

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THRISSUR DISTRICT: KEY STRESSORS, DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES, AND COPING MECHANISMS

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Abstract

Occupational stress represents a considerable obstacle for educational professionals, especially within private educational institutions, where substantial workloads, elevated administrative demands, and uncertainties regarding job security profoundly influence their overall well-being. This investigation will systematically scrutinise the principal determinants of occupational stress experienced by teaching personnel in private schools located in the Thrissur district of Kerala. This study investigates the occupational stress experienced by private school teachers in the Thrissur District of Kerala, with a focus on identifying key stressors, examining demographic influences, and evaluating the role of coping strategies. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, ANOVA, and independent sample t-tests were employed to assess the relationships among variables. The findings revealed that financial dissatisfaction, workload, and lack of rest were the most prominent stressors. While demographic factors such as age, gender, and teaching experience showed limited influence on overall stress levels, coping strategies demonstrated a significant relationship with occupational stress. However, their predictive power was modest. The study highlights the need for targeted support systems and context-specific interventions to manage teacher stress effectively and promote well-being in the private school sector.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Private School Teachers, Stress Factors, Demographic Factors, Teacher Well-being

Introduction

Stress is a disturbance in the body caused by external stressors, impacting both physiological and psychological well-being. Psychologists describe stress as "the spice of life," emphasizing its potential to motivate and build resilience, but it fundamentally represents the body's response to environmental demands. According to R.S. Lazarus (1966), stress arises when individuals feel unable to manage the expectations placed on them or when they perceive

threats to their well-being. This highlights the complex interplay between stress and personal perception in navigating life's challenges.

Hans Selye introduced the concept of stress in the life sciences in 1936. Derived from the Latin word "stringere", it signifies experiences of hardship and pain. Selye defined stress as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it," further stating that it encompasses "any external event or internal drive that threatens to disrupt the organism's equilibrium" (Selye, 1956). This understanding remains fundamental in studying psychological and physiological responses to demands.

Stress significantly impacts both our physical health and mental well-being. To effectively manage the pressures of daily life, individuals can learn to relax and appreciate joyful moments. While preventing stress is ideal, it's not always possible; thus, reducing stress and simplifying life becomes crucial. Stress arises from various demands—environmental, organisational, or personal—that require us to adapt our typical behaviour. The intensity of stress often correlates with significant events or changes, and the stress triggers, known as stressors, can be categorised into three primary sources: environmental factors, individual challenges, and organisational pressures.

Stress varies greatly from person to person, influenced by individual circumstances and coping styles. What one person finds relaxing, such as spending time outdoors or practising mindfulness, may be stressful for another.

Stress is defined as any situation or event that imposes significant physical or psychological demands. These demands can come from various sources, including environmental factors like noise and pollution, social obligations, family responsibilities, and personal aspirations. The pressures of modern life can overwhelm individuals, leading to a range of stress-related symptoms, from irritability to severe emotional distress.

Work-related stress is a prevalent phenomenon that has been demonstrated to detrimentally affect health, performance, and overall well-being, as indicated by various organisational and behavioural studies. Furthermore, Colligan and Higgins (2005) contend that occupational stress represents a complex scientific construct that necessitates an initial comprehension of the foundational concept known as stress.

Incompatibility between an individual and their workplace has been characterised as work-related stress. Stress at work is defined as a collection of negative and unpleasant aspects of the job, organisation, and environment that cause emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and physiological reactions. The National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (1999) states that while working conditions are a major factor, personal factors also play a role. They

define work-related stress as "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the worker's capabilities, resources, or needs."

Teaching has evolved into a highly stressful profession due to the complex organisation of educational work. Teachers now face a challenging student population with varying backgrounds and heightened support needs. This shift requires educators to continually develop new skills and adapt to modern pedagogical demands, leading to increased pressure and potential burnout.

Literature Review

Jain, Tyagi, and Kumar (2015) investigated the impact of personality, gender, age, qualification, and experience on stress among teacher educators at work. We randomly selected 100 male and female teachers from teacher training colleges in Delhi, India. Research indicates that female educators are more prone to experience stress than male educators. (ii) Stress levels are higher among younger teachers compared to older ones. (iii) Stress levels are higher among less qualified teacher educators compared to highly qualified educators. (iv) Stress is more prevalent among less experienced teacher educators compared to highly experienced ones.

Azar Eskandaricharati (2014) conducted an investigation into the organisational attributes and their correlation with the organisational commitment of educators at three universities in Hyderabad. The findings indicated that individuals exhibiting elevated levels of job satisfaction, engagement in decision-making processes, and a pronounced sense of belonging are more committed to the organisation.

Gabha (2013) For Teachers College and the organisations they work for, work-related stress is a significant issue. The Foundation is addressing the types of problems that instructors might encounter and enhancing their working environment. It is imperative that stress-related problems at work be routinely assessed. Therefore, we investigated the various career pressures that engineering schools in the Indian state of Punjab face in this study.

(Basher and Ismail, 2010) in their study utilised the Pearson correlation coefficient to evaluate the significance of the association between job satisfaction and the aggregate professional stress experienced by faculty members within academic institutions. According to the data presented in the table, no statistically significant disparities were observed between job satisfaction levels and professional stress, thereby delineating the overall relationship. These findings necessitate the dismissal of the null hypothesis H_0 . A comprehensive analysis of the relationship among various demographic variables may uncover a statistically significant association between the pertinent constructs.

Maolin and Xiaoxin (2008) investigated the job stress and coping mechanisms of 182 special-education teachers. The study found that special school instructors face considerable stress, with student-related issues being the primary source. Secondly, the most common coping mechanism adopted by instructors was issue resolution, followed by seeking help. Third, job stress and coping mechanisms differed significantly across special school instructors based on gender, teaching experience, and professional background.

Bindu and Sudeesh Kumar (2006) investigated the correlation between job satisfaction and stress management competencies among a cohort of 500 primary school educators in India. The findings demonstrated a significant positive correlation between job satisfaction and stress management skills; furthermore, educators who foster a supportive organisational atmosphere, enhance task design, mitigate conflicts, and receive adequate guidance tend to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction and are better equipped to manage stress effectively.

Comprehending educators' perceptions and convictions is of paramount importance, as these educators, deeply engaged in a multitude of pedagogical and learning activities, serve as practitioners of established educational doctrines and theoretical frameworks (Jia, Eslami and Burlbaw, (2006).

Potter et al. (2002) concluded that interpersonal stressors at work have a profound impact on employees. Conflicts at work are also associated with a decline in health and well-being. It has been demonstrated that the psychosocial environment of the workplace has a unique impact on employees.

Aminabhavi and Triveni (2000) in their study indicates that nationalized bank employees are significantly more stressed than non-nationalized bank employees in terms of role conflict, unreasonable group and political pressure, intrinsic poverty, and strenuous working conditions. The authors meticulously discovered that the factors of age, gender, and the various coping strategies employed by employees exhibited no significant influence on the levels of occupational stress and role-related stress that these individuals experienced within their professional environments. It is significant to observe that younger individuals generally face increased stress levels when juxtaposed with their older counterparts, thereby implying a potential association between age and stress resilience.

Need for the study

The purpose of this study is to determine the causes of organisational stress in educators and examine the relationship between stress and job satisfaction. The study intends to identify faculty coping strategies and stressors, such as workload and administrative expectations. In

order to gain insight into the problems faced by private school teachers in the Thrissur area, the study employed subjective methods such as interviews and self-reported questionnaires.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the occupational stress experienced by private school teachers in the Thrissur District of Kerala. The explorations of particular stressors in this setting provide an understanding of the particular difficulties that private school teachers confront. Investigating the relationship between stress and some demographics, such as age, gender and teaching experience, gives a deeper insight into how the stress is affected by personal characteristics. Moreover, the study provides important knowledge regarding the association between coping and stress, and their predictive values, which is of importance with respect to targeted interventions and support. Our results offer implications for school management, policy makers, and mental health professionals about the possibilities of intervention programs for stress reduction and promoting the health and job performance of teachers.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the key stressors affecting private school teachers in the Thrissur District of Kerala.
2. To explore the association between stress levels and demographic factors (age, gender and experience)
3. To examine the relationship between coping strategies and occupational stress.
4. To evaluate whether coping strategies predict occupational stress levels.

Methodology Used

The research employed a mixed-methods methodology, effectively integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to thoroughly investigate organisational stress experienced by educators in private schools within the Thrissur district. We compiled primary data through a thoughtfully constructed questionnaire, which reached out to 130 high school educators across different disciplines, out of which 123 responses were received, employing a convenience sampling technique. Furthermore, qualitative perspectives were gathered through interviews, aimed at acquiring a deeper comprehension of the stressors and coping strategies utilised by teachers. The collected data were systematically analysed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, ANOVA, and independent sample t-tests to assess the key stressors and coping strategies influencing teachers' occupational stress.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Socio-demographic Profile of the School Teachers

Sample Characteristics (N= 123)		F	%
Gender	Male	69	56
	Female	54	44
Age	< =25 years	19	15
	26 – 35 years	51	42
	36 – 45 years	16	13
	46 - 54 years	25	20
	> 54 years	12	10
Educational Qualification	Undergraduate	0	00
	Graduate	78	63
	Postgraduate	45	37
Marital status	Married	90	73
	Single	33	27
Monthly Income	<=10,000	18	15
	10,001 - 20,000	82	67
	20,001 & above	23	19
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	28	22
	5-10 years	13	11
	11-20 years	35	29
	More than 20 years	47	38

Chart 1. Socio-demographic Profile of the School Teachers

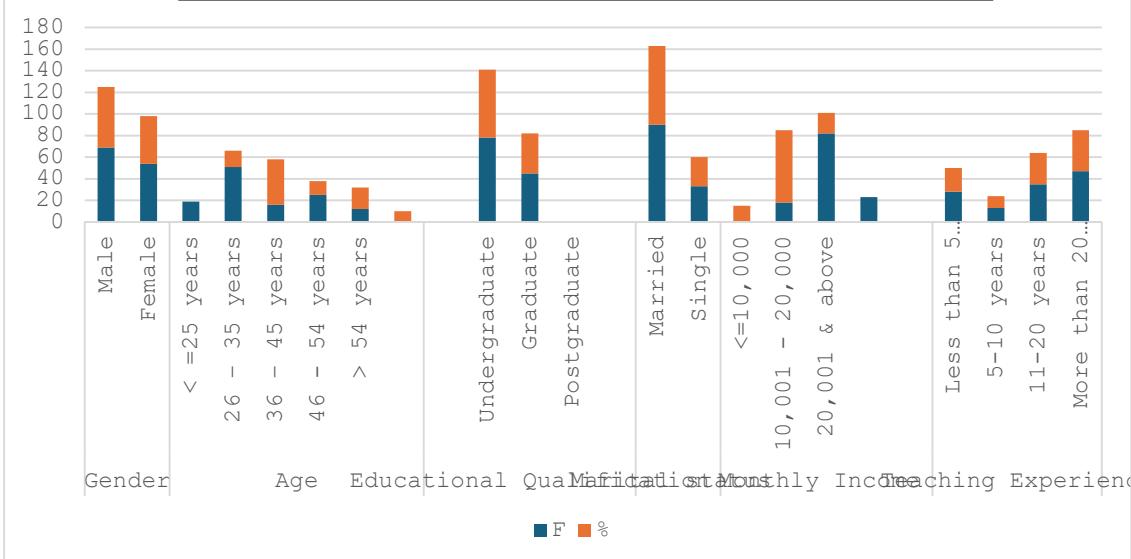


Table 2. Scale Reliability Statistics		
Parameters	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Occupational Stress Factors	.920	10
Coping Strategies	.775	8

Interpretation: Reliability test result indicates all the items of occupational stress factors are highly reliable, as the alpha value is more than 0.9, and items of coping strategies are also acceptable as the alpha value is more than 0.7. This suggests the items of the scale are reliable to measure the constructs.

Objective 1: To identify the key stressors affecting private school teachers in the Thrissur District of Kerala.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics analysing the Key Stress Factors		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel overwhelmed by the number of responsibilities at school	3.16	1.066
I find it hard to manage student behaviour in class	2.90	.824
I face pressure to complete tasks within tight deadlines	2.97	.819
I often feel emotionally exhausted after a day's work	2.91	1.008
The expectations from school management are unrealistic	3.07	.930
I feel unsupported by my school administrators	2.92	1.149
I feel anxious about job security or contract renewal	3.07	1.129
I struggle to maintain a balance between my professional and personal life	2.82	1.300
My workload leaves me with little or no time for rest or leisure	3.36	1.072
I feel underpaid for the responsibilities I manage	3.70	1.016

Interpretation: This table presents the key stress factors in teaching among private school teachers in Thrissur district. The highest rated statement ($M = 3.70$), and the second highest rated statement ($M = 3.36$), indicates that financial dissatisfaction and workload-related time constraints are the most prominent stressors. Conversely, difficulty in managing student behaviour ($M = 2.90$) and maintaining work-life balance ($M = 2.82$) were comparatively lower, though still indicative of moderate stress.

On the other hand, the standard deviation scores indicate varying levels of agreement among teachers regarding different stressors. The highest variability was found in managing work-life balance ($SD = 1.300$), suggesting diverse personal circumstances. In contrast, low variability in responses to time pressure ($SD = 0.819$) and student behaviour management ($SD = 0.824$)

reflects more consistent experiences. These findings highlight that while some stressors are commonly shared, others differ significantly among individuals, pointing to the need for context-specific support strategies.

Objective 2: To explore the association between stress levels and demographic factors (age, gender and experience)

Hypothesis 1

- **H₀:** There is no significant difference in occupational stress levels among male and female teachers.
- **H₁:** There is a significant difference in occupational stress levels among male and female teachers.

Table 4: Group Statistics

Gender of the Respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	69	2.5739	.26327	.03169
Female	54	3.7426	.76247	.10376

Table 5: Independent Sample Test

Occupational Stress	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	62.895	.000	-11.871	121	.000	-1.16868	.09845	-1.36358	.97378
Equal variances not assumed			-10.772	62.924	.000	-1.16868	.10849	-1.38549	.95187

Interpretation: An unpaired sample t-test was conducted to understand the difference in occupational stress levels among male and female teachers. Levene's test results show a significant value ($F = 62.9$ and P value 0.000), which means the assumption of equal variance is violated. Therefore, the t-test is considered for interpretation, considering equal variances not assumed.

The mean score and standard deviation values of male and female and the t-test value (10.772), p value $< .001$ show considerable differences in occupational stress levels among male and female school teachers in private institutions. Further mean difference value -1.169 reveals that female teachers significantly reported high stress levels than male teachers at 5% level of significance.

As the probability value 0.000 is less than 0.05, which is even significant at 0.01 level. The study rejects null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis stating there is a significant difference in experiencing occupational stress among male and female teachers. Female school teachers stress level is higher than male teachers.

Hypothesis 2

- **H_0 :** There is no significant difference in occupational stress levels among school teachers across different age groups.
- **H_1 :** There is a significant difference in occupational stress levels among school teachers across different age groups.

Table 6: One-way ANOVA showing the relationship between Stress levels and Age				
ANOVA- Across Age groups	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	4.148	1.383	2.261	.085
Within Groups	72.752	.611		

Interpretation: One-way ANOVA is performed to understand whether stress level differ among school teachers of different age groups. The test revealed no significant difference in occupational stress across age groups of private school teachers, $F = 2.261$, $p > 0.05$. Although some variation was observed, the results suggest that age does not significantly influence stress levels in this sample. Therefore, H_0 is accepted, indicating occupational stress has no significant difference among different age groups.

Hypothesis 3

- **H_0 :** There is no significant difference in occupational stress levels among schoolteachers across years of experience.
- **H_1 :** There is a significant difference in occupational stress levels among school teachers across years of experience.

Table 7 : One-way ANOVA showing the relationship between Stress levels and Experience

ANOVA- Across years of teaching experience	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	2.118	.706	1.124	.342
Within Groups	74.781	.628		

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether occupational stress levels vary based on teachers' years of experience in private schools. The results yielded an F-value of 1.123 and a p-value of 0.342, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in stress levels across different experience groups. In other words, teachers experience similar levels of occupational stress regardless of their years of teaching experience.

Objective 3: To examine the relationship between coping strategies and occupational stress

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics analysing the key Coping Strategies adopted by teachers

	Mean	Std. Deviation
I plan and prioritise my tasks to reduce stress	3.63	.986
I talk to colleagues or friends about my stress	3.66	.818
I use time management strategies to complete my tasks efficiently	3.51	.953
Support from colleagues helps me manage job-related stress better	3.74	.904
I use relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation	3.44	.968
I seek guidance or counselling when overwhelmed	3.00	1.048
I feel comfortable discussing stress-related issues with school leadership	3.02	1.016
My school administration is supportive when I face work-related stress	3.37	.987

Interpretation: The descriptive statistics highlight the key coping strategies adopted by private school teachers to manage occupational stress. Among the strategies, support from colleagues received the highest mean score ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.904$), indicating that peer support plays a significant role in helping teachers manage job-related stress. This was closely followed by talking to colleagues or friends about stress ($M = 3.66$) and planning and prioritising tasks ($M = 3.63$), suggesting a preference for interpersonal and task-oriented coping mechanisms. Time management ($M = 3.51$) and relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation ($M = 3.44$) were also moderately used. In contrast, seeking professional guidance or counselling ($M = 3.00$) and

discussing stress with school leadership ($M = 3.02$) were among the least adopted strategies, possibly reflecting limited access to formal support systems or reluctance to engage with administrative channels. The relatively high standard deviations in these areas suggest variability in how comfortable teachers feel accessing formal institutional support. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers primarily rely on peer interactions and personal planning strategies to cope with stress, with less emphasis on institutional or professional mental health support.

Table 9: Pearson's correlation showing the relationship between Coping Strategies and Occupational Stress			
Variables	Coping Strategies	Level of Occupational Stress	P value
Coping Strategies	-	-.381**	
Level of Occupational Stress	-.381**	-	0.000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Interpretation: The correlation analysis reveals a statistically significant relationship between teachers' occupational stress levels and their use of coping strategies, with a p-value of 0.000, indicating significance at the 0.01 level. The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.381$) suggests a moderate negative association, meaning that as the use of coping strategies increases, occupational stress tends to decrease. This negative correlation confirms that coping strategies play a crucial role in alleviating stress among private school teachers, underscoring the importance of promoting effective stress-management techniques within the educational environment.

Objective 4: To evaluate whether coping strategies predict occupational stress levels.

Table 10: Simple Linear Regression Model										
Model	Dependent Value	Independent Value	Beta	Std. error	T	Sig.	R	R2	F	P
1	Level of Occupational Stress	Constant	5.189	.628	8.257	.000	0.381	0.145	20.56	0.000
		Coping Strategies	-.820	.181	-4.534	.000				

Interpretation: The simple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of coping strategies on occupational stress levels among school teachers. The results revealed a

beta coefficient of -0.381 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant negative relationship at the 0.01 level. This suggests that as coping strategy use increases, occupational stress decreases. The model's R^2 value of 0.145 indicates that coping strategies account for approximately 14.5% of the variance in stress levels, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.138 further confirming the model's explanatory strength. Additionally, the regression output shows an F-value of 20.56 with a p-value of 0.000, demonstrating that the overall model is statistically significant. The regression coefficient implies that for every one-unit increase in coping strategy use, occupational stress decreases by approximately 0.82 units. While the findings highlight the effectiveness of coping mechanisms in reducing stress, the relatively modest R^2 value suggests that other factors also contribute to teachers' stress levels and should be considered in future research.

Findings

The most notable findings of this study are:

- The study identified major stressors among private school teachers in the Thrissur District, with the most prominent being financial dissatisfaction and limited time for rest due to workload.
- Descriptive statistics indicated that teachers most frequently adopted coping strategies such as peer support, personal task planning, and time management.
- Correlation analysis demonstrated a statistically significant moderate negative relationship between coping strategies and occupational stress ($r = -0.381$, $p = 0.000$), suggesting that greater use of coping mechanisms is associated with lower stress levels.
- Simple linear regression further confirmed that coping strategies are a significant predictor of occupational stress ($\beta = -0.381$, $p = 0.000$), explaining approximately 14.5% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.145$), with the model showing strong statistical significance ($F = 20.56$, $p = 0.000$).
- An independent sample t-test was conducted to assess gender differences in stress levels. Levene's test indicated a violation of the assumption of equal variances ($F = 62.9$, $p = 0.000$), so results were interpreted assuming unequal variances. The t-test result ($t = 10.772$, $p < 0.001$) and a mean difference of -1.169 confirmed that female teachers experience significantly higher levels of occupational stress compared to their male counterparts.
- Conversely, demographic factors such as age and years of teaching experience showed no significant impact on stress levels.

Conclusion

Occupational stress significantly affects private school teachers due to high workloads and performance pressures. This study investigates factors contributing to stress among these educators, emphasising coping strategies like peer support. It also analyses gender differences in stress levels to address challenges faced by female teachers. In examining the elements that contribute to stress and the approaches to handle it, the study aspires to enhance the welfare of educators and foster more conducive work conditions in private educational establishments.

The findings of this study underscore the complex nature of occupational stress among private school teachers. While coping strategies such as peer support and personal planning play a meaningful role in reducing stress, they only account for a portion of the overall stress levels, indicating that additional factors also contribute. The significantly higher stress reported by female teachers highlights the need for gender-sensitive support mechanisms within schools. Overall, the study emphasises the importance of fostering a supportive institutional environment, promoting effective coping strategies, and addressing gender disparities to improve teacher well-being and reduce occupational stress in private educational settings.

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