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A study on occupational environment and occupational stress among school teachers

Adhi Sri Latha

Department of Family Resource Management, College of Community Science, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, Karnataka, India

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Corresponding Author: Adhi Sri Latha

Abstract

Occupational stress among teaching professionals is a growing concern due to its impact on work performance, physical health, and psychological well-being. This study examined the occupational environment and stress experienced by school teachers in Dharwad, Karnataka, focusing on workload, target pressure, participation in decision-making, and gender-related workplace difficulties. An exploratory research design was adopted, and 30 school teachers were selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured, pre-tested questionnaire administered face to face and analysed using frequency, percentage, and chi-square tests. The results revealed that a majority of respondents reported heavy workload (80.0%) and high pressure to meet targets (80.0%) on an “always” basis. In contrast, most respondents indicated that they never experienced insufficient challenging work (70.0%) or exclusion from decision-making (70.0%). Additionally, 60.0% of respondents reported always facing gender-related problems at the workplace. Chi-square analysis showed no significant association between salary and insufficient challenging work ($\chi^2 = 5.35$, $df = 4$, $p > 0.05$), whereas educational qualification was significantly associated with heavy workload ($\chi^2 = 19.51$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$). The study recommends improved workload distribution, effective communication, and stress-management support for teachers.

Keywords: Occupational stress, school teachers, workload pressure, occupational environment, stress management

1. Introduction

Stress is a multidimensional construct that has been studied across the life sciences since Selye (1936) first described it as the non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it. In organisational contexts, stress has since been redefined as a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, or demand related to a desired outcome that is perceived as both uncertain and important. Occupational or work-related stress arises when the demands of a job are not matched to an employee's knowledge, skills, and coping resources, and it is frequently intensified when employees perceive inadequate support from supervisors and colleagues.

Teaching is widely recognised as a psychologically demanding profession. Teachers are routinely required to manage heavy workloads, meet performance targets, handle heterogeneous classrooms, and respond to administrative and parental expectations, often with limited institutional support. Persistent occupational stress among teachers has implications not only for their own physical and psychological health — manifesting as fatigue, muscular tension, anxiety, irritability, and impaired judgement — but also for the quality of instruction delivered to students and the overall functioning of educational institutions.

Commonly cited workplace stressors include lack of control over one's tasks, poor communication, absence of recognition or feedback, ambiguity about career progression, unclear institutional policies, interpersonal mistrust, and an uneven distribution of workload. Within the Indian context,

women employees in particular have been reported to face additional stressors related to gender-based treatment, isolation in male-dominated settings, and difficulty balancing domestic and occupational responsibilities.

Despite the acknowledged importance of the issue, empirical documentation of occupational stress specifically among school teachers at the local level remains limited. The present study was therefore undertaken to examine the occupational environment of school teachers in Dharwad and to assess the extent and correlates of the occupational stress they experience, with the following specific objectives: (i) to identify the causes of stress affecting teachers in the school environment; (ii) to assess teachers' perception of job-related stress; (iii) to examine the consequences of stress among school teachers; (iv) to identify the ways in which teachers manage stress; and (v) to suggest measures for stress management.

2. Review of Literature

Adler (1991) ^[3] reported that the occupational performance of women employees is strongly influenced by the physical amenities provided at the workplace, with inadequate facilities associated with a decline in work performance quality.

Kumud (1993) ^[11] documented the difficulties faced by working women in adjusting to predominantly male work environments, including isolation, poor communication, and, in some cases, harassment associated with working beyond normal hours.

Morse (2001) ^[13] examined occupational stress among working women, identifying childcare responsibilities, unequal pay, harassment, and role-related psychological pressures — such as fear of failure and fear of being perceived as overly assertive — as significant sources of stress.

Umarani (2012) ^[17], studying garment industry workers in Tirupur, found that a majority of workers experienced stressful working conditions, while Dhinakar and Mekala (2013) ^[6] linked stress among knitwear-unit employees to long working hours, job insecurity, inadequate wages, and poor coordination, using percentage analysis, weighted averages, ANOVA, and chi-square tests.

Aziz (2016) ^[15] investigated organisational role stress among women professionals in the Indian information technology sector and identified resource inadequacy and role overload as the most prominent stressors, with differences observed between married and unmarried employees. Nimisha and Dharmaraj (2016) ^[14] similarly linked stress to reduced productivity and higher accident rates both on and off the job. Physiological correlates of occupational stress have also been documented. Clays *et al.* (2007) ^[5] found that job strain was associated with significantly elevated ambulatory blood pressure at work, at home, and during sleep, while Guimont *et al.* (2006) ^[9] reported that cumulative exposure to job strain produced modest but significant increases in systolic blood pressure among white-collar workers, particularly among those with low workplace social support. Gilbers (2003) ^[7] associated disordered breathing patterns with several stress-related physiological conditions, and Hodson and Chamberlain (2003) ^[10] identified job autonomy, organisational coherence, and social involvement at work as key factors mitigating job stress.

Comparative studies of managers (Gill and Davidson, 2001) ^[8] and intervention studies using stress-management and meditation programmes (Sheppard, 1997) ^[16] have further shown that coping strategies, organisational support, and structured interventions can meaningfully reduce occupational stress and its psychological consequences. Taken together, this body of literature establishes workload, role ambiguity, limited autonomy, and inadequate organisational support as recurrent and well-documented determinants of occupational stress, providing the conceptual basis for the present study.

3. Methodology

The present study adopted an exploratory research design to obtain precise information on occupational stress among school teachers, as this remains a relatively under-documented and practical problem area. The study was confined to school teachers working in Dharwad, Karnataka. A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that all respondents had an equal probability of being selected. A total of 30 school teachers were included in the study. Considering the large size of the teacher population and the time constraints associated with the research, a sample size of 30 was deemed adequate for an exploratory investigation; therefore, the findings are interpreted as indicative rather than generalisable to the entire population. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire specifically developed in alignment with the

study objectives and administered face-to-face by the researcher. Secondary data were obtained from books, journals, and published research articles to support the conceptual framework and literature review. The collected data were analysed using frequency and percentage analyses to summarize the characteristics and opinions of the respondents. Additionally, the chi-square test of independence was employed to examine the associations between selected demographic variables, namely salary and educational qualification and specific stress indicators such as insufficient challenging work and heavy workload. Statistical significance was assessed at the 0.05 level.

4. Results

The results of the study are presented below and interpreted in relation to the objectives of the research, highlighting the occupational stress factors experienced by school teachers.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents (N = 30)

Age group (years)	Frequency	Percentage
20–25	8	26.66
26–30	15	50.00
31–35	5	16.66
35 and above	2	6.66

Half of the respondents (50.0%) belonged to the 26–30 years age group, followed by 26.66 per cent in the 20–25 years group, 16.66 per cent in the 31–35 years group, and 6.66 per cent aged 35 years and above, indicating that the sample was predominantly composed of relatively young, early-to-mid-career teachers.

Table 2: Educational qualification of respondents (N = 30)

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's degree	18	60.00
Master's degree	10	33.33
Doctoral degree	2	6.67

The majority of respondents (60.0%) held a bachelor's degree, 33.33 per cent held a master's degree, and 6.67 per cent held a doctoral degree, reflecting a broadly qualified but not highly research-oriented teaching workforce within the sample.

4.2 Perceived Occupational Stressors

Table 3: Respondents' opinion regarding insufficient challenging work (N = 30)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	3	10.00
Rarely	6	20.00
Never	21	70.00

A large majority (70.0%) of respondents reported that they never experienced insufficient challenging work, with a further 20.0 per cent reporting this rarely. This suggests that task monotony was not a prominent source of stress for the teachers surveyed.

Table 4: Respondents' opinion regarding heavy workload (N = 30)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	24	80.00
Often	5	16.67
Sometimes	1	3.33

In marked contrast, 80.0 per cent of respondents reported experiencing heavy workload “always,” with a further 16.67 per cent reporting it “often.” This indicates that workload intensity was the most consistently reported stressor among the teachers in this sample, corroborating earlier findings (e.g., Dhinakar and Mekala, 2013) ^[6] linking heavy or poorly distributed workload to occupational stress.

Table 5: Respondents' opinion regarding pressure to meet targets (N = 30)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	24	80.00
Often	4	13.33
Rarely	2	6.67

Similarly, 80.0 per cent of respondents reported experiencing pressure to meet targets “always,” confirming performance pressure as a second major stress dimension alongside workload.

Table 6: Respondents' opinion regarding lack of involvement in decision-making (N = 30)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	1	3.33
Rarely	8	26.67
Never	21	70.00

Most respondents (70.0%) reported that they never experienced a lack of involvement in decision-making, suggesting that, unlike workload and target pressure, exclusion from institutional decision-making was not a major stressor for this group — a finding consistent with Hodson and Chamberlain's (2003) ^[10] observation that greater autonomy and participation are associated with reduced job stress.

Table 7: Respondents' opinion regarding gender-related problems in the workplace (N = 30)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	18	60.00
Often	4	13.33
Sometimes	2	6.67
Never	6	20.00

A notable 60.0 per cent of respondents reported facing gender-related workplace problems “always,” with a further 13.33 per cent reporting this “often.” Only 20.0 per cent reported never facing such problems. This finding is consistent with earlier literature (Kumud, 1993; Morse, 2001) ^[11, 13] documenting the added psychosocial burden faced by women in professional environments, and points to gender-related workplace dynamics as an important, under-addressed stress dimension among the teachers surveyed.

4.3 Association Between Demographic Variables and Stress Indicators

Table 8: Chi-square analysis: Salary × insufficient challenging work

Salary (Rs.)	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Up to 10,000	5	6	12
11,000–20,000	0	0	5
21,000–30,000	0	0	2

The computed chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 5.35$, $df = 4$) was less than the table value of 9.49 required for significance at the 0.05 level. The null hypothesis was therefore accepted, indicating no statistically significant association between salary level and perceived insufficiency of challenging work.

Table 9: Chi-square analysis: Educational qualification × heavy workload

Qualification	Always	Often
Bachelor's	10	8
Master's (P.G.)	10	0
Doctoral (Ph.D.)	0	2

The computed chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 19.51$, $df = 2$) exceeded the table value of 5.99 required for significance at the 0.05 level. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, indicating a statistically significant association between educational qualification and perceived heavy workload. This suggests that workload burden is not uniformly distributed across teachers of differing qualification levels, and that qualification-linked role differences may shape how workload is experienced.

5. Overall Discussion

Taken together, the findings indicate that occupational stress among the school teachers surveyed is driven predominantly by workload intensity and performance-related pressure rather than by task monotony or exclusion from institutional decision-making. This pattern aligns with prior occupational stress research emphasising workload and role overload as central stressors (Aziz, 2016; Dhinakar and Mekala, 2013) ^[15, 6] rather than a lack of task variety. The high proportion of respondents reporting gender-related workplace problems further underscores that occupational stress in this context cannot be fully understood without attention to gender dynamics in the workplace, consistent with earlier studies on women in Indian professional settings (Kumud, 1993; Morse, 2001) ^[11, 13]. The significant association between qualification and workload, contrasted with the non-significant association between salary and task-related stress, suggests that structural and role-based factors may be more influential in shaping teachers' stress experience than compensation alone.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the occupational environment and occupational stress of school teachers in Dharwad and found that heavy workload and pressure to meet targets were the most consistently reported stressors, affecting the large

majority of respondents, while insufficient challenging work and exclusion from decision-making were reported by only a minority. A substantial proportion of respondents also reported gender-related difficulties in the workplace. Educational qualification was significantly associated with perceived workload, whereas salary was not significantly associated with perceptions of insufficient challenging work. These findings suggest that work stress remains a genuine challenge for school teachers and their institutions, and that as institutions and working environments change, so too do the stress-related problems employees face; continuous monitoring of workplace stress is therefore warranted. It is recommended that educational institutions give greater attention to equitable workload distribution, clear and timely communication during organisational change, provision of professional support where appropriate, and encouragement of healthy coping practices such as regular exercise, adequate rest, and relaxation activities, in order to promote a safer and more health-supporting occupational environment for teaching staff.

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