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Professional Life Stressors among Teaching Faculty at Tertiary Level

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Abstract

This study was designed to examine the professional life stressors among teaching faculty at tertiary level. The major objectives of the study were the identification of professional life stressors among teachers at tertiary level, finding the differences between life stressors of male and female teachers at tertiary level, and suggesting them some plausible ways to cope with stressors in their daily routine. The current study was descriptive in nature. The population of the study comprised all the teachers teaching at the department of social sciences in 13 public sector universities of Islamabad. Cluster sampling technique was used to draw 200 representatives from the population of four universities. The study concluded that both lifestyle stressors and professional stressors were meaningful for the faculty teaching in the universities of Islamabad. However, professional stress was higher than lifestyle stress among teachers. Career development was the major stressor for teachers teaching at tertiary level. Organizational climate and organizational discipline were also perceived as major sources of stress for teachers at tertiary level. Female teachers of tertiary level had higher levels of stress as compared to male teachers. Relationships at work were least stressful for the faculty teaching in the universities of Islamabad. Based upon the findings of the study, it is recommended that facilities such as equal opportunities of training, quality training and counseling may be provided to teachers by their institutions for their career development and organizations may improve their communication and overall management.

Keywords: career development, organizational climate, professional life stressors, teachers' relationships, tertiary level

Introduction

Teachers are the key players in the teaching learning process at elementary, secondary and higher levels of education. Expectations from

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teachers at university level are very high. However, they face challenging work and have to perform considerable tasks relevant to their work and research. In this way, they face many occupational levels of stress while performing their duties and this creates a gap between the promised and the actual educational quality (Raza, 2012).

For many educational institutions, disciplinary issues are becoming a major problem as dramatic developments in socioeconomic life have occurred and teaching profession has become a highly demanding profession (Suleman, Hussain & Shehzad, 2018). One of the primary roles of universities is to promote research, enhance teaching capacity and develop management discipline in the country. The universities' faculty promises to meet this great challenge of attaining the aforementioned objectives which puts a great deal of stress on them (Mudrak et al., 2018).

Griffin (1990) explained stress as "an individual's adaptive response or physical demands on that person and the stimulus that induces stress is usually called a stressor. Stressors can be either psychological or physical." Blix, Cruse, Mitchell and Blix (1994) in their study "Occupational Stress among University Teachers" described that two thirds of the university faculty responded that during half of their scheduled time, they perceived job stress. The faculty also shared the issues job stress was creating such as burnout, turnover, health problems, decreased work output, and low capacity to manage the work stress (Sucan, 2019).

Teaching can be a stressful occupation. With students, colleagues, and endless teaching requirements, fragmented daily interactions often lead to enormous pressure and challenges, which can cause stress (Yordy, 2018). Wherein the work pressure is relentless, some negative physiological, psychological and behavioral consequences may result. Stress is a perceptual experience that arises from the relationship between the demands made on a person and his / her ability to deal with them. Any discrepancy in this regard causes the experiencing of stress (Zhai, Raver & Grining, 2011). Teacher stress is defined as unpleasant emotions, such as stress, depression, anxiety, anger and depression, resulting from working as teachers in various aspects and due to their professional experience. In the context of occupational stress, teacher stress has undoubtedly become

the focus of educators and education policy-makers around the world (Donovan, 2018). Studies about teacher stress have established stress as the number one health problem for teachers. It will take time to determine the severity of this issue in Pakistan, since teachers are definitely not enjoying their professional life in the country, both socially and economically (Nayak, 2008).

Pressure has different meanings for different people. From the perspective of non-professionals, pressure or stress can be described as a variety of nervousness, anxiety, fear or depression. Although these feelings occur because of the amount of pressure felt at the workplace; however, enriching experiences at the workplace may empower the employees to successfully manage their emotions, while controlling the intensity of their negative responses in a potentially threatening situation (Sucan, 2019). Commonly understood, stress is destructive, limiting the physical and psychological reactions enabling an employee to deal with threat via positive action. Stress is also perceived as a limitation when people feel unable to meet the work expectations. Stress is positive when employees are conscious of diverse individual needs and responses and are able to adjust and adapt to diversity and situational demands. Every stressful feeling creates a psychological imbalance and adopting appropriate coping mechanisms is needed to overcome stress. What is needed here is whether or not the employees possess a vast repertoire of responses to deal with critical situations, since all emotions whether love, anger or fear can be agents of stress (Sindhu, 2014).

Events and circumstances that generate pressure are known as stressors. Most teachers are caught in between young families and elderly parents; these roles may conflict with and contradict each other. Teachers' stress level is not at all the same, it differs according to the requirements of work and the environment at the workplace (Nayak, 2008). Stressors that hinder teacher efforts can be student indifference, student indiscipline, poor student attendance, heavy paperwork, indifferent attitude of colleagues, lack of leadership, career development, low wages, a less than ideal relationship with students and the loss of motivation (Denson, Szelényi & Bresonis, 2018; Butt et al., 2005).

The rational-emotive theory of Ellis (1962) teaches customers to more realistically assess their abilities and the psychological pressure put on them. This theory has many applications in the environment of an organization. Ellis believed that many people have their own unrealistic expectations. They think, "I must make everyone like me" or "I should be successful in everything I did." This is an ego-centered attitude; a more realistic response will help customers to reduce internal conflicts and experience pressure in a less dangerous way. A variety of other cognitive therapy approaches enable customers to make a more realistic and optimistic interpretation of stressful situations, thereby enhancing their ability to respond to them.

1.1 Lifestyle Stressors

1.1.1. Performance stressors. are the sources of stress intrinsic in the accomplishment of a piece of mental or physical behavior. The fact that such behavior is considered to be normal is that it involves the desire to carry out an activity or to achieve a particular goal. It encompasses several stages including the planning stage; the operational stage, which attempts to perform the task in the desired manner; and the feedback stage, where an attempt is made at the modification of the task in the light of past performance. Generally, following these rules, the produced behavior reduces stress and strain in practice more and more frequently. The best example is driving a car, interacting in public, and playing sports. These and in many other cases the behavior is difficult and laborious at an early stage but is gradually established with the attainment of the desired skills, easily (Nagra & Arora, 2013).

1.1.2. Threat stressors. are to be considered and assessed as dangerous situations. They may be related to the objective reality of the risks to the individual's physical well-being, such as those in physically aggressive confrontations, fighting, riots or war, in high-risk sports or where individual physical participation is implied. The latter occurs mainly in the case of fear and feelings of insecurity.

1.1.3. Boredom stressors. are to be considered and assessed as situations which lack physical or mental stimulation. Typically, these situations are so familiar to an individual that s/he doesn't need any action

or thought to deal with them. Such individuals tend to work in the production line and carry out other similar chores in daily physical activity. These stressors may also be observed in situations where people are not working to their full capacity, either physically or mentally (Sindhu, 2014).

1.1.4. Frustration stressors. are to be considered and evaluated as caused by unpopular circumstances beyond a person's control. They can take different forms. One is when a person is placed in this way, regardless of his or her response to such a situation, it is bound to have an unpleasant or insulting result. Another source of this type of pressure is any form of imprisonment imposed by the state or because of poverty or family pressure and any other factors a person may feel stranded. Frustration also originates with the control exercised by bureaucracy, taxes and other constraints placed by the government which gradually produces more and more and more in the form of rules and regulations controlling private and business life (Ghani, Ahmad & Ibrahim, 2014).

1.1.5. Bereavement stressors. have been considered and assessed to result in loss of any type. It is quite obvious that a major source of stress is bereavement due to the death of a close relative or friend. It can also be felt because of the loss of a relationship, moving away from an area where one has had many friends, losing a job or even a treasured possession. Loss of reputation, whether real or imaginary, or the value of a personal feeling such as dignity and practicality, also enters into this category.

1.1.6. Physical stressors. are different types of stressors related to the actual physical damage sustained by a person, such as broken limbs, illness or infection from working in a contaminated environment or the inability to take precautions in extreme temperature conditions. Areekkuzhiyil (2011) described that in higher education sector, the faculty faces organizational stress and it is comparatively high; indeed, it is one of the important factors that influences the quality and efficiency of the faculty. This level of stress is based on gender, organization type and experience. Recent research shows that the faculty experiences consistent pressure by the institution for better performance, meeting certain regulatory criterion of performance set by HEC; dealing with these

pressures may conflict with the coping mechanism used by a certain personality type (Ahmad, 2017).

Occupational stress is a reaction people show when they face a critical lack of information required to fulfill a task; therefore, the pressure of work keeps mounting on them (Liu & Hu, 2010; Noor & Ismail, 2016). Faculty of higher education, the true asset of any university, is now acknowledged as knowledge managers, not just deliverer of instruction. Increasing demands of the profession, including the roles of a researcher, advisor and counselor as well as an administrator, have opened new vistas of stress upon higher education employees. Social loafing cannot occur as modern appraisal techniques hold a faculty member accountable both as an individual and as a team member (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008). Keeping up with so many roles and rules is highly stressful.

The major stressors of the staff as indicated in research in an Australian university (Dua, 1994) were workload, job significance, work politics, interpersonal dealings at work, work conditions, and university reorganization. Cooper (cited in Dua, 1994) identified intrinsic job factors, poor working conditions, work overload, career development, poor working relations, and organizational culture as stressors. However, in case of teachers, stress is multiplied and becomes multifold due to other factors as well. There are many factors that contribute to increase the stress of teachers. These include student discipline and indifference, lack of personal support, lack of financial support, pressure of the reform movement, lack of social support, poor professional image, role ambiguity and so on (Frank, Reibel, Broderick, Cantrell & Metz, 2013; Sindhu, 2014).

According to Mondal, Shrestha and Bhaila (2011), the majority of teachers are concerned about poor working conditions, the increase in paperwork and the declining status of teachers as major factors leading to job dissatisfaction. Quraishi, Aziz and Siddiquah (2018) concluded that cognitive understanding of stress and stressors is vital to deal with stress at work. Beneficial responses for active stress management are positive reinterpretation and forward action resulting in growth, faith and religious beliefs, planning, suppressing competitiveness in oneself, developing better coping techniques, and seeking social support.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research was conducted to measure the difference in the perceptions of male and female teachers working at tertiary level regarding life stressors and professional stressors.

1.3 Hypotheses

Null hypotheses for the study are stated below.

1. There is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding lifestyle stressors.
2. There is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding professional stress resulting from relationships at work.
3. There is no difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding professional stress resulting from career development.
4. There is no difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding professional stress resulting from organizational structure.
5. There is no difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding professional stress resulting from organizational climate.

2. Methodology

The current study was descriptive in nature and quantitative approach was used to achieve the objectives of the study. The purpose of descriptive research is to accurately and systematically describe a phenomenon, population or situation. It was used to describe the characteristics of teachers teaching at tertiary level and to test the hypotheses regarding (McKenney & Reeves, 2018) the differences in the influence of lifestyle and professional stressors upon male and female teachers. The population of the study comprised all the teachers teaching in the social sciences department of four public sector universities of Islamabad. Cluster sampling technique was used to draw representative samples from the population. This sampling technique helped the researcher to divide the population into different groups and afterwards, clusters (50 teachers from

each university) were selected from the entire population. In this way, the researcher covered a large population at a lesser cost and in a short span of time (Gray, 2013) Thus, the sample target of 200 teachers from the social sciences departments of universities of Islamabad was reached.

2.1 Instrumentation

Keeping in view the nature and need of the study, the statements of David Fontana's Professional Life Stress inventory (Fontana, 1989) and the inventory used in UCU Health and Safety by John Bamford were adapted. The adapted questionnaire was found suitable for the study keeping in view its objectives and questions. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part A collected demographic information regarding gender, age and experience. Part B contained a list of stressors. Part C comprised two scales, 1) lifestyle stressors, and 2) professional stressors. The perceptions of male and female teachers were collected on a 5-point Likert type scale. The values ranged from 1-5 (5 for Strongly Agree, 4 for Agree, 3 for Neutral, 2 for Disagree and 1 for Strongly Disagree).

The questionnaire was reviewed by 7 experts for content validity and by 10 peers for face validity. In the light of their views, the researcher did some changes and improvements in the questionnaire. The final questionnaire was pilot tested for reliability and its value was found to be 0.85. Cronbach's alpha reliability of the final data obtained from the questionnaire was 0.89.

3. Data Collection Procedure

For data collection, the respondents were informed about the nature and objectives of the research. Every researcher faces many expected and unexpected hurdles while collecting the data; therefore, a permission letter was provided to the administrators of universities so that issues in data collection could be minimized. The respondents were informed about the nature and objectives of the research. The respondents were guaranteed the privacy of the results and questionnaires were circulated through personal visits. Approximately all the participants completed the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed keeping in view the objectives of the study. A quantitative approach was applied for the collection and interpretation of data. After completing data collection, data were transferred to SPSS Version 20.0 for statistical analysis by applying statistical tests including t-test. Mean and percentage were calculated for the demographic data, whereas t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to test research hypotheses.

Table 1
Demographic Details of the Respondents (N=200)

S. No.	Demographic Variable	F	%
1.	Gender		
	Male	100	50
	Female	100	50
2.	Age		
	23-34	41	20.5
	35-44	98	49
	45-54	44	22
	Above 54	17	8.5
3.	Experience		
	Less than 5 years	57	28.5
	6-15 years	89	44.5
	16-25 years	31	15.5
	26 years & above	23	11.5

Table 1 above represents the demographic characteristics of the respondents of the current study. There were 100 male and 100 female respondents. They were divided into four age groups. 41 respondents belonged to the age group 23-34 years, 98 respondents belonged to the age group 35-44 years, 44 respondents belonged to the age group 45-54 years, and 17 respondents belonged to the age group 54 years and above. Experience wise, 57 respondents' experience was less than 5 years, 89 respondents had experience between 6-15 years, 31 respondents' experience was between 16-25 years, and 23 respondents' experience was more than 26 years.

Table 2
Causes of Professional Stress (N=200)

Items	Yes	No
Job and Salary	54%	46%
Lifestyle Stressors	89%	11%
Relationships at Work	20%	80%
Career Development	82%	18%
Organizational Structure and Discipline	91%	09%
Organizational Climate	73%	27%

Table 2 shows that 54% of the respondents agreed that salary was one of the causes of professional stress. However, 89% of the respondents agreed with the fact that lifestyle stressors were the cause of professional life stress and 80% of them agreed that relationships at work were not a cause of professional life stress. 82% of the respondents were not satisfied with the opportunities available for progress and development. 91% of the respondents were not satisfied with the overall organizational structure and discipline. 73% of the teachers responded that in organizational climate communicating their issues with their seniors was not easy for them.

Table 3
t-test Measuring Differences in the Perceptions of Male and Female Faculty about Lifestyle Stressors

Gender	N	M	SD	t	Df	Sig
Male	100	3.85	14.21			
				6.743	98	.001
Female	100	4.62	15.06			

Table 3 above indicates that *t* value is significant. It means that there is a significant difference between male and female teachers in the perception of lifestyle stressors; female teachers face a significantly higher level of stress (Mean=4.62) as compared to male teachers (Mean=3.85).

A one-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to find out the difference in male and female faculty across various professional

life stressors. The results explained in Table 4 depict that there is a significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers about relationships at work (F =.854; p=.015), career development (F =.905; p=.028), organizational structure (F=2.87; p=.007), and organizational climate (F =1.47; p=.048). Therefore, all null hypotheses are rejected.

Table 4

One-Way Analysis of Variance of Professional Life Stressors by Academic Experience (N=200)

Professional Life Stressors		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Relationships at work	Between Groups	5884.42	3	76.71	.854	.015
	Within Groups	7264.152	192	85.23		
	Total	7244.222	195			
Career Development	Between Groups	5374.35	3	73.31	.905	.028
	Within Groups	769.50	196	27.74		
	Total	738.40	199			
Organization al Structure	Between Groups	4157.67	3	64.48	2.875	.007
	Within Groups	690.11	195	26.27		
	Total	667.22	199			
Organization al Climate	Between Groups	1903.57	3	43.63	1.475	.048
	Within Groups	347.07	196	18.63		
	Total	333.98	199			

5. Conclusions

1. There is a significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding lifestyle stressors.
2. There is a significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding professional stress resulting from relationships at work.

3. There is a significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding professional stress resulting from career development.
4. There is a significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding professional stress resulting from organizational structure.
5. There is a significant difference between the perceptions of professional life stressors of male and female teachers regarding professional stress resulting from organizational climate.

The present study concluded that both lifestyle stressors and professional stressors are meaningful for the faculty teaching in universities of Islamabad. However, professional stress is higher than lifestyle stress. Career development is the major stressor for the teachers teaching at tertiary level. Organizational climate and organizational discipline were also perceived as major source of stress for the teachers of tertiary level. Female teachers of tertiary level have higher levels of stress as compared to the male teachers. Relationships at work is least stressful for the faculty teaching in universities of Islamabad.

6. Discussion

Addressing teachers' stress at work place is still a significant challenge in educational institutions (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus & Davidson, 2013). The findings of the study revealed that professional stress is higher than lifestyle stress for teachers at tertiary level. A study conducted by Berebitsky and Ellis (2018) titled as "Influences on Personal and Professional Stress on Higher Education Faculty" described that stress has different dimensions and the personal and professional characteristics inculcate a variety of influences within those different dimensions. Moreover, higher educational administration must be concerned about the faculty's professional level of stress.

However, it was found that most of the teachers were not satisfied with the facilities and support available for their career development which is a major stressor for teachers. For better academic results, it is important to safeguard teachers from a constantly socially isolating environment and the threat of fear and accountability for every action (Aarnikoivu,

Nokkala, Siekkinen, Kuoppala, & Pekkola, 2019; Cooper, 2018). The climate and structure of organization were the causes of performance, individual development, interpersonal associations and organizational environment (Yordy, 2018). Noor and Ismail (2016, p.01) described that "teaching has become a stressful occupation."

The findings revealed that and female teachers of tertiary level experience higher levels of stress as compared to male teachers. This finding is similar to the finding of the study "Faculty Challenges and Barriers for Research and Publication in Tajik Higher Education" conducted by Kataeva and DeYoung (2018). The study found that despite a number of state gender-equity policies, the issues of female participation remain prominent at the university level and it creates job stress. However, either its demographic or cultural marginalization of women, university teaching opportunities and female faculty status have a negative impact. According to Eddy and Gaston-Gayles (2008) and Ahmad (2017), women face additional issues regarding adjustment in their academic life. This may require investment in developing interventions and coaching in order to guide individuals. Educators' mindfulness is one aspect of socio-emotional competence that may protect them from experiencing burnout and its negative consequences (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris & Katz, 2013). Self-regulation of attention, self-awareness, and self-compassion are three key components of mindfulness (Roeser et al., 2013).

Organizational climate and discipline were also perceived as major sources of stress for teachers at tertiary level. Le Fevre, Matheny and Kolt (2003) believed that the key contribution in this regard is to help employees manage stress in the workplace experience as eustress. Employees should be given support to make their environment positive. Teachers should know the different methods of how to become a good teacher by controlling their stress (Donovan, 2018). One of the popular techniques adopted at a larger scale is to obtain and establish a good healthy body with the help of proper workout, healthy meals and sound sleep. Stress must be kept at an appropriate level. It requires an appropriate relationship between tension and relaxation (Tabeleão, Tomasi

& Neves, 2011). This balance can be achieved by detaching some burdens or taking new ones and by improving the abilities to cope with stress.

According to Iqbal and Kokash (2011), quite a few recent studies reported that faculty at university level is among the occupational group that is most stressed. The study suggested that stress should be minimized through regular support and communication with faculty. However, top university management and administration should focus on reducing faculty stress particularly regarding student interaction and professional identity.

Relationship management is an effective strategy against stressors; therefore, it should be introduced and promoted (Rubeena, 2018). It has a positive effect on teachers' self-esteem as well and strengthens the collegial bond among them (Demsar & Zabukovec, 2009). Teacher effectiveness suggests that when teachers sustain an emotionally positive classroom climate and effectively manage student behavior, students demonstrate high engagement in teaching and learning (Li Grining et al., 2010). Moreover, teachers who experience high levels of work stress, low levels of confidence in behavior management, and little control in the classroom are less likely to engage in responsive caregiving practices. Teachers with higher levels of efficacy engage in more nurturing caregiving practices (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

For organizational development measures, Treven (2005) recommended the application of control strategies over factors causing stress; he suggested a variety of programs for employees to deal with stress, which include workshops on stress management and relaxing techniques. Organizational behavior researchers also recommended that creating a good atmosphere in the organization and the planning and development of a career strategy motivates employees (Arif, Ijaz & Yousaf, 2017; Vijayashree & Mund, 2011).

7. Recommendations of the Study

Facilities such as equal training opportunities, quality of training, guidance and counseling can be provided to teachers for their professional development, while agencies and organizations can improve their communication and overall management. Teacher stress can be removed

by developing realistic goals, the delegation of authority, giving teachers responsibility as well as self-examination or self-assessment by teachers can help to come out of the pressure, easily.

Tertiary teachers remain under pressure because of the lack of staff cooperation and the lack of friendly colleagues who are not willing to help and guide each other, in any case, if there is a question of a conflict between teachers and students or between teachers themselves, between teachers and administrators, and if there is no way to resolve these issues then lower conflict resolution creates stress for teachers. The appropriate person in charge should organize regular meetings to understand the problems with teacher confrontation. There should be a friendly environment; teaching fellows have the responsibility to guide each other in order to reduce the stress level for teachers, which occurs when there are few solutions or no guidance.

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