

Causes of stress among school teachers



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The effects of stress upon a person's life can be profound. Different studies have shown that job-related stress affects work satisfaction and overall happiness. Increasing stress is becoming a recognized occupational hazard in the educational profession. In a country like Pakistan, we cannot ignore the situation in educational settings. Teachers' agitations and class boycotts are common practices that show their dissatisfaction. Both quantity and quality of education are not good. There may be many causes of stress in teachers. To investigate the causes and the nature of stress is of vital importance for improving the quality of education. The present study will be an effort to investigate the causes of stress and to get an orientation of how to explore it on a larger scale.

Statement of the problem:

The proposed study will investigate the causes of stress among school teachers.

Significance of the study:

Receiving little practical attention from the governmental side education department, especially school situation, is very bad. Working staff in school is very much frustrated and every one from principal to lowest rank servant complains about his status and neglected condition. It is clear that every one faces some kind of stress which is evident in his lack of interest in job. This disinterestedness leads to a poor teaching environment and also creates administrative problems for the head of the institution. To improve the situation in school, it is must to create a stress-free environment. But nothing can be improved without knowing the factors involved in creating stress

among the staff especially the teachers who are responsible for the better running of the system. So this study will be very important for those who are concerned with the education system; e. g. the following can take help of this study:

- Heads of educational institutions
- Education planners
- Education department
- Society stakeholders who thinks teachers accountable

Delimitations of the study:

The research will follow the conceptual theoretical framework developed on the basis of review of related literature. However, the study will restrict itself to primary investigation of government high schools only in district Peshawar only.

Hypotheses of the study:

The following hypotheses will be tested:

- there is significant difference between salary of teachers and the level of stress
- there is significant difference between level of stress and traveling to reach their place of duty.
- there is significant difference between personal conflict among teachers and stress in teachers
- there is significant difference between class size and stress in teachers
- there is significant difference between level of stress in teachers and lengthy courses

- there is significant difference between level of stress in teachers and Heavy work load on them
- there is significant difference between level of stress in teachers and Authoritarian behavior of the principal
- there is significant difference between level of stress in teachers and lack of rule and discipline in school
- there is significant difference between level of stress in teachers and lack of community support

Sample of the study:

Since the research will be restricted to schools of one district only, therefore to see the meaningful effect the sample will comprise 60% of the whole population of teachers in the district.

Brief Review of related literature

Definition of stress

It is not easy to define the concept of stress. Usually it is associated with the less pleasant aspect of life (Sharp, 1977). Hans Selye (1956) defined stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand. It was used as a substitute for anxiety, conflict, and emotional distress. To Bower (1984) it is any force that brings some change in an organism for better or worse. There are many more definitions but their description equates stress with distress. However, the literature about stress does not conform to this meaning. It refers to a wide range of physiological changes and environmental pressures in the health/illness literature. It becomes clear when Selye further distinguishes in his definition of stress between eustress, that is an exciting and pleasant kind of demand, and distress that is threatening, unpleasant, or even harmful.

demand. This distinction between eustress and distress lies in the perception of the person.

The above discussion leads us to general definition as Sharp has given. According to him stress is an individual perception and assessment. This definition is broad and means that every thing which we feel with our five senses is a source of stress. The definition also makes it clear that the perception and assessment of the environment is not the same by each individual. For example for a person, moving to a new town might be a source of distress because of some painful loss.

The above definition illustrates that stress is the fact of life. We cannot escape from it anywhere. Without stress life means death. So for living a better life we should understand it.

Theoretical perspective

Stress theory begins with the experiments of Hans Selye (1956) who described stress as biological syndrome;

“ Experiments on rates show that if the organism is severely damaged by acute non specific cocoas agents such as an exposure to cold, surgical injury, production of spinal shock—a typical syndrome appears, the symptoms of which are independent of the nature of the damaging agent and represent rather the nature of damaging agent as such”.

The apparent state of this syndrome is called stress, which brings biological changes in the organism. Selye’s observation was that stress reaction was general and occurred in response to any number of different stimuli. He saw

this reaction as an adoptive syndrome of this organism in response to external stress. The form this syndrome takes place is called general adaptation syndrome (GAS). GAS consists of three phases, (i) alarm reaction (ii) resistance (iii) exhaustion. In the first stage the system assesses the situation and prepare for fight or flight but the overall resistance is to a stressor initially decreases. During the resistance the body becomes adapted to the presence of the stressor and begins to resist its impact. It may mean fighting or controlling one's self trying. The exhaustion starts if the stressor continues and the body reaches the end of its capacity for resistance, the result may be a collapse, illness, mental disorder or even death. In general the current research suggests that the stress response is not a simple biological response to no specific stressors but rather a complex, interrelated process including the occurrence of stressor, how it is seen physiologically by the organism, under what circumstances the stressor occurs, how the organism characteristically reacts and what the resources are that the organism has, available for dealing with the stressors. The concept of a general stress reaction may be viable but only if we assume that it represents the sum of a great many psychological and physiological factors rather than a specific all or non response to the occurrence of a stressing event

Empirical perspective

Stressful life events:- Halms and Rahi (1967) developed the Social Readjustment Scale for measuring the intensity of 43 life events. Newman (1983) found that the intensity of stress depends on the person's impression of the life event and his coping strategies. Two different interpretations have

been offered about why life events may be tied to physical or psychological disturbance. One view suggests that all change is stressful and the source is not important. The total amount of life change in a given period should predict subsequent stress responses. The second view focuses on undesirable or negative changes as the primary stressors. In a number of studies, this factor i. e. the undesirable change was more closely related to disturbance than was total change. Apparently there is not a direct relationship between occurrence of crises events and the observed physical and psychological disturbance of crises state. It is difficult to know when a crises event is about to occur. Many of the important life events occur by change. Two factors will influence the extent to which crises events lead to crises states. One is person's interpretation of the event. The second is the effectiveness of the person's coping strategies.

The hassles of daily life: – there are countless minor stress events that have low intensity but greater frequency. According to Lazarus , et al (1985) these daily life hassles are important sources of stress. They have developed hassles scale on which individual indicates the extent to which he has been hassled by common event during the past month. The list of these hassles includes household, time pressure, inner concern, financial and work. The effects of these hassles also apply to health.

Work as a source of stress:- work can also be a source of stress. The factors that make work stressful are work overload, work under load, employee's role and change in the work environment.

Stress in teachers:- work stress has been recognized as occupational hazard of teaching and its causes have been fairly well established (Smith and Milstein, 1984).

According to Kyriacou (1987) teachers experience more work stress than most other occupational groups and according to Pankhurst (1982) they are more distressed than the general population. Nagy and Davis (1985) have found that junior and secondary school teachers in one place are about as stressed as their colleagues elsewhere. At organizational level there are many factors that contribute to teachers' stress.

Students' discipline: – managing disruptive students is invariably among the top ranked items in teacher stress. Among various manifestations of school discipline problem i. e. disruptive students, threats of personal injury, verbal abuse, and assault on colleagues are represented three or four times, in the list of top ten stressors. This is evident from the various surveys of teaching stress (Goodlad 1984). Bloch (1978) studied the effects of violence on teachers and compared their symptoms to those of combat neurosis. These teachers suffered from anxiety, insecurity, nightmare, fatigue, irritability, headaches, ulcers and number of other emotional and physical symptoms. Lazarus (1966) pointed out that anticipation of a threat may be as stressful as an actual stress. According to Lortie (1975) teachers who fail to keep control over students soon find that teachers' are intolerable work.

A related issue is that of students' lack of interest. According to Goodlad when teachers were asked, " what is this school's biggest problem?" they answered, " Lack of students' interest". Teachers do feel enormously

frustrated and deprived of crucial sense of gratification when working with students who are uncaring and unconcerned about learning. These students are not only personally frustrated but they also contribute to a class tone often leading to further discipline problem, that make it more difficult for a teacher to do effectively in the class room.

Administrative insensitivity:

The complaint is usually linked to the issues of students' violence and school discipline. Many teachers think administrators are neither supportive nor sensitive to students' violence and do little about enforcing rules or promoting a secure learning environment. Teachers feel that administrators are too content with their proper work in offices and avoid dealing with problem students. Stress has been found to be significantly related to principal's participation in problem solving and not supporting the teachers (Jackson, S. E. et. al 1986)

Involuntary Transfers

This source of stress is much related to teachers. Being a principal my self I witness this phenomenon in teachers' community in everyday life. Many teachers are not satisfied with their place of duty and a large number of them complain this when they are prompted and transferred to other station which is not their choice. Such transfer notices demoralize teachers and they think about retirement.

Large class size

Classrooms generally require structure children attention and the most effective classrooms are generally those in which teachers can individualize

lessons to meet the needs of each child. The task becomes difficult with the increase in size of the class. Because large class size provides fewer opportunities to interact individually with each student, the teacher feel less involved and less effective. Moreover with the increase in class size classroom management becomes more difficult. Overcrowded classrooms then are seen weakening the likelihood of effective teaching.

Inadequate Salaries

Teachers also complain of their low salaries. They compare their salaries with other professional groups and their work at school level with that of the teachers at college level. This situation becomes stressful for teachers. To meet their expenditure they search for other ways. They do private tuition, which is also a blame for teachers to earn from their own school students.

Parents and society at large expect from teachers and invest them with an enormous degree of responsibility. Politicians continually declare that our children are our nation's future. In response to such statement teachers ask, where are the financial rewards that equate with such important task? This situation shows that inadequate salary is a source of stress for teachers.

Role ambiguity, Role conflict and Role overload

Role ambiguity is associated with a lack of clarity regarding workers' rights, responsibilities, methods, goals, status and accountability. Although in some ways teachers' role is defined quite explicitly, that is to teach children well, in other ways with regard to school discipline and accountability ambiguity arises. Role conflict occurs when inconsistent, incompatible or inappropriate demands are placed upon an individual. Sutton (1984) pointed to common

sources of role conflict for teachers. They are expected to provide quality education to their students, yet they are not allowed to use the best instructional methods or curriculum materials available. They are responsible for maintaining discipline but do not have the authority for doing so.

Teachers may also experience role conflict when they are told to perform task that is outside the domain of their professional work.

Role overload is one of the common complaints of those who, with their own needs, interest, motivation and achievement level are a big number, for any one person to handle. Role overload may also occur from the efforts necessary to work effectively with children who are seemingly unprepared or unmotivated to attend school. Sutton has pointed out two distinct, though equally dysfunctional responses to work overload. In the first case teachers feel forced either to do low quality work or to not finish the work at all which is psychologically as well as physiological problem. Stress results from either response. This is a general list of work related stressors for teachers. In any given school a number of idiosyncratic stressors impinge upon teachers, their existence is a junction of the type of individuals who have taught and who have learned in that particular setting.

Societal Factors

Unconcerned parents; parents beliefs, an integral part of the educational process and parental support of children's work, strongly influence school success. The teachers generally welcome parental involvement in schools but majority parents are not supportive to teachers.

Unsupportive parents come under two major varieties; not involved and too involved. In the first group are those parents who are not available. Incapable, uninterested in their children's education and those who put whole responsibility of educating of their children on teachers. In the second group are those parents who have decided that the real education is only possible if parents constantly monitor what occurs in the school. These parents feel that their child is being overlooked by the teacher and that only constant pressure on their part will rectify the situation. Although all parents are not of such kind but generally parents are perceived by teachers as either unhelpful or unavailable or intrusive.

Public criticism; the typical comments about teachers from public include: they have much to do, get much for the little they cannot do anything else etc. charged with the educating and socializing so many children teachers are reminded of their failures and rarely praised for their successes. This evaluation of teachers by the public in such a way make them stressful.

Public demand for accountability; apparently it is reasonable to say that public should hold teachers accountable for the success of their work. The public pay taxes and pay teacher salaries and have right to expect some performance levels. However from the perspective of teachers the demand for accountability is too often the means by which teachers' autonomy and sense of professionalism are trampled upon by those who know little about education and educational evaluation. Most troubling to teachers is their feeling that society expects them to educate, socialize every student who comes to school regardless of the social, economic and psychological difficulties some of these students bring with them. If parents, psychologists

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social workers have failed why teachers should be accountable for all the problems. This demand of accountability is also a source of stress for teachers.

Procedure of the study

Based upon the objective of the study an occupational stress inventory will be developed regarding job related stress events. In developing the items in the inventory discussion with the local teachers and study of the related literature will be focused. Teachers' opinion about stress inducing problems will be given more importance. Like previous researchers Likert Scale will be used for obtaining data about job related stress.

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