



RESEARCH ARTICLE

STRESS-AN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH HAZARD IN SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

There has been an increasing level of stress among the school teachers who shoulder diverse responsibilities. To detect the stress levels, a model stress questionnaire was circulated among 116 school teachers of a private school after taking informed consent. The response was obtained from 98 teachers of which 72 were female staff. Leading questions were asked whether they had experienced any stress symptom in the last year. The questions included eighteen stress symptoms. A three grade choice having options of “never experienced”, “sometimes” and “very often” was given and were asked to tick the most appropriate choice. Questions on how they feel at work were also asked. Remaining part of the questionnaire included the number of work hours per week and factors for increased work load apart from the demographic data. The final column was given to explain the cause of stress, if any, in their own words and any suggestions of their choice. The teachers were requested to fill the questionnaire with a calm mind. Results reflect a high level of stress among the school teachers. Headaches and pains were the most common (82.65%) stress symptoms complained of. 42.85% of the teachers were overtired often due to work load. The other results were also evaluated. 22.44% were working for more than 51 hrs per week. Increased student number and meeting the targets were the commonest factors for increased work load as opined by 63.26% and 60.20% of teachers respectively. When asked to describe any other problems or suggestions in their own words, 29.59% suggested implementing government leave pattern could relieve some stress. This data reflects stress as an occupational hazard amongst teachers from a private school of Visakhapatnam city. There is every need to take preventive measures and to adopt easy methods to reduce stress related problems. A conducive work atmosphere will enable the teacher to deliver his/her duties perfectly resulting in ideal moulding of the future generation.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher is a model of faith and peity with a fair good knowledge. An architect of future generations, a good teacher sets a best example in moulding the student in a holistic approach. Till twentieth century teachers or gurus enjoyed loyalty and respect of society. There was a dramatic change in the teaching- learning relationship in the twenty first century due to multifactorial causes like sophistication, liberalization, technology, attitudes and so on. A teacher needs to use a lot of energy in his daily chores in the classroom coupled with his personal and family commitments (Surinder Kaur, 2011). Stress in the teaching profession had alarmingly risen to such an extent that it became an occupational health hazard. According to Caplan *et al.* (1975), occupational stress is any characteristics of job environment which poses a threat to the individual (Gulab and Dr. Sandhya Mehta, 2016). Stress is

derived from the Latin word ‘stringere’ which means to be drawn tight (Gayatri and Ulchi Venkata Sumalatha, 2016). Teachers have reported increased occurrence of psychological distress, physiological illness, and job dissatisfaction (Kyriacou, 1987). Stress reduces the capacity of executing the responsibilities and duties bestowed on. Comparative studies show the increasing level of stress markedly effecting females (Feltoe, 2013). Studies done on physical health indicators of stress show a higher incidence (Richards, 2012). Research on parameters of stress indicators in job like “clerical duties”, “interruptions”, “time pressures “were done (Lortie, 1975). These show an increasing prevalence of stress related illness as an occupational hazard among the school teachers. A questionnaire based study was done on school teachers of Sri Chaitanya School in Visakhapatnam to understand the level of stress as an occupational health hazard.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

98 teachers participated in the study. With prior permission from the management, the teachers were asked to fill a model

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stress questionnaire (<https://www.ucu.org.uk/stress>), with a peaceful mind. The answers were evaluated. The results were illustrated in tables and graphs.

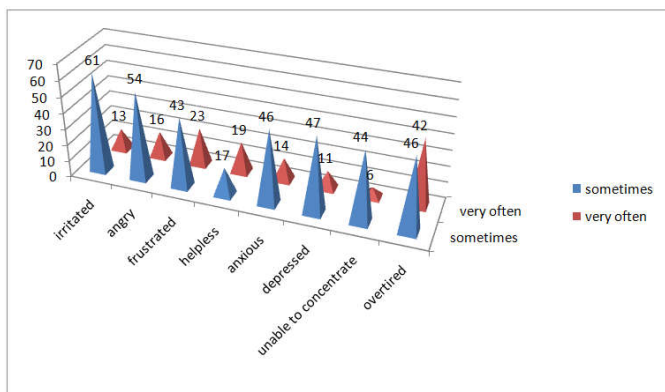
RESULTS

The data of the study is illustrated in the following tables.

Table 1. Frequency of Stress symptoms experiencing for the last one year

S. No	Stress symptom	Never	Sometimes	Very often
1.	Headaches/migraine	17 (17.34%)	39	42
2.	Aches/pains	18 (18.36%)	44	36
3.	High blood pressure	51 (52.04%)	23	24
4.	Poor sleep patterns	36 (36.73%)	29	33
5.	Skin rashes	62 (63.26%)	16	20
6.	Indigestion	47 (47.95%)	34	17
7.	Stomach ulcers	80	11	7
8.	Asthma	79	9	10
9.	Anxiety	34	44	20
10.	Depression	43	34	21
11.	Heart disease	87	11	-
12.	Change in appetite	74	18	6
13.	Exhaustion	73	17	8
14.	Increased consumption of tobacco	96	2	-
15.	Increased consumption of alcohol	97	1	-
16.	Inability to concentrate	64	26	8
17.	Erratic moods	61	35	2
18.	Low self esteem/confidence	68	16	14

Of the 116 teachers working in the private school, 98 teachers participated in the study and the replies were evaluated. There were an extremely high proportion of female teachers who were 72 when compared to male teachers who counted only 26. The highest count was 42 who reported headaches and migraine frequently.



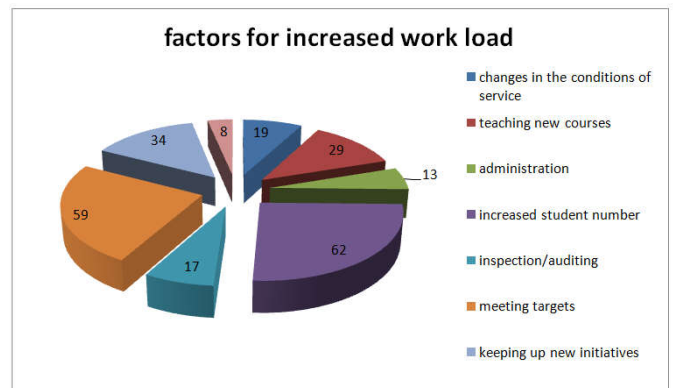
Graph 1. Bar chart showing the sensibilities of teachers at work

Table 2. The number of work hours per week

S No	Work hours/week	Number of teachers
1.	30-35	31
2.	36-40	21
3.	41-45	9
4.	46-50	15
5.	51+	22

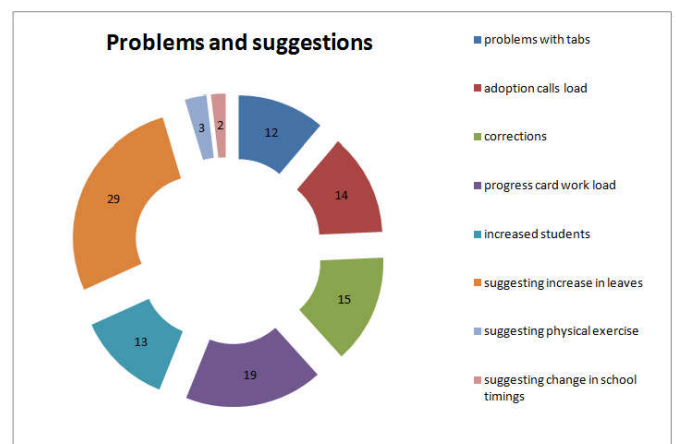
Teachers were asked to give multiple replies as required, for the question to enumerate the factors for increased work load. Accordingly a pie chart was prepared to see which factor

would be most common for increased work load among the teachers.



Graph 2. Pie chart depicting the factors for increased work load

From the chart it is evident that increased number of students and meeting the targets are the two most common factors for the heavy work load. Multiple answers were given for the question to describe any other problems or suggestions in their own words. The responses were shown below.



Graph 3. Diagram illustrating the problems and suggestions of the teachers in their own words

It is observed that a good number of teachers suggested to increase the leave pattern to get rid of the stress.

DISCUSSION

Stress is a body’s method of reacting to a challenge. Increased stress may alter human’s memory function, reward, immune functions, metabolism and susceptibility to diseases (Stephens *et al.*, 2012). There has been a striking rise of stress levels amongst teachers in the recent era. Work related stress was first identified by smith *et al.* in 1930 (Smith and Milstein, 1984). A comparative study on professional stress shows that teaching profession is the most stressful occupation after ambulance car drivers (Johnson *et al.*, 2005). Another study (Naina Sabherwal *et al.*, 2015) reveals the multifactorial causes of stress and its relation with demographic data. This is a questionnaire based study done to evaluate the stress levels in school teachers of a private school in Visakhapatnam. When the replies were analysed, there were a great proportion of teachers subjected to stress symptoms in the past one year. Headaches and body pains were strikingly affecting the teachers often when compared to other symptoms. Few reported incidence of high

blood pressures frequently. Poor sleep patterns were given by 63.2% of teachers. 30.61% teachers replied incidence of low self esteem/confidence sometimes and often. Demographic data was also taken to relate stress to such factors. The number of working hours per week was evaluated and 22 teachers answered that they work for more than 51 hours a week. A maximum of 62 teachers reported increased number of students is the main cause for stress. When asked about any other problems, 12 teachers said that they frequently encounter problems with tabs given to them and 14 feel attending to adoption calls is a stressful factor. As many as 29 teachers suggested to implement government leave pattern to alleviate stress. These figures tell about the intensity of stress as an occupational hazard among school teachers.

Conclusion

A good number of teachers have been found to suffer from stress related health issues. On thorough evaluation, the percentage of teachers responded reflect the magnitude of stress felt at work. Effective measures should be taken both by the management and personally to combat with stress related health problems. A stress free environment makes the teachers to achieve better results in delivering their duties, thereby providing an efficient future generation to the society.

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