

Determinants of Stress among University Teachers: A Conceptual Study

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ABSTRACT

The modern society has made the lives of teachers very hectic. The harsh schedule of teachers especially in universities are gruelling to say the least. The challenges encountered by the teachers in the present scenario of academia are challenging like never before. The pandemic not only tested the mettle of university teachers worldwide but also their merit in the face of such an unprecedented adverse situation. The constant demands posed on university teachers, even as the pandemic seems to be in the receding stages, have contributed to a lot of stress. The study aims to find out the determinants of stress among university teachers in the metropolitan city of Kolkata.

Keywords: Kolkata; Stress; Teachers; University.

I. INTRODUCTION

The roles, responsibilities and duties of the teachers have undergone drastic changes, exposing them to stress. Stress has become a universal crisis and has received considerable attention in recent years. In this context, teachers at the university level are faced with a herculean task of countering this demon. This study is primarily based on some selected universities in the metropolitan setting of Kolkata.

The Concept of Stress

Every person experiences stress in their daily lives. Stress is a global phenomenon experienced in all professions and the teaching profession is no exception. Stress may be defined as "The adaptive response of an individual as a result of the interaction with the environment

characterized by certain changes within those individuals causing them to deviate from their normal functioning." There could be different connotations to stress such as, "A state of mental tension and worry caused by problems in one's life, work, etc.", "The feeling of being overwhelmed or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressure", "Any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain", etc. Thus, broadly stress is nothing but the human body's response to anything that requires attention or action.

Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way one may respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to their overall well-being.

General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS): The Body's Response to Stress

The brainchild of Hans Selye, a medical doctor and researcher, who came up with the theory of GAS, the General Adaptation Syndrome is a three-stage process that describes the physiological changes the body goes through when under stress. Understanding these different responses and how they relate to each other may help individuals, including university teachers cope with stress. The stages are namely, alarm reaction stage, which translates simply into "flight or fight"; Resistance stage, when the body is undergoing a state of repair after having to deal with the initial shock triggers; Exhaustion stage, often the last stage in the stress cycle where an individual has given in to a sense of prolonged/chronic stress. Exhaustion stage is often characterised by tell-tale signs such as fatigue, burnout, decreased stress tolerance, etc.

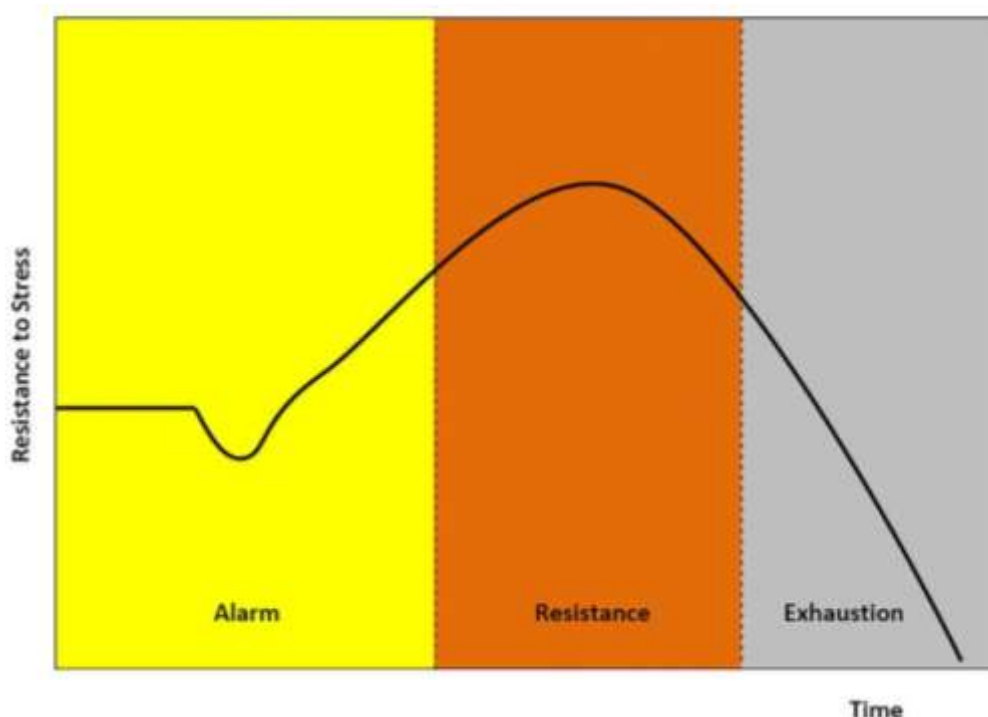


Figure: General Adaptation Syndrome stages (Source credit: www.healthline.com)

A New Dimension of Stress

A relatively nascent area of study, is the possibility of a stress trigger which is positive, helpful, and motivating. This positive side of stress caused by positive changes is called 'Eustress'. Eustress motivates people to work hard, improve their performance, and reach their goals, even in the face of challenges. The neutral side of stress is called 'Neustress' where an individual is said to have no positive as well as no negative stress. Distress talks about the negative kind of stress that most people identify with and leads to a feeling of being "stressed out". It may cause people to feel overwhelmed, anxious about their future whereabouts, and prone to experiencing physical and psychological symptoms like headaches, tension, insomnia, inattentiveness or irritability. Frequent episodes of intense or prolonged stress is toxic to the body and brain and is linked to a number of physical and mental illnesses, which may ultimately impair a person's ability to function.

While it is common knowledge, which has also been restated priorly, that positive stress is good for an individual, negative stress creates an adverse impact on an individual in the form of emotional fatigue, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, etc. Ultimately, the major difference between eustress and distress and the effects associated along with it has to do with

the stressor(s) that triggered the response and the way an individual may assesses these.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive and concise review of available literature pertaining to the topic of study at hand has been conducted to ascertain the framework for the research enquiry. A brief compilation of the same is presented as under.

According to Bernik (1997) stress designates the aggression itself leading to discomfort, or the consequences of it. It is an organism's response to a challenge, be it right or wrong. Moorhead & Griffin (2001) said stress is caused by a stimulus, which can be either physical or psychological, and that the individual responds to the stimulus in some way. Yan et al. (2016), defined work stress as a series of physiological, psychological and behavioural responses due to the continuing effects of one or more stressors on individuals in an organization. According to Kyriacou (2001), teacher stress may be defined as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher".

Objective of Study

The objective of the study is to identify the various factors of stress among teachers of selected universities in the city of joy, Kolkata.

Research Methodology

Research methodology can be understood to be the outline or blueprint of how particular research is intended to be carried out.

Secondary data has been used in the present study. The scientific articles were mainly found on authentic reliable databases such as INFLIBNET, J-Stor, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), etc. Other sources used were newspapers, books and Internet.

III. OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

As per the literature reviewed and understanding developed from there, it could be concluded that the various factors of stress in the context of teachers at the university level can be clubbed into different aspects such as “Academic Stress”, “Individual/Personal Stress”, “Student related Stress”, “Home-Workplace Stress”, “Interpersonal Stress”, “Working Condition Stress”, “Group Stress”, “Social Stress” and “External Stress”.

It is worth mentioning that although, certain academic proceedings of repute have captured the fact that certain teachers are themselves confused between the concepts of job pressure and job stress. Although, pressure at the workplace is an inevitable part of all work and helps to keep the teachers motivated and productive, excessive or uncontrolled pressure which continues for a prolonged or indefinite period actually leads to the occurrence of stress which undermines performance.

The findings from different leading newspapers, talking about the issue of factors creating stress among teachers of selected universities in Kolkata could be collated to include the following-

- Factors Intrinsic to the Job: unsuitable working conditions coupled with poor infrastructure and undue work hours ultimately increase the work overload beyond justification.
- Work Relationships and camaraderie: If interpersonal relationships with colleagues, superiors and subordinates are sour, it creates an adverse environment to undertake productive work
- Ambiguous Role in the Organization: Role ambiguity, role-conflict and dry promotion are major determinants of stress among university teachers.

- Unjustified pressure to publish research work: Often university authorities put unjustified pressure on faculty members to publish their research to rank higher as an university in different performance metrics. This not only hampers the teachers teaching assignments, the ethics to be followed in research procedures but also the quality of research undertaken and ultimately creates a definite cause of stress amongst the concerned faculty members.
- Unfavourable Organizational Structure and Climate: If there exists little to no opportunity for advancement, a scenario leading to lack of participation in decision making, lack of belongingness, etc, the ill effects of stress do not take much time to seep in.
- Stagnant Career Development: Feeling of getting stagnated in one’s career is highly frustrating and stressful.
- Extra-Organizational Sources of Stress: financial difficulties, relocation, residential conditions, conflict in work-home interface and life crises, etc. often add on to existing levels of stress among university teachers.

IV. CONCLUSION

The rapidly changing world is creating an adverse impact on the lives of everybody, especially, working professionals who cannot keep up pace with such changes. They are witnessing stress every now and then. However, the level of stress varies among individuals. The teachers of universities have been experiencing huge amount of stress with each passing day. Managing teacher stress has become a much talked about subject taken up for research and discussion. Universities should start practicing various kind of teacher training programs on stress management. Although stress cannot be avoided completely, management of stress levels is the need of the hour.

V. SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Factors like ‘Personal Stress’ and ‘Interpersonal Stress’ depends to a very large extent on the teachers themselves and the way they are able to manage it. Counselling sessions, wellness programmes and other stress releasing events could be organized by universities and teachers can showcase their involvement by participating in it and getting guidance on how to overcome stress.

University authorities should encourage participative decision making, better organizational communication and redesigning job structures if

necessary to bring down the levels of stress among faculty members. The university teachers on their part may remain clear on requirements, try to avoid conflicts as much as possible and keep perfectionism in check to reduce certain stressors from their lives.

It is also necessary for the government and political leaders to carry on their activities in a manner that do not harm the society.

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