal that a major proportion of teachers were experiencing a higher level of stress.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of factors of teacher's stress inventory

| Factors of stress             | Mean    | Std. deviation |
|-------------------------------|---------|----------------|
| Professional investment       | 10.3030 | 4.04744        |
| Behavioural manifestations    | 7.9885  | 3.75089        |
| Time management               | 21.6667 | 9.42713        |
| Discipline and motivation     | 16.0902 | 7.15227        |
| Emotional manifestations      | 13.4625 | 5.98594        |
| Work related stress           | 16.2294 | 7.19883        |
| Gastronomic manifestations    | 8.0094  | 3.67221        |
| Cardiovascular manifestations | 7.9365  | 3.60729        |
| Fatigue manifestations        | 13.2763 | 6.00741        |
| Professional distress         | 13.1912 | 5.93845        |

The descriptive statistics of coping strategies indicated that most adapted coping strategies of female teachers are dysfunctional coping strategies (Mean, 27.50, SD± 3.39) followed by emotion-focused coping strategies (Mean, 26.70, SD±2.49) and lowest values were observed for problem-focused coping strategies (Mean, 14.29, SD± 2.26) results are presented in table 3. The descriptive statistics of brief COPE subscales are shown in table 4.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics Coping strategies

| Coping strategies    | Mean    | Std Deviation± |
|----------------------|---------|----------------|
| Problem-focused      | 14.2922 | 2.26202        |
| Emotion-focused      | 26.7092 | 2.49705        |
| Dysfunctional coping | 27.5007 | 3.39191        |

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of subscales of Brief COPE

|                                  |               |                |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Self-distraction</b>          | <b>4.5361</b> | <b>1.05676</b> |
| <b>Active coping</b>             | 4.0281        | 1.34725        |
| <b>Denial</b>                    | 5.7374        | 1.41687        |
| <b>Emotional support</b>         | 5.7460        | 1.42256        |
| <b>Instrumental support</b>      | 5.6833        | 1.24244        |
| <b>Behavioural disengagement</b> | 6.9957        | 1.47665        |
| <b>Venting</b>                   | 6.9902        | 1.41638        |
| <b>Positive reframing</b>        | 4.0498        | 1.01026        |
| <b>Planning</b>                  | 4.5808        | 1.08267        |
| <b>Acceptance</b>                | 4.6039        | 1.57300        |
| <b>Religion</b>                  | 7.3268        | 1.57300        |
| <b>Self-blame</b>                | 6.5058        | 1.35701        |
| <b>Humour</b>                    | 6.9827        | 1.42072        |

## 6. Discussion

The teacher's stress inventory included ten subscales, i.e., professional investment, time management, behavioral manifestations; cardiovascular manifestations; gastronomic manifestations; fatigue manifestations; professional distress; discipline and motivation; emotional manifestations and work-related distress. Each subscale had a separate set of statements where teachers provided their responses. The results obtained from the study participants on the subscales of the teacher's stress inventory (TSI) has shown that teachers were experiencing higher level of occupational stress in general. Professional investment presented the possible difficulties confronted by the teachers related to their job, such as personal opinions are not aired sufficiently and lack of control over decisions. The results illustrated that teachers noticed being less emotionally and intellectually stimulated, whereas opportunities for improvement were considered insufficient for their professional growth. The education system, particularly private schools, introduces new technologies to make lessons interactive and more interesting for learners. Therefore, teachers need to get such training to adopt modern teaching methods to excel in their field. Similarly, the studies exploring stress and its factors among teachers working in the United Kingdom and Sweden reported that Swedish and British teachers noted that professional growth and lack of opportunities for career advancement are the primary stress-elevating factors among study participants (Cox et al., 2000).

Behavioral manifestations included indications like calling in sick and using over-the-counter drugs. In addition, female teachers observed physical indications of being sick; due to workload, insufficient time to rest, and lack of proper sleep, thus, teachers felt being unwell. The fatigue manifestations were assessed by the items like needing more sleep, delaying tasks, becoming fatigued in a short time, the study participants with great strength observed physical exhaustion and physical weakness. Behavioral and fatigue manifestations are highly associated, indicating the workload and pressure on the teachers. This illustrates that teachers were physically tired and assigned tasks and job-related responsibilities were more than their capabilities. Time management is one of the leading stress factors in the previous research scholarships.

Similarly, time management was one of the most stressful factors among study participants. Teachers noticed that they mostly did more than one thing at a time and observed that they had very little time to relax. In this regard, McPhee & Patrick (2009) stated that teachers' average work was 45 to 80 hours per week but still needed more time to finish their assigned tasks. It was found

that the teachers were also not conceptualizing their responsibilities into the essential and less essential tasks. They could not sort out and prioritize the work to do within 35 hours a week. In the context of the present study, teachers working in the private schools of Hyderabad work five/six days per week, but still, they find the time was insufficient to finish their designated tasks. Teachers noticed items like feeling insecure, vulnerable, depressed, anxious, and feeling unable to cope were detected by the teachers as either medium strength or significant strength on the stress scale. This illustrates that teachers were experiencing emotional difficulties, which can be linked to the results obtained for the subscale professional distress, where teachers have indicated great strength in items such as the lack of opportunities, not progressing, need for more status and respect, receiving an inadequate salary, and lack of recognition was included. Teachers' professional and emotional distress are highly interlinked, and teachers' satisfaction entirely depends on their progress, recognition, salary scale and respect in society. Low or no values of such vital aspects lead to rise in strain and stress among teachers. Notably, lower salary packages in private schools have been highlighted in the several previous studies (Hasan, 2014; Nadeem et al., 2011).

Similarly, it was validated in the context of the present study, where teachers signified low salary as a reason for rise in occupational stress. Private school teachers in Pakistan are underpaid according to the wages policy of Government of Sindh, Pakistan issued in 2021, with the minimum wages was 19,000 and later in 2022 raised to 25,000 per month. However still there are private educational institutions who are paying 10,000 or less. The policies do exist, but implementing such policies remains a neglected side. One of the possible factors is the unemployment rate in Pakistan thus the employers never have a shortage of teachers to hire on such low wages.

Teachers indicated great strength of stress regarding teaching students who are poorly motivated and inadequate or poorly defined discipline policies. The majority of teachers indicated that students reject their authority. This illustrates that teachers were experiencing difficulties while teaching pupils who do not pay attention and do not work hard in class. Behavioral issues and poor academic performance ultimately affect teachers' teaching performance and motivation. According to Private school policies, teachers' performance appraisal and yearly salary increment teachers' performance appraisal and yearly salary increment are primarily measured by teacher's performance and depends on students' academic performance and discipline maintenance of class. In a similar context Preliminary Model of Occupational Stress by Motowidlo et al. (1986) explains that the workplace is an important aspect of employees; as the individual needs and motivations of employees are shaped, to some degree, by the demands of an organization and the professional development of employees. The workplace's dominant and demanding organizational system illustrates that employees cannot work independently. The complexity of the relationship between employees and organization can appear to create a contradiction. However, it is difficult to accurately calculate the number of complexities confronted by employees, and due to these complexities, occupational stress arises. Similarly, the demanding working hours, lack of professional development and dominant needs of the school were found to be a source of stress among study participants.

As a private school teacher, stress does not come from one source (i.e., work); in most cases, teachers are the bread earners for their families, and meeting their needs at the end of the month becomes stressful. In that situation, educational institutions' working conditions and environment can play a vital role for teachers to ease their stress by managing their work efficiently to prevent physical and psychological stress and strain. Teachers indicated the great strength for items including "need more status, recognition and respect in society" teachers are nation-building personalities. Still, unfortunately, they have not been recognized and valued in most societies. In

this regard, Hamann et al. (1990) expressed that teachers deserve to be rewarded with intrinsic and extrinsic advantages; but unfortunately, teachers are not at the place where they deserve to be in this perspective. Decades have passed, and teachers are still confronted with similar working conditions and challenges but continue to serve.

### ***6.1. Coping strategies of female private school teachers***

The most utilized coping strategies of female private school teachers were dysfunctional coping strategies followed by emotion-focused coping strategies. Dysfunctional coping strategies included self-distraction, denial, self-blame behavioral disengagement and venting. The emotion-focused coping strategies i.e., using emotional support, positive reframing, acceptance, religion, and humor. Based on the results obtained from participants on the subscales of brief cope the most used coping strategy was religious coping strategies, instrumental support, and venting. Religious coping was most used coping style. Similarly, in a study by Yusuf (2011) to investigate the stress and coping strategies of medical universities in Malaysia students indicated that most of the students, particularly Muslims, were found to use emotion-focused coping, especially religious coping. Whereas Dyrbye et al. (2006) in their study to assess stress and stress management among university students, the most utilized coping strategies were substance use and the religious coping strategies were used by Muslim participants at most. In a study done by, Azman et al. (2017) also indicated that emotion focused particularly religious coping was mainly utilized by the study participants to manage their stress. Venting involves the ventilation of negative emotions and use of instrumental support involves sharing their problems, getting suggestions and ideas from others or fellow teachers was mostly a coping style found among the study participants.

Possible factor could be that the teachers are confronted with daily stress on daily basis daily, a new challenge every day, so they tend to use emotion focused and dysfunctional coping strategies comparatively more often. In this regard Li et al. (2012) elaborated that, when an individual is confronted with a short-term stressor, emotion focused strategies are found more beneficial when compared, problem focused coping strategies were reported to be superior as compared to emotion focused strategies when participants had to deliberate on the long-term consequences of the stressor. There is a possibility that teachers are confronted with short term stress episodes of frequent and intense work-related stress. Therefore, they tend to get emotional support from others and sometimes they find comfort in religion.

Overall results of the brief COPE inventory illustrated that teachers used emotional and dysfunctional coping together. Teachers utilized the emotional support utilized emotional support to buffer the stress effects. It is observed to help the stressed person in two ways ventilation and suggestions to handle the stress encounter technically.

### ***6.2. Implications***

The present study has highlighted the importance of teacher's mental health on the country's future generation. The study has highlighted very important issues which will be helpful in building a positive society in future. According to Awan and Zia (2015) the number of students studying in private schools noted in the year 2007-2008 was up to 34 % of total school enrolment. Whereas according to the statistics from a survey from 1990 to 2016, 47.5 million children were enrolled in schools and 42 % of them are going to private schools. This shows quite a high number of that many children in Pakistan are studying in private school. The mental health of these children is directly related to the better mental health conditions of teachers.



The results of the present study have provided empirical evidence of the prevalence of occupational stress, stressors and most utilized coping strategies of teachers working in private schools. The stress and burnout among teachers, particularly working in private schools, have rarely been addressed by the researchers in the field of social work so the present research project will play a role in the prominence of private school teachers' issues. The present research will highlight the importance of social work in the field of education. Social work is not yet introduced in schools though education requires it at most because students and teachers have several issues to be intervened in. The highlighted issues and the factors of stress can be addressed based on the empirical evidence from the study's social work perspective.

## **7. Recommendations**

Based on the present study findings, the teachers are recommended to learn how to manage their stress and identify their stressors. Which is possible if teachers have knowledge, awareness and understanding of the subject to deal with them effectively. School administration can play a vital role in promoting healthy working environment by taking steps like, division of work load among teachers fairly, assigning duties to the teachers matching to their interest and abilities, by a positive strong sense of collegiality, involvement of teachers in decision making, positive feedback, appreciation and rewards for their efforts and hard work, optimum level of resources and facilities for teaching, in hand support for teachers to resolve their issues, flexible school policies. The district's policy makers and education department are urged to support private school teachers and private schools to improve working conditions for teachers.

## **8. Conclusion**

Most female teachers were under higher stress levels and moderate burnout was also observed. The factors contributing to stress were time constraints, inadequate salary, being tired, discipline and motivation, professional distress and work load which were influencing the stress among teachers. Based on the results obtained from the study participants, teachers working in private schools of Hyderabad mostly utilized religious coping, ventilation of negative emotions, instrumental support, and behavioral disengagement. The most used coping strategies were found some how useful in managing stress. Therefore, teachers managed their stress to prevent higher level of burnout among most participants. Thus, the higher level of stress was also observed and moderate level of burnout indicated. The possible factor could be the use of emotional and dysfunctional coping strategies together, which helped teachers manage stress and prevented higher burnout among most teachers. Promoting a healthy working environment for teachers will promote better performance and ultimately result in succeeding and advancing organizations.

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