

STRESS AMONG TEACHING COMMUNITY: AN ALARMING SIGNAL

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Abstract

Teaching has been identified as one of the most stressful occupations in many countries. Teaching related stress, commonly termed 'teacher stress', is defined as a teacher's experience of "unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher." Like other forms of occupational stress, it can have serious implications for the healthy functioning of the individual as well as for the organization in which the individual serves. At a present level, teaching related stress can affect a teacher's health, well being, and performance. From an organizational perspective, it translates to unproductive employee behaviours such as alienation, apathy, and absenteeism. Hence, even after three decades of research efforts, the study of teachers stress, particularly its sources and its manifestations, continues to attract widespread interest and attention.

Keywords: *Stress, Teachers, Positive Thinking.*

Introduction

The teacher forms the most important link of our educational system. They are called 'Nation Builders.' Due to recent advancements in science and technology, our educational process and system is undergoing a period of transformation. Teaching is a noble but very demanding profession. Teachers have to play multiple roles of an administrator, role models, friend, philosopher and counsellor for the students and the society which is subsequently leading to high levels of stress among the teacher's educators, in the prevailing educational system.

Concept of Stress

The word stress is derived from Latin word 'stringer' which means "to be drawn tight." Stress is the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed upon them. It arises when they worry that they can't cope with the situation (Lazarus 1966). According to Fred Luthans (1904) stress is the 'wear and tear' our minds and bodies experience as we attempt to cope with our continually changing environment. Stress occurs when pressure is greater than resource $S = P > R$

The word 'stress' is defined by Oxford Dictionary (1998) as "a state of affair involving demand on physical or mental energy." A condition or circumstance which can disturb the normal physical and mental health of individual.

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Dynamics of Stress

"Nothing gives one person so much advantage over another as to remain always cool and unruffled under all circumstances." Thomas Jefferson

In a challenging situation, the brain prepares the body for defensive action the fight or flight response by releasing stress hormones namely cortisone and adrenaline. When we fail to counter a stress situation the hormones and chemicals remain unreleased in blood stream for a long period of time. It results in stress related physical symptoms such as tense muscles unfocused anxiety, dizziness and rapid heartbeats. We all encounter various stressors (causes of stress) in everyday life, which can accumulate, if not released subsequently it compels the body and mind to be in an almost constant alarm state in preparation to flight or flee. This state of accumulated stress can cause headaches irritable bowel syndrome, eating disorder, insomnia, backaches, frequent cold and fatigue to diseases such as hypertension, Asthma Diabetes, Heart ailments etc. These common symptoms of stress affect work output and disrupt smooth functioning in the workplace (Okorie, 1997).

Teacher's Stress

Within the general area of occupational stress, teaching has been identified as one of the most stressful occupations (cooper, Sloan and Williams, 1980). Teaching related stress commonly termed 'teacher stress' is defined as teacher's experience of unpleasant negative emotions such as anger, anxiety tension frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher (Kyria Cou, 2001). Like other forms of occupational stress it can have serious implication for the healthy functioning of individual as well as for the organization in which the individual serves. At a personal level teaching related stress can affect a teacher's health, well being and performance (Larchick and Chance, 2004) from an organizational perspective, it translates to unproductive employee behaviours such as alienation, apathy and absenteeism (Guglielmi and Tat row 1998).

Source of Teacher's Stress

The source of teacher's stress are varied (Dewe, 1986) some of the more common source include the need to make adaptations to sudden curriculum changes and feeling of disempowerment (Brown, Ralph and Brember 2002; Moriarty et.al., 2001). A part from school curriculum changes, a change in school structure is also a stressor. Such change cause erosion of collegial relationship (Truman, 2000) and harbors feeling of inequity and uncertainty (Taris et.al., 2004). Other often reported stress catalysts include role overload, namely the need for teachers to cope with a number of competing roles within their jobs (Pither and Soden 1998), excessive overtime work (Cooper and Kelly 1993), and management problems associated with students misbehavior and large class size (Gordon, 2002). The events that provoke stress are called stressors. They are divided into two categories external and internal stressors.

External Stress:

Physical conditions such as heat and cold, stressful psychological environment such as working conditions and abusive relationship e.g.

- Physical environment : Noise, Bright lights, Heat, Confined spaces.

- Social interaction : Rudeness, Bossiness, Aggressiveness by others, Bullying.
- Organizational : Rules, Regulations, Red-tape.
- Major life events : Birth, Death, Lost job, Promotion, Marital status change.
- Daily hassles : Commuting misplaced keys, mechanical breakdowns.

Internal Stressors

Physical ailments such as infection or inflammation or psychological problems such as working about something.

- Life style choices: Caffeine, lack of sleep, overloaded schedule.
- Negative self : Pessimistic thinking, self criticism, over analyzing.
- Mind traps: Unrealistic expectations, taking things personally, exaggeration, rigid thinking.
- Personality traits: perfectionists, work alcoholics.

Stress Management Techniques

The most helpful method of dealing with stress is learning how to manage stress that comes along with any new challenge good or bad. Stress management skills work best when they are used regularly, not just when pressure is on. Knowing how to de stress and doing it when things are relatively calm can help you get through challenging circumstances that may arise. The following techniques can help teacher a lot in combating this deadly stress:

1. Change your thinking.
2. Change your behaviour.
3. Change your life style.

Change your Thinking

a. Re-framing

Re-framing is a technique to change the way you look at things in order to feel better about them. There are many ways to interpret the same situation, so the pick one you like. Re-framing does not change the external reality but helps you to view things in different perspective and less stressfully.

b. Positive thinking

- Forget powerlessness despair, dejection failure.
- Stress leaves us valuable to negative suggestion, so focus on positives.
- Focus on your strengths.
- Look for opportunities.
- Seek out the positive - make a change.

Change your Behaviour

a. Be assertive

Assertiveness helps to manage stressful situations and will in time help to reduce their frequency. Lack of assertiveness often shows low self esteem and low self confidence. The key to assertiveness is verbal and non-verbal Communication.

b. Equality and basic rights

- The right to express my feelings.
- The right to express my opinions.
- The right to change your mind.

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- Right to say 'I don't understand.'
- The right to make reasonable request to other.
- The right to set my own priorities.
- The right to be listened to, and taken seriously.

c. Time management

- What 'must' be done?
- Make a list.
- What SHOULD be done?
- What would you LIKE to do?
- Cut out time wasting.
- Plan your day.
- Set achievable goals.

d. Humour

- Good stress reducer.
- Applies at home and work.
- Relives muscular tension.
- Pumps endorphins into bloodstream the body natural pain killers.

e. Ventilation

"A problem shared is a problem halved" Develop a support network through friends or colleagues to talk with.

f. Assertive skills

- Establish good eye contact/don't stare.
- Stand or sit comfortably don't fidget.
- Talk in a firm steady voice.
- 'I think'/ I feel.
- Concise and to the point.

Change your Life Style

a. Get a good night's sleep

Getting enough sleep helps keep your body and mind in tip top shape. It is a good stress reducer.

b. Benefits of regular Exercise:

- Improves blood circulation.
- Lowers Blood pressure.
- Improves self image.
- Increase social contacts.

c. Cultivate hobbies and Leisure time activities

- Provides outlet from stress.
- Gives you break from stresses.

d. Learn to relax and eat balanced meals:

Relaxation decreases mental worries, increases concentration, eases muscle tension, combats fatigue.

Conclusion

The American Institute of stress recommends that no single technique can single handily manage stress. Rather a combination of techniques proves to be most effective in managing occupational stress. The above mentioned stress management techniques can go a long way in reducing stress among teachers and improving the efficiency of teaching community.

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