

# Stress Causing Factors Among Teachers in Upper Primary Schools and Their Relationship with Demographic Characteristics

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## Abstract

After the massive educational and financial reforms made to Universalize Elementary Education (UEE), for children up to the age of fourteen years under Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, the number of government Upper Primary Schools and the enrollment of students in these schools have increased. Consequently, the number of teachers have also increased in these schools but the cyclical nature and different challenges of the teaching job cause occupational stress in them. Therefore, the present study is aimed to examine the levels of occupational stress and the effects of different dimensions of occupational stress in upper primary school teachers. A sample of 200 teachers were selected randomly for this study from government Upper Primary Schools of Bhopal District. The Occupational Stress Scale was constructed and standardized by the investigator by following the standard procedure. The collected data was statistically analysed by calculating Mean, SD and t-values. The results of the study showed that under different dimensions of occupational stress the Upper Primary School teachers differed significantly with the variables like locale and teaching experience. It was also found that urban teachers and less experienced teachers were more stressed, than their counterparts and the dimension like Work Overload caused maximum stress in Upper Primary teachers than any other stressors studied in the present work.

## Key Words

Upper Primary Teachers, Occupational Stress

## Introduction

In any educational pyramid, teaching personnel are considered as the architects of future generation and therefore, the success of any educational system depends beyond doubt on their requisite qualities. The success of all educational endeavors depends on the personal qualities and character, educational qualifications and professional competence of the teacher.

The role of teachers in schools has become more varied and challenging. Teachers strive to care for their students and administer to their emotional and social needs while meeting a demanding schedule and a constantly changing curriculum. In addition, teachers are expected to supervise extracurricular activities, provide lunch hour supervision, supervise playground activities and monitor multitude of other duties. Teaching is thus characterized and considered as a high occupational stress job now. (Milstein and Golaszewski, 1985; Cooper and Travers, 1996; Farber, 2000; Kyriacou, 2001).

The occupational environment may be described as a potential 'source' of stress. Occupational stress is a type of stress that relates to workplace and caused due to the conditions that seems to be negative to an individual with work situation. The causes of increased occupational stress in the teachers are numerous. The literature discussing the occupational stress (Mattesson and Ivancevich, 1989; Trauer, 1990) identify several sources of occupational stress namely, task-based stress, role based stress, environmental stress and social stress. Teachers working within the upper primary schools confront with multiple stressors on a daily basis that results in varying levels of occupational stress in them. Factors like poor student behaviour, poor relationships with the administration and colleagues, work-related demands, role-related factors, pace and intensity of change in the workplace and lack of organizational support (Sabherwal, et.al., 2015) cause occupational stress in these teachers. In addition to this, teachers struggle with poor prospects relating to pay, promotion, and career development results in their stress (Kyriacou, 1998). These stress factors greatly affect teachers performance, behavior, psychological state and

physical state of an individual. Researchers (Forlin, et.al., 1996) viewed teacher stress as an interactive procedure that happens between teachers and their teaching environment, thereby leading to excessive demands being placed on them and ultimately resulting in physiological and psychological distress.

Hans Selye and Richard Lazarus are amongst the earlier pioneer relating to theories of stress. In the earlier work of Selye (1976) stress is defined as "the non-specific responses of the body to any demand."

In the classical work of Lazarus (1966) stress is defined as "A stimulus condition that results in a form of disequilibrium in the system." The occupational environment may be described as a potential 'source' of stress. Occupational stress is a growing concern to organization around the world.

Collins (1990) defines occupational stress as a "persons' job or profession, any activity on which time is spent by a person."

The earlier work of Mclean (1975) defines job or occupational stress as "The condition in which some factors, at work interacts with the worker to disrupt his psychological or physiological homeostasis."

Levy and Wegman (1988) describes "Occupational stress as an occupational hazard depending on the nature of work and/ or the perception and strength of the worker."

## Review of Literature

Eres and Atanasoska (2014), explored that level of stress varies with the experience in teaching and found that junior teachers are under more stress as compared to seniors.

Warraich, et.al., (2014), in their study revealed that work load and role conflict, and inadequate monetary reward are the prime reasons of causing stress in employees and this stress reduces their efficiency.

Ramya and Mallika (2013), in their research study concluded that the occupational stress was medium and low and the demographic variable such as income and experience, significantly influence the occupational stress of employees.

Howard and Johnson (2004), in an Australian study found ten main causes of teacher stress. They were: teaching students who lack motivation; maintaining discipline; time pressures and workload; coping with change; being evaluated by others; dealings with colleagues; self esteem and status issues; problems dealing with administration/management; role conflict and ambiguity and poor working conditions.

Bhatti et.al. (2011), conducted a survey among 400 teachers in Pakistan and found the determinants of job stress were management role, relationship with others, workload pressure, homework interface, role ambiguity, and performance pressure. The results revealed that there was a significant relationship between four of the constructs tested and there is significant negative relationship between job stress and job satisfaction.

Shernoff et.al. (2011), have conducted a study for twenty teachers of three low-performing elementary schools located in high poverty urban neighborhoods in a large Midwestern city at USA. They draw conclusion that the lack of resources, excessive workload, school-level disorganization, managing behavior problems, and accountability policies are significant sources of stress for urban teachers.

Hanif, et.al., (2011), did a research to identify personal and job related predictors of teacher stress among the school teachers in Pakistan. In this study they cited the other predictors of job stress for teachers that were situational demands and appraisal to that situation. They found that school system, gender, job experience, number of family members, and number of students as significant predictors of teacher stress.

Rao et.al. (2011), conducted a study among 178 secondary school teacher from different institutions situated in different areas in India and found that intensity of work, students' behavior, professional growth and extrinsic annoyances are the main contributors for stress of teachers.

Alan et.al. (2010), reported that heavy workload, time pressure, education reforms, external school review, pursuing further education, and managing students' behaviour and learning were the most frequently reported sources of work stress of primary and secondary school teachers in Hong Kong.

Blase, et.al. (2008), in their studies found that lack of administrative support and the excessive number of tasks that are required to perform by the new teachers who have not acquired successful task-management, contribute to teachers' stress.

Antoniou, et.al. (2006), compared occupational stress and burnout between primary school and high school teachers in Greece. They found that the most highly rated sources of stress refer to problems in interaction with students such as the large number of pupils in the classroom, the lack of interest on the part of the pupils, handling students with "difficult" character and the slow progress of certain students.

Ncube and Tshabalala (2013), studied work stress among 200 teachers in Zimbabwe, and found that most of the teachers perceived poor pay, work overload, bad school management, role overload and large class sizes are the major causes of stress in their work. They also reported lack of resources for the job, bad social climate, low social status of teachers, anxiety over evaluation and lack of social support from colleagues, particularly, senior colleagues also significantly affected the stress levels of teachers and the least qualified teachers were affected by self-defeating beliefs, unacceptable people's behavior, lack of parental support, fear of conflict, lack of job stability and security as well as career development.

Borg and Riding (2011), studied a sample of 150 school administrators in state primary and secondary schools in Malta and did a principal components analysis of 22 listed sources of stress. He revealed four major stress factors, labeled them as 'lack of support and resolving conflicts', 'inadequate resources', 'workload' and 'work conditions and responsibilities'. The demographic variables of 'sex', "type of administrative post" and 'type of school' interacted significantly with the four stress factors.

### **Need and Importance of The Study**

The review of the research studies reflects most of the studies cover the broader compass of occupational stress in teaching. But the investigator could not find much research work conducted on upper primary teachers in relation to their occupational stress. The upper primary teachers reel under heavy pressure in the wake of universalization of elementary education and implementation of right to education for the same. In the recent past, Government of India laid much more emphasis on primary and upper primary education, which is referred to as Universal Elementary Education (UEE), for the children up to the age of fourteen years under Article 25 of the constitution. Nearly 80% of all recognized schools at the elementary stage are Government run or supported, making it the largest provider of education in the country. However, due to the shortage of resources, lack of interest, high pupil to teacher ratios, frequently changing curriculum, and poor levels of teacher training this system suffers from massive gap and develop disinterest and stress in teachers. The role of these stressors in teaching occupation have been reported earlier also (Blase, 1986; Manthei and Solman, 1988; Kyriacou, 2001; Butt, et. al., 2005; Johnson et. al., 2005; Meng and Liu, 2008; Shernoff et. al., 2011).

The teachers working at upper primary level deal with mid-adolescent students and have numerous challenges to face and as a result they undergo occupational stress. Therefore, keeping in mind, that the occupational stress has far reaching consequences on the personality of the teachers and entire system of education, it becomes imperative to study the occupational stress among the upper primary teachers also.

### **Construction of Occupational Stress Scale:**

#### **Tool Development**

##### **A. Item Development**

After reviewing many related studies done in the field of Teachers' Occupational Stress both in India and in other countries, the following five dimensions were identified viz. Work Overload, Strenuous Working Conditions, Professional Distress, Impoverished Relations and Role Conflict. The statements to measure teachers stress were prepared on the basis of above dimensions which were expressive of teachers occupational stress, either positive or negative.

##### **B. Dimensions**

- I. Work Overload (WO): is the extent to which the teaching job demand exceeds human limits and teachers have to do too much work, in too little time, with too few resources.
- II. Strenuous Working Conditions (SWC): is the extent to which an individual have to work under such environmental conditions that are stressful.
- III. Professional Distress (PD): is the extent to which an individual

finds teaching profession extremely stressful that leads to distress.

IV. Impoverished Relations (IR): is the extent to which an individual share relations with other colleagues in the organization.

V. Role Conflict (RC): is the extent to which someone's loyalties are divided between a particular department and the organisation as a whole, or between personal professional ethics and the demands of the organisation.

### C. Tool Description

A large number of statements pertaining to the above dimensions were collected from experts and were supplemented with statements taken from relevant literature. After a careful scrutiny of the statements by experts, 40 statements were selected for the study related to occupational stress of upper primary teachers. Based on the judges' comments on the items' content and face validity, relevance and clarity, 30 items were retained.

### D. Scoring

The scale was constructed by making use of Likert's methods of summation to get a five point judgement on each item. Against each statement, five alternative responses, namely, "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree" (A), "Undecided" (U), "Disagree" (D) and "Strongly Disagree" (SD) were given. Weights of 5,4,3,2 and 1 were given for favourable statements and the scoring system is reversed for unfavourable statements. A schedule was added in the beginning of the questionnaire in order to get information about sex, category, qualification, residential background, category etc.

### E. Pilot Study

After constructing the Occupational Stress Scale for Teacher, on the Likert's method, a pilot test was conducted on a random sample of 300 teachers of upper primary schools of Bhopal district.

### F. Item Analysis

The discriminating power of each item with the total test was done by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation techniques. To achieve this end, scores on each item of the respondents were correlated with their total test scores. The items found to have a correlation of 0.40 or less with the total test were discarded. The reiterative procedure increased the original coefficient such that none of the 30 items were found to have a correlation of less than 0.60 with total test. It was considered sufficiently high size for retaining an item for the final form of the Occupational Stress Scale. The instrument in its finished form consisted of 30 items on Occupational Stress Scale.

### G. Validity

Due importance was given to all the dimensions while selecting items. The scale contains 30 statements which represent the universe of content. Hence, it has content validity. It has also construct validity as items were as per the agreement between a theoretical concept and a specific measuring device or procedure.

### H. Reliability

The reliability of the split half test is found 0.767 by the use of Spearman – Brown prophecy formula. Cronbach  $\alpha$  of the scale was found 0.792.

## Methodology

### 1. Research Design and Type of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the occupational stress in upper primary school teachers' with respect to location and teaching experience. The quantitative approach was the most appropriate design for this investigation. The study employed a survey design.

### 2. Population

There were 200 upper primary school teachers who were teaching in government upper primary school. Out of total population 130 were female and rest of the male.

### 3. Data Analysis

A self developed tool namely Occupational Stress Scale for upper primary school teachers was administered to the upper primary teachers. The detail of tool construction is already discussed earlier section.

### 4. Statistical technique

To analyze and interpret the data, the investigator used the following statistical techniques.

1. Mean, Standard Deviation and t- test.
2. Percentage calculation

### Objectives

The objective of the study is as follows:

1. To develop and standardized Occupational Stress Scale.
2. To study and compare the stress of rural and urban teachers with different dimensions of occupational stress.
3. To study and compare the stress of teachers of different teaching experiences (above and below 10 years) with different dimensions of occupational stress.

### Results and Discussion:

**Table 1 :** The Distribution of Sample of Teachers According to the Level of Occupational Stress experienced by them.

| Level of Occupational Stress | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------------------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Low                          | 39        | 19.5    | 19.5               |
| Moderate                     | 104       | 52      | 80.5               |
| High                         | 57        | 28.5    | 100                |
| Total                        | 200       | 200     |                    |

From table 1 it may be noted that only about one-third of the responding teachers felt that the level of occupational stress experienced by them is low. The sampled teachers differed significantly in their levels of stress. Out of 200 upper primary school teachers, 52% teachers are showing moderate stress, while 28.5% and 19.5% teachers are under high and low occupational stress respectively.

The analysis is further done in upper primary teachers with respect to variables like location and teaching experiences to find the influence of various dimensions of occupational stress on them.

**Table 2 :** Occupational stress of rural and urban upper primary teachers with its different dimensions.

| Occupational Stress Dimensions | Rural Teachers<br>N=95 |       | Urban Teachers<br>N= 105 |       | t<br>-value | Significance    |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|-------------|-----------------|
|                                | Mean                   | SD    | Mean                     | SD    |             |                 |
| Work Overload                  | 83.15                  | 4.23  | 84.92                    | 5.95  | 2.40        | Significant     |
| Strenuous Working Conditions   | 18.32                  | 2.49  | 19.19                    | 2.19  | 2.60        | Significant     |
| Professional Distress          | 30.59                  | 3.10  | 30.03                    | 2.83  | 1.30        | Not significant |
| Impoverished Relationship      | 19.07                  | 2.21  | 19.65                    | 1.97  | 1.96        | Significant     |
| Role Conflicts                 | 15.17                  | 2.49  | 14.82                    | 1.92  | 1.20        | Not significant |
| Overall Stress                 | 165.7                  | 15.20 | 169.2                    | 11.87 | 1.80        | Not significant |

p<=0.05

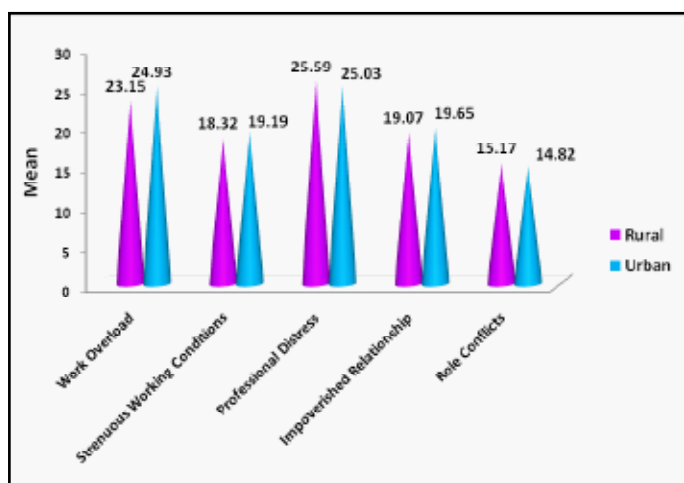


Fig.1 : Occupational stress of rural and urban upper primary teachers with its different dimensions.

A perusal of table 2 and Figure 1 shows that urban teachers show higher mean values than rural teachers on three dimensions of occupational stress i.e., Work overload(M=84.92), Strenuous working conditions(M=19.19) and Impoverished relationship(M=19.65). A significant difference was also obtained between the occupational stress of rural and urban teachers with these dimensions. The obtained ‘t’ values in these dimensions came out to be 2.40, 2.60, and 1.96 respectively, which are significant at 0.05 level. These differences clearly indicated more stress in urban group of teachers than their rural counterparts. The

results further revealed that, in contrast to urban teachers, rural teachers are more stressed with Professional distress(M=30.59) and Role conflicts(M=15.17) dimensions of occupational stress, but they did not differ significantly with the urban teachers, as is evident from the ‘t’ values obtained for these two dimensions which were 1.30 and 1.20 respectively. Thus, these results show differences between the rural and urban teachers on dimensions of occupational stress because when work plays a predominant role in the lives of these teachers it exerts a decisive influence on their well-being and their level of stress. Increased class size also lead to a greater workload on teachers both within the classroom and after school hours in preparation and assessment. In addition to this, unreasonable deadlines, conflicts with other people, no feedback on performance, unclear duties, and lack of control further deepens the stress problems in these teachers, which has been reported earlier also (Johnson, et., al. 2005; Lynda, 2005; Borg and Riding 2011).

The results of overall occupational stress also show that the mean score of urban teachers (M=169.2) is higher than that of rural teachers(M=165.7) thereby confirming higher occupational stress in urban teachers. It may be due to the reason that the rural teachers seem to be somewhat less concerned with work load than do urban teachers. They also seem to be more satisfied with the moral ethical self than are urban teachers and generally value both professional and social rapport among the fellow teachers. These results confirm the earlier studies reported by Trentham and Schaer, (1985); Abel and Sewell (1999); Reddy and Anuradha, R. (2012) and Jeyaraj (2013).

**Table 3 :** Occupational stress of teachers having different teaching experiences with different dimensions

| Occupational Stress Dimensions | Teaching experience<br>(above 10 years) N=80 |       | Teaching experience<br>(below 10 years) N=120 |       | t<br>-value | Significance    |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------|-------|-------------|-----------------|
|                                | Mean                                         | SD    | Mean                                          | SD    |             |                 |
| Work Overload                  | 17.89                                        | 3.58  | 18.76                                         | 3.1   | 1.77        | Not significant |
| Strenuous Working Conditions   | 9.80                                         | 2.38  | 10.65                                         | 3.0   | 2.22        | Significant     |
| Professional Distress          | 12.30                                        | 4.01  | 11.43                                         | 3.99  | 1.50        | Not significant |
| Impoverished Relationship      | 12.46                                        | 6.47  | 10.51                                         | 4.43  | 2.3         | Significant     |
| Role Conflicts                 | 10.12                                        | 2.84  | 10.80                                         | 2.46  | 1.85        | Not significant |
| Overall Stress                 | 79.37                                        | 16.15 | 86.17                                         | 13.07 | 1.30        | Not significant |

p<=0.05

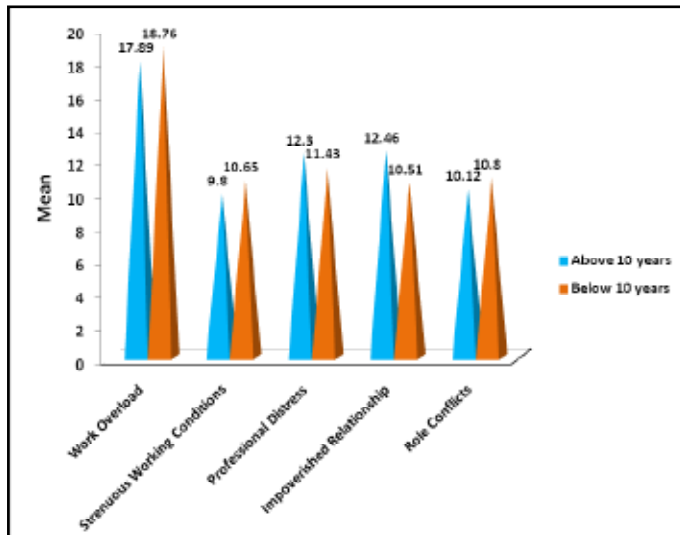


Fig. 2 : Occupational stress of teachers having different teaching experiences with different dimensions

From table- 3 and figure 2 it is clear that, under the dimension- Work Overload, the mean scores of teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience was higher (M=18.76) than the teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience (M=17.89), but there was no significant difference between the two groups. The teachers of both groups showed significant differences (t=2.22) with the strenuous working conditions dimension, where the teachers of less than 10 years experience had a higher mean score (M=10.65) than the teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience (M=9.80). In the case of Professional distress dimension, there was no significant difference (t=1.85) between the two groups of teachers, but the teachers with more than 10 years teaching experience were more stressed (M=12.30) than teachers with below 10 years experience (M=11.43). The Impoverished Relationship dimension depicted a significant difference (t=2.3) in the stress values obtained between the two groups of teachers, where the more experienced teachers had a higher mean value (M=12.46) than lesser experienced teachers (M=10.51). These two groups of teachers did not differ significantly (t=1.85) with each other on role conflict dimension of occupational stress however, teachers who were having teaching experience of less than 10 years showed higher mean value (M=10.80) than the mean value (M=10.12) of teachers with higher teaching experience.

In the case of overall occupational stress, teachers with less than 10 years experience had a higher mean score (M=86.17) than the more experienced teachers (M=79.37) but there was no significant difference (t=1.30) between the two groups. From these results it can be interpreted that both groups of teachers are affected by all the dimensions of occupational stress. Teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience are more stressed as they often consider the job an intimidating, and sometimes of insurmountable, challenge. They are more stressed by strenuous working conditions and role conflict dimensions as they feel overwhelmed by the multiple demands placed upon them and their lack of experience in dealing with the new tasks under limited resources in government schools. Due to impoverished relationships between teachers classroom administrative tasks, paperwork, and time management issues suffers. When teachers don't receive or share such guidance, stress levels are increased, confidence falls, and feelings of isolation is developed in teachers. The professional distress is high in more experienced teachers

may be because of their approach to the job becomes a continuous reflection of professional and personal development with their experience (McCormick, 1997).

**Conclusions**

The current study concludes that the phenomenon of teacher stress is prevalent in upper primary school teachers. The results have shown that in upper primary schools, the majority of the teachers are stressed towards their occupation due to work overload, strenuous working conditions and impoverished relations. A closure look into the study revealed that urban school teachers experienced significantly more stress from all the dimensions of stress than did rural school teachers, except in the case of impoverished and role conflicts dimensions where the rural teachers showed significantly higher stress. In the case of teachers with different teaching experiences, work overload, impoverished relations and professional distress were significantly greater than stress from strenuous working conditions and role conflicts. The overall stress was found to be high in urban teachers and in the teachers who were having less than 10 years of teaching experience, although there was no significant difference between these two groups of teachers.

**Implications of The Study**

Teacher stress continues to be a growing concern in schools across the world. The demand for teachers in education is growing. Initiatives to reduce the occupational stress in teachers should be taken up the education authorities. The findings and the information of common sources of teacher stress found in this research could serve as a useful reference for the government and related organizations in the process of establishing new education policies or educational reforms to help the teachers to relieve and cope with their work-related stress and consequent health problems. Finally, this research study is believed to be able to enlighten other researchers to conduct further in-depth studies related to different dimensions of stress, which would help to investigate the occupation health problems of the upper primary teachers.

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