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RESEARCH ON OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND STRESS COPING STRATEGIES: CERTAIN REFLECTIONS

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CONCEPT OF STRESS

Stress and strain have become pervading features of peoples' life in modern world. Despite tremendous advancements in science and technology, and remarkable growth of economy and sources of luxury, majority of being experiencing moderate to high degree of psychological stress in various spheres of their lives. In the present day world majority of people may be seen talking about the term, yet, significantly few people use the term in the same way or even attempt for a clear-cut definition of the term stress. The word stress is derived from the Latin word *Stringere* which means 'to be drawn tight'. The term was used to refer to hardship, strain, adversity or affliction. The physiologist, Walter Cannon (1914), in his work on homeostasis had used the term stress to describe emotional states that had possible detrimental physical impact on the focal organism. Dunbar (1947) had described the term stress as quality of stimulus while some others defined it as the quality of both stimulus and the response. Wolff (1950) described it as a state of human organism. Basowitz et al. (1958) also described stress as that class of stimuli which produce anxiety and reportable experience of tension.

Stress is a term that is used in many different ways (Lasky, 1995). For instance, most often in colloquial language, the term stress is used to denote a research or reaction to negative conditions. In empirical literature, this type of stress is usually referred to as strain and represents an outcome variable (Spector and Jex, 1998). The second major use of the term is in relation to the actual demands that are placed on humans. Similarly, the formal dictionary definition of stress is 'to put pressure or strain on an object or...a person' (Macquarie Dictionary, 1982). In an academic context, these demands are usually referred to as stressors. The third use of the term that is most meaningful in such a context refers to stress as a process. This term acknowledges the fact that stress is a multi – faceted concept that occurs in a temporal and dynamic manner; and which is influenced by the interaction of a multitude of contributory factors (Cotton, 1996). For instance, Shirom (1982) defined stress as an individual's perception that environmental demands (stressors) exceed his or her capabilities and resources, thus leading to negative outcomes. Similarly, Selye (1976) described stress as an imbalance between the body's resources and the demands upon it. The stress process stress involves a stressor and a strain (McEwen, 2007).

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

In accordance with the 'Stress-process' definition, work stress has been described as an incompatibility between the individual and his or her work environment (Humphrey, 1998). A more specific definition was provided by NIOSH (1999), who defined work stress as being the harmful

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physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. In the Guidance on Work-related Stress issued by the European Commission in 2002, work-related stress is defined as 'a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological reactions to adverse and noxious aspects of work content, work organization and work environment' (p.7) ; the emphasis is on the workplace as the source of stress. The United states National Institute for Occupational Health and safety, on the other hand, in its 1999 publication entitled 'Stress at work', defines work-related stress as ' the harmful physical and emotional responses or needs of the worker' (p.6), and expresses the view working conditions are a primary factor, but that personal factors are also influential.

Of further interest is the conceptualization offered by Lazarus (1991) who postulated that occupational stress is a process, involving a transaction between an individual and his or her work environment. The worker's response to work stress can be either psychological, physical or both (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994; Kristensen, 1996; Santor & Cox, 2000), and is usually categorised as being either acute, post traumatic, or chronic.

The primary sources of occupational stress within an organization originate from four areas. These include task demands, physical demands, role demands and interpersonal demands. Any demand either physical or psychological nature encountered in the course of living is known as a stressor. Task related stress is directly related to the job itself. It involves role ambiguity, conflicting task demands, work overload, inadequate resource support, no provision for work place or other sources to be considered. Physical demands of the work place are another source of stress. Role demands are external to the tasks associated with the job. It arises due to flawed organizational structures, ineffective organizational development and organization. Knots (1996), states that individual stress often results when his/ her work role and responsibilities are not clearly defined. The final source of occupational stress is related to interpersonal demands. Interpersonal stress at work is concerned with the demands that are placed on us in developing working relationships with other people in the organization. Thus teachers undergo stress in one form or in another form which lead them to job dis-satisfaction.

When we add the complicity and turbulence of contemporary working environment and organizational life, altogether, causes of occupational stress can be grouped into two main groups: (1) Job related stressors, with three major subgroups – job specific, organization specific and environment specific stressors and (2) Individual – related stressors, which can be either a consequence of individual characteristics or a consequence of individual life circumstances.

A BRIEF NOTE ON THE RESENT RESEARCHES ON OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN INDIA AND ABROAD

A good number of research has been done on the occupational stress of Teachers at different levels (Aftab and Khatoon , 2012; Anbuchevean, 2012; Balaswamy, 2011; Chaturvedi and Purushothaman, 2009; John, 2007; Manojkumar, 2006; Poornima, 2010; Vijaya Anuradha,2012;



Reddy, 2006; Reddy, 2011; and so on) and Other Professionals (Bakshi et al,2008;Katyal et al 2011; Mishra et al,2011; Sinha et al, 2011; Vijayalaxmi et al 2004), in India.

A good progress of research in this area is also noticed in Abroad. Al- Amri (2004), Antoniou et al (2000), Burket et al (1999), Chan et al (2010), Darmody and Smyth (2011), Lanre Olaitan et al (2011), McCromick and Barnett (2011) and Sprengar (2011) carried out studies on occupational stress of school teachers. Similarly, Ahsan et al (2009); Jackson and Rothmann (2006); Liu and Zhu (2009); Morino et al (2010); Sun et al (2011), Yahaya et al (2010) and Yong (2011) studied the occupational stress of higher education teachers. Likewise, Mark and Smith (2012), Mazzola et al (2011) Okoza et al (2010) Smith et al (2000) Wu et al (2011) and Vagg et al (1998) studied the occupational stress in other professionals.

CONCEPT OF STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES

Coping refers to 'how the mind reacts to stress' It is not possible to tolerate stress for long period as it produces feelings of discomfort. Consequently, when an individual recognizes a situation as stressful, will seek to escape from it or alleviate the anticipated harm as quickly as possible, using the devices that are successful or comforting. These are called as coping strategies or comfort tricks. Coping includes all the possible responses to stressors in one's environment. As a stressor makes demands on an organism and initiates to remove the stressor or to interrupt its effects. Coping often reduces the negative effects of the stressor, but sometimes coping creates new and different problems.

Coping is "an effortful process of adaptation to challenging, threatening or harmful circumstances". Problem-focused coping, Emotion-focused coping and Avoidance coping are the three types of coping. Problem focused coping, consisting of activities aimed at changing the situation causing the stress. Emotion-focused coping consisting of thoughts and activities aimed at managing one's own internal reactions and feelings. Avoidance coping includes behavioral disengagement, mental disengagements, alcohol, drug disengagement and use of humour. Here and there, some researches are noticed on stress coping strategies among adolescent students (Dubat, Punia and Rashmi Goyal 2007; Srikanth Reddy, Balakoteswari and Tirumala Rao 2005; Seema Kashyap and Ravisindhu 2005; Kumar and Prakash 1986; and Sod 1998).

NEED FOR RESEARCH ON OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND STRESS COPING STRATEGIES OF B.E.D COLLEGE TEACHERS

Occupational stress is the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the workers. According to Akinboyo (2002), Stress is an ineffective and unhealthy reaction to change. Stress describes force, which affects human being physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually. It is the body response to any undesirable mental, physical, emotional, social or environmental demand. Stress describes physical trauma, strenuous exercise, metabolic disturbances and anxiety, which challenges the body wellbeing. Stress has been an age-long phenomenon that has great-impaird work behaviors. Stress has also been defined in terms of role demands originating in the work environment. Thus excessive stress is aroused by stressors drive, conflict and overload responsibilities lead to burnout.



According to Kerry (2006) less worker autonomy, indeterminate hours of work, work intensification and the infinite expansion of shift times are creating stressors that the officers can no longer accommodate. Discourses on the etiological of occupational stress are played out in the analysis and structural theories, were found to be most opposite. The dominant discourse on the etiology of stress locates the cause of stress within an individual's personality. The proponents of this discourse study handiness, locus of control, coping and adaptation skills as well as stress generating personality types. Alege (1988) listed some factors that lead to stress as overcrowded working place, retrenchment threats, power relationship with the boss and workers, poor physical environmental conditions, conflict of work and family demand, inability to reach desired goal, Personal problem, poor communication and even gossip.

In India, studies by Reddy (2006), Poornima (2010), and Vijaya Anuradha (2012) revealed that more than 70% of the teachers are experiencing high and moderate levels of occupational stress irrespective of schools they are working. Similarly, 60% are with high and moderate professional burnout and emotionally exhausted due to heavy workload and stress in working situations. Moreover, 70% are with low and moderate level of job satisfaction, the infrastructure facilities in special schools have their own bearing on occupational stress, professional burnout and job satisfaction. It is revealed in the study that the special schools are not well equipped with necessary facilities to transact the curriculum into practice. Further, the men teachers have higher rates of occupational stress, professional burnout and lower rates of job satisfaction than their counterparts. Reddy & Poornima (2006) studied that the stress factors viz., lack of opportunities for promotion, thrusting on development of curricular innovations and materials, giving more and more assessment and diagnostic responsibilities, preparation of teaching learning materials and implementation of instruction is causing high level of occupational stress in teachers working in the schools for visually impaired. The study conducted by Reddy (2011) on university teachers also revealed that majority of the teachers are experiencing moderate and high levels of occupational stress due to the organization structure and climate, personal and professional efficiency, intra and interpersonal interactions and environmental factors.

A critical view of the research studies reviewed above clearly indicates that research on occupational stress of teachers is done both India and Abroad. The researchers are mostly on school teachers and other professionals. The occupational stress of B.Ed.. college teachers is not attempted and there is need to identify the occupational stressors and ways and means to overcome the same. A comprehensive study on the occupational stress and stress coping strategies of teachers' working in the B.Ed.. Colleges of Education will give clear cut picture about the sources of occupational stress and the coping strategies adapted by the teachers. Such research provides better insights to create effective organizational environment, healthy intra and inter personal relations, professional interactions, strengthening of the professional training components and the ways and means to equip the teachers with instructional assignments and arrangements to meet the needs of global society. This information is vital for the development of Teacher Training Programmes at B.Ed. Level.



Similarly, stress coping mechanism/ strategies of B.Ed. College teachers to be identified will give better insights to the teacher educators to develop and promote such strategies in the budding teachers through pre-service and in-service training programmes. It also helps to orient college managements and principals about the need for providing conducive organizational structure and climate for personal and professional development, effective work environments for intra and interpersonal interactions and to take steps for better working conditions, apart from teacher's welfare measures leading to their personal and professional empowerment. Furthermore, such studies will give better insights into the influence of personal variables of teachers on their occupational stress which lead for better policy planning, development and implementation. All these things go a long way to improve the quality of the teacher education programmes in India.

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