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Stressful behaviour in primary school teachers regarding demographic and personality factors

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Abstract

Once high levels of work-related stress among teachers were confirmed many studies concentrated on identifying and investigating key stress factors among school teachers. Unfortunately there are very few researches made on stress causing factors among teachers in Bihar. To determine the most frequent stress causing factors among teachers in Primary schools and to investigate their relationship with demographic and job characteristics.

Keywords: workplace; stress causing factors; teachers; Primary school; job characteristics

1. Introduction

Education undoubtedly represents one of the most critical sectors when speaking of work-related stress. Work related stress among teachers was firstly identified during 1930s in a study by Smith and Milstein [1]. Later on in 1955, Travers and Cooper have documented the history of changes in the educational process as well as the impact of these changes on teachers' stress [2]. In their daily jobs teachers increasingly faced tasks and demands that generated work-related stress and reduced job productivity [3-6]. Moreover, a comparative study by Johnson S. et al. in 2005 concluded that out of 26 professions, teaching represents the second most stressful occupation after ambulance car drivers [7].

Once high levels of work-related stress among teachers were confirmed, many studies concentrated on identifying and investigating key stress factors among school teachers.

According to a study by Pettigrew and Wolf, conducted in 1982, there are two types of stress which might ultimately have an impact on teachers: stress based on work related tasks and stress based on the workplace role. Stress based on work related tasks, such as *dealing with misbehaving students*, addresses the problems associated with different specific tasks that teachers must perform as part of their occupation and job description. Stress based on the workplace role such as *lack of necessary resources for proper teaching*, refers to how the expectations of teachers about their role in the workplace fit with their real responsibilities that are necessary for teachers to fulfil their roles [8].

Often, stress within teaching is connected with organizational factors related to the way teachers are expected to work. Such organizational factors that contribute to stress among teachers can be: Unreasonably set time frames, excessive bureaucracy, unrealistic deadlines and frightening inspection regimes [9]. The causes of stress among teachers can also be defined as stressors of living and working environment as well as individual stressors. Most stressors are associated with the working environment and include unfavourable working conditions, excessive workloads, organizational problems, and insufficient resources, lack of support and/or autonomy, and decision making. The working environment may also include physical stressors such as noise associated with teaching assignments, accrued classrooms, size of the classroom and/or school, security and violence among youth as well as administrative pressures such as lack of support from managers and ambiguity of the teaching role. Individual characteristics include the unique attributes of teachers such as personality, gender, age, demographics, ability to establish and maintain supportive networks, cognitive evaluation of stressors, coping ability, type of teaching position and work dissatisfaction [10, 11].

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Individual stress, can also be linked to the compatibility between personal and educational values, ambition to succeed, the threshold of sensitivity, competitiveness, multiple roles for women teachers (parent, caretaker, housewife and teacher), and perfection [12]. One of the few analyses in the field of work-related stress in Bihar is the comparative study that explores the levels of stress among teachers in UP and their colleagues in Bihar. Their study suggests that working conditions as well as personal and social characteristics may have an effect on teacher stress.

The aim of this paper was to determine the most frequent stress causing factors among teachers in Primary schools and to further investigate their relationship with demographic and job characteristics (gender, age, position in the workplace, the current job being the first job and the level of education).

Methodology

Study design and setting

The research was carried out in nine Primary schools in Patna, Bihar by using a descriptive-analytical model of an epidemiological cross-sectional study. Prior to the research, ethical approval was granted by the Ministry of Education and Science. Evaluation of examined subjects included completion of a specially designed questionnaire. Out of 358 teachers to whom the questionnaire was distributed, 300 of them responded. The interviewing process was voluntary and respected the teachers’ rights to anonymity.

Subjects

The research included 300 teachers from Primary schools, aged from 26 to 64 years. Out of the overall number of subjects, 195 (65%) were females and 105 (35%) were males. According to the research data, 45% of the subjects were lower-grade school teachers, while 55% worked as upper-grade school teachers. In terms of education, 159 (53%) of teachers had high education,¹ while 141 (47%) were with university (superior) education. Out of overall number of subjects, 174 (58%) stated that the current job was their first job while 126 subjects (42%) declared to have been previously employed.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire concerning the impact of stress on teachers’ health in Primary schools has been used as an instrument of the study. It was based on the UCU (University and College Union) Model Stress Questionnaire² and it consists of five parts. For the purpose of this paper we have utilized part one of the questionnaire which includes: data regarding the demographic and job characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, position in the workplace, the current job being the first job and the level of education) and part four which includes six different categories of factors that generate work-related stress (job demands, control, relationships, role, changes and support). Our results have shown that out of six analyzed categories of stress factors, *control* and *support* have the highest mean scores. Accordingly, more detailed results for work - related stress factors among teachers have been presented only for these two categories.

It should be mentioned that the category *control* has been analyzed through six main stress factors: (1) not able to exert control over demands made; (2) dealing with competing demands – unable to plan working day; (3) work linked to deadlines and targets; (4) changes in terms and conditions

without consultation; (5) job changes without consultation and (6) given responsibility without the authority to take decisions. On the other hand, the category *support* has been analyzed through seven main stress factors: lack of information about what is going on; (2) insufficient admin support; (3) lack of management support; (4) limited or no access to training; (5) over competitive/confrontational institutional culture; (6) lack of funds/resources to do the job; and (7) lack of equipment (photocopiers, etc.)

Statistical methods

Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 for Windows was used for data description and analysis. Categorical variables were expressed as absolute and relative number. The Chi-square test was used to test differences in relation to the different demographic and job characteristics. P-value below 0.05 was considered statistically significant while p-value below 0.01 was considered highly significant.

Table 1: Demographic/job characteristics of the study subjects

Variable	N=300
Gender	
Female	195 (65%)
Male	105 (35%)
Age	
Under 45	83 (27.66%)
45 +	217 (73.34%)
Position in the workplace	
Teacher-lower grade	135 (45%)
Teacher-upper grade	165 (55%)
The current job is the first job	
Teacher-first job	174(58%)
Teacher-not first job	126 (42%)
Level of education	
High	159 (53%)
University (superior degree)	141 (47%)

Note: numerical data are expressed as mean value with standard deviation; frequencies as number and percentage of study subjects with certain variable.

The different work related stress factors among teachers in our questionnaire have been divided in six main categories: (a) demands; (b) control; (c) relationships; (d) role; (e) changes; and (f) support. Overall mean scores for these different six categories of stress factors based on the questionnaire are shown.

According to our results, among the six analyzed categories, *control* and *support* have the highest mean scores. Therefore, more detailed results for work-related stress factors among teachers of these two categories and their relationship with demographic and job characteristics, are presented below:

Control

Table 2: Levels of teacher’s work-related stress factors - category *control* Which factors associated

with your current post do	Not	Occasionall		Very
			Stressful	
you think create work related stress?	applicable	y stressful		stressful
Not able to exert control over	89 (29.67%)	57 (19%)	66 (22%)	88 (29.33%)

Overall levels of teacher’s work-related stress for six stress factors within the category *control* are shown in Table 2.

Demands Made

Dealing with competing

Demands-unable to plan 34(11.33%) 97(32.33%) 103(34.33%) 66(22%) working day Work linked to deadlines and 84(28%) 65(21.67%) 76(25.33%) 75(25%) targets Changes in terms and conditions without 45(15%) consultation 64(21.33%) 50(16.67%) 141(47%) Job changes without

79 (26.33%)	90 (30%)	45 (15%)	86 (28.67%)
consultations			
Given responsibility without the 52 (17.33%)	20 (6.67%)	105 (35%)	123 (41%)
authority to take decisions			

According to the Table 2, among the six analyzed factors, the highest levels of perceived teacher’s work-related stress within the category *control* were caused by *changes in terms and conditions without consultation* and *given responsibility without the authority to take decisions*. Namely, out of 300 interviewed teachers, 141 (47%) have mentioned *changes in terms and conditions without consultation* as very stressful; while another 50 (16.67%) have reported it as stressful. On the other hand, 123 (41%) of interviewed teachers have stated *given responsibility without the authority to take decisions* as very stressful, with another 105 (35%) mentioning it as stressful.

The relationship of the gender, age, position in the working place, the current job being the first job and the level of education with the stress factor *changes in terms and*

conditions without consultation is shown.

According to our results, low-grade teachers consider the stress factor *changes in terms and conditions without consultation* more often as very stressful as compared to the upper-grade teachers (60.74% vs. 35.76%). The same finding was detected for teachers older than 45, as compared to those younger than 45 (58.99% vs. 15.66%), as well as for teachers for whom this is the first job compared to the teachers that have been previously employed (54.02% vs. 37.3%). On the other hand, teachers with university education perceive such stress factor more often as occasionally stressful and stressful as compared to teachers with high education - (30.5% vs. 13.21%) and (19.15% vs. 14.47%) respectively.

The relationship of the gender, age, position in the working place, the current job being the first job and the level of education with the stress factor *given responsibility without the authority to take decisions* is shown.

The lower-grade teachers perceive the stress factor *given responsibility without the authority to take decisions* as very stressful more often than upper-grade school teachers (51.85% vs. 32.12%), and the same finding was detected for female teachers as compared to their male colleagues (48.72% vs. 26.67%). The results also show that teachers for whom this is the first job consider this stress factor as very stressful more often than teachers that have been previously employed (46.55% vs. 33.33%), as well as teachers with university education as compared to teachers with high education (45.28% vs. 26.17%).

Support

Overall levels of teacher’s work-related stress for seven stress factors within the category *Support* are shown.

Table 3: Levels of teacher’s work-related stress factors - category *support* Which factors associated

with your current post do you think create work-related stress?	Not applicable	Occasionally stressful	Stressful	Very stressful
Lack of information about what is going on	9 (3%)	108 (36%)	81 (27%)	102 (34%)
Insufficient admin support	41 (13.67%)	116 (38.67%)	60 (20%)	83 (27.67%)
Lack of management Support	71 (23.67%)	61 (20.33%)	70 (23.33%)	98 (32.67%)
Lack of funds/resources to do the job	42 (14%)	29 (9.67%)	50 (16.67%)	179 (59.67%)
Over competitive/confrontational institutional culture	75 (25%)	74 (24.67%)	57 (19%)	94 (31.33%)
Limited or no access to training	68 (22.67%)	38 (12.67%)	39 (13%)	155 (51.67%)
Lack of equipment (photocopiers, etc.)	38 (12.67%)	47 (15.67%)	50 (16.67%)	163 (54.33%)

According to the Table 3, among the seven analyzed factors, the highest levels of perceived teacher’s work-related stress within the category *support* were caused by *lack of funds/resources to do the job* and *limited or no access to training*. Our data suggest that, out of 300 interviewed teachers, 179 (59.67%) have reported *lack of funds/resources to do the job* as very stressful, while another 50 (16.67%) as stressful. On the other hand, 155 (51.67%) of the interviewed teachers have reported *limited or no access to training* as very stressful, and another 39 (13%) consider this factor as stressful.

The relationship of the gender, age, position in the working

place, the current job being the first job and the level of education with the stress factor *lack of funds/resources to do the job* is shown.

Discussion

Our research aimed to determine the most frequent stress causing factors among teachers in Primary schools and to investigate their relationship with demographic and job characteristics.

A study by Dlamini, Okeke and Mammen from 2014 has indicated that badly planned changes were a major source of work-related stress among teachers in Swaziland. Changes in

education as a major factor among sources of work - related stress among teachers were also reported by studies conducted in South Africa and Zimbabwe in 2002. These studies indicate that teachers do not object to the changes themselves, but more to the manner in which they were implemented and the fact they were made without prior consultations. Our results are very much in line with these finding since 141 (47%) of the interviewed teachers have mentioned *changes in terms and conditions without consultation* as very stressful, while another 50 (16.7%) have reported it as stressful. However, contrary to our results, these studies did not find any important correlation between demographic/job characteristics and changes in education as a stress factor. Our study, on the other hand, has indicated that the lower- grade school teachers, older teachers and teachers with university education perceive more often changes in education (*changes in terms and conditions without consultation*) as a very stressful factor than the upper-grade school teachers, younger teachers and those with high education.

Nevertheless, a study by Nayak from 2008 has reported that a relatively high percentage of teachers (22%) always experienced stress due to lack of their involvement in decision making in their organization despite given responsibilities. Our study supports these findings, though in our case, a much higher percentage of teachers have indicated stress factor *given responsibility without the authority to take decisions* as stressful. Namely, according to our results, 123 (41%) of interviewed teachers have stated *given responsibility without the authority to take decisions* as very stressful, with another 105 (35%) mentioning it as stressful. A study by Check & Okwob from 2012 has analyzed the correlation of demographic/job factors with different stress factors among teachers in Cameroon. While the study indicated that non - involvement in decision making concerning teaching and learning is perceived by teachers as relatively stressful, it found no evidence of significant correlation between gender, level of education and other demographic/job factors, with this specific stress factors. Our study contradicts such findings since the lower-grade school teachers, female teachers, teachers for whom this is the first job and teachers with university education perceive more often the *lack of authority to take decisions (given responsibility without the authority to take decisions)* as a very stressful factor than the upper-grade school teachers, male teachers, teachers previously employed in another workplace, and those with high education.

Conclusion

It should be mentioned that the educational system in Bihar has been undergoing serious and high paced reforms. The highest levels of perceived teacher's work-related stress in Bihar are caused by factors that are imposed by these changes. Coupled together, these two facts send a message to both teachers and policy makers that for successful and well received educational reforms, field of education has to be a stress-relieved environment for all actors involved in these changes. Finally, although a number of results from this study might be important for the potential they have in terms of public health and policy implications, it is clear that further research in this field remains an obvious necessity.

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