

## IDENTIFYING WORK STRESS FACTORS AMONG FACULTY OF HIGHER ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS IN OMAN

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### ABSTRACT:

The present paper discusses the results of a study which was done to investigate some new factors leading to work stress among teaching faculty of higher education institutes in Oman. Faculties from both public and private institutes participated in this study. The main five factors namely Work Environment, Heavy Use of Information Technologies, Mobile Phone misuse by students, Teaching Performance and Time Pressure were identified as sources of work stress in this study. The responses confirmed those factors as sources of stress at their work. The weighted mean and standard deviation (SD) are reported in this paper.

**Keywords:** Stress factors, Work stress, Job burnout

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## **1. Introduction:**

Numerous surveys and studies confirm that occupational stress has been steadily increased over the past few decades. The United Nations Report (1992) labelled job stress “The 20th Century Disease”.

Stress is a complex term to describe precisely. It is highly individualist in nature. It is individual’s feelings of tensions or exhaustion in their daily life due to work overload or excessively demanding duties. The severity of job stress depends on the volume of work demands and individual’s sense of control. The stress may result in job-burnout that brings negative consequences to both individuals as well as the organization.

Academic stress has been reported all over the world. Teaching profession was earlier viewed as a ‘low stressful occupation’ because of regular job, light workloads, flexibility, fixed job responsibilities and other attractions such as foreign trips for conferences and study leaves for higher study and research. However, some recent studies reported that University faculty is among the most stressed occupational group. Research evidences have shown that there is high stress prevailing among teachers of higher educational institutions. Globalization of higher education also forces Universities and higher education institutes to become internationally competitive. According to Ravichandran and Rajendran (2007), “Stress has become a major dilemma amongst teachers due to quick changes in education system during 1980-1990”. Adnan and Husam (2011) reported, “University faculty tend to experience higher than normal levels of stress and these high levels of stress have increased over the last 6 years”. Gmelch et al. (1986) once wrote, “We, as academicians and researchers, willingly study other groups, yet we seldom take time to look at our own profession”.

Therefore, it is a major area of interest for educationists/researchers throughout the world to find out the factors affecting stress. In developed countries like in USA, UK, Australia, sufficient research has been done in the area of work stress. A study conducted in USA, observed 26 occupations and furnished that teaching was one of the most stressful occupation (Johnson, 2006). There is a lack of information about academic stress specifically in developing and underdeveloped world. Keeping this in mind the present study focuses on occupational stress on faculty members of higher educational institutes in Oman. Teaching staff from various institutes

of higher education participated and responded a questionnaire uploaded in Google Docs. Total 45 faculty members responded the questionnaire.

## **2. Literature Review:**

Gmelch et al. (1986) conducted a national study to investigate identifiable patterns of faculty stress. They selected a sample of 80 doctorate-granting institutions where 1,920 professors were selected and stratified by academic rank and Biglan's academic discipline model. Factor analysis reveals uniqueness and a multidimensionality of stress in academics. Five factors namely, reward and recognition, time constraints, departmental influence, professional identity, and student interaction have been used for study. Two of the five factors namely, time constraints and workplace influence appear in studies of stress in other occupations. However, the other three factors reward and recognition, professional identity, and student interaction are newly identified stressors appearing to be unique to academe.

Cartwright and Cooper (2002) recently developed the ASSET (An Organisational Stress Screening Tool) model to measure an employee's potential exposure to stress and to recognise additional factors such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, which serve to either exacerbate or moderate the stress levels experienced at work.

Anthony H. Winefield et al. (2002) conducted a national survey of occupational stress in Australian university staff. The survey was conducted in late 2000. Responses were received from 8732 staff members of 17 participating Australian universities (a 25% response rate). The result of this huge survey revealed that Australian university staffs, particularly academic staff, are highly stressed. Diminishing resources, increased teaching loads and student/staff ratios, pressure to attract external funds, job insecurity, poor management and a lack of recognition and reward are some of the key factors driving the high level of stress.

Coetzee and Rothmann (2005) conducted a study to assess the indicators and moderators of occupational stress at a higher education institution in South Africa, as well as differences based on language and years of experience at the institution. Workload, control, work relationships and pay and benefits were the major occupational stressors in the institution.

Pamela A. Jacobs et al. (2007) conducted a secondary analysis of data from staff in 13 higher education institutions in the UK to examine the relationship between stress levels, organizational commitment, health, and performance. The authors found that stressors had a negative linear relationship with all the performance measures used. However, this relationship was also influenced by physical health, psychological well-being, and organizational commitment, and by the measure of performance used.

In their study, N. Barkhuizen and S. Rothmann (2008) identified the indicators of occupational stress for academic staff in South African higher education institutions, to analyse the differences between the occupational stress of different demographic groups, and to investigate whether occupational stressors predict ill health and a lack of organisational commitment of academics in higher education institutions. Two stressors, namely, overload and work-life balance contributed significantly to ill health of academics. Four occupational stressors, overload, job control, resources and communication, and job characteristics contributed significantly to the commitment of academics to their institutions.

The study done by Archibong et al. (2010) identified stress source among university academic staff in Nigeria with regards to 4 occupation-related areas- interpersonal relationships, research, teaching and career development. They also determined the gender difference in stress level of academic in the study variables. Their sample consists of 279 (168 males and 111 females) academic staff. Overall result of the study showed that career development is the greatest source of stress to academic staff. The results also indicated that male and female academic differed in perceived stress level in teaching.

Adnan Iqbal and Husam Kokash (2011) conducted a study to explore the faculty perception towards occupational stress in a private university in Riyadh city, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They collected the data from five departments. The result of the study suggested that the top management and University Administration should focus their attention on faculty stress, especially on two areas (student Interactions and Professional Identity) to reduce the stress among the faculty members.

Tony Jreige (2011) explored the difference in stress factors and levels experienced by faculty members in Lebanon according to their gender. The result of study showed that female faculty

members have higher levels of stress than their male colleagues. The main differences in the perception of stressors were extra activities and illness among women, and loans among males.

Daniela Veronica (2011) investigated the relationship between stress and job satisfaction among Romanian academics. Stress was indicated by the levels of depression and anxiety. 70 university teachers participated in the study. The results indicated that there is a negative correlation between stress and job satisfaction and academics with tenure have substantially greater job satisfaction than their colleagues without tenure.

Manvel Raj et al. (2012) considered fifteen Chennai based self-financing Engineering Colleges with 1200-1800 students. They analysed both the external and internal causes of teacher's stress (stressors). They recommended their results to the college psychologist in the prevention and coping with the professional stress.

Syed Gohar et al. (2012) investigated the contribution of various role stressors to stress and burnout in a public sector university of Pakistan. A sample of 80 faculty members from a university in Pakistan completed a structured questionnaire. Results showed that role ambiguity is one of the organizational role stressors having the biggest impact on two dimensions of stress and one dimension of burnout among the faculty. The other significant organizational role stressors include role stagnation, inter-role distance, self role distance, resource inadequacy, role conflict and role overload.

Reddy and Poornima (2012) conducted a study to investigate the occupational stress and the professional burnout of South Indian University teachers. The sample of the study included 9 state universities from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The results of the study revealed that majority (74%) of the university teachers are experiencing moderate and high levels of occupational stress and 86% of teachers have professional burnout.

Owais Mufti et al. (2012) conducted a study to identify the stressors causing stress in the faculty members of public and private sector universities of Khyber PaktunKhwa, Pakistan. They selected 18 (11 were public and 7 were private universities) offering business degrees in KP. A sample of 729 was taken and total 9 stress factors have been identified and analysed. Stressors identified were; Work Load, Reward, Student/faculty interaction, Collegial/Social interaction,

Self Efficacy, Procedural Justice, Distributive Justice, Leadership Style and Organizational Politics. These stressors were pointed as the major causes of stress by faculty of 18 universities.

Senthil Kumar et al. (2013) performed the same research in the field of engineering and technology. Their study sets out to investigate various causes of work stress among 478 engineering faculty members of 58 self-financing engineering and technology colleges and four deemed universities in the Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu. The results of the study showed a significant association among gender, type of institution, location of the college, current working status and average number of working hours with causes of stress.

### **3. Research Methodology:**

**3.1 The Sample of the Study:** The sample for the study includes the academic staff of higher education institutions in Oman from different public and private institutions consisting both male and female participants.

**3.2 The Time of study:** The research was done during June to August 2014.

**3.3 Research Instrument:** This research work was done using the survey method which is a type of descriptive research. A questionnaire was used as a research tool. It consists of a five point rating scale to collect the data about the work stress on faculties of higher education institutes. The questionnaire was made available online and was sent to various faculties of Universities and Colleges in Oman. A total of 23 items were carefully included in this rating scale. Teachers were required to respond on a five point Likert scale. The preliminary concept about the phenomenon and selection of variables causing work stress have been developed from the literature review, experiences of teachers and informal interactions with some of the faculty members of higher education academic institutions. The questions were classified into 5 categories.

**3.4 Reliability of instrument:** Reliability of the data is needed in any research for authenticity. In order to find the reliability of the items used in the instrument, Cronbach's alpha test was conducted on the 23 items in the questionnaire where dependent variable work stress is distributed on a 5 point likert scale. The Cronbach Alpha showed that the reliability of the scale was 0.71 for all 23 items which is significantly suitable for this study.

#### **4. Results and Discussion:**

Descriptive statistics was used to answer the questions of the study. To analyse the data, responses were converted into numerical scale. As it was a five point scale, the range of scores would be from 5 to 1. The data analysis included the calculation of the weighted mean for each statement. The perception of teachers on factors of work stress was considered positive or negative depending on how much the average score lied near or far from 5.

The survey gathered basic demographic information as well as participants' responses. Total 45 participants completed the survey online. Male were 33 and female were 12. The respondents from public institutes were 30 and from private institutes were 15. The average teaching experience of respondents was 14 years. It shows that experienced faculty members responded the questionnaire. One incomplete response has been excluded in final calculations. The following are the results of the study:

##### **Stress due to work environment:**

This variable contains total 4 items to know the effect of work environment leading to stress on faculties. The idea was to discover how often faculties feel their work stressful (frequency), which type of work gives more stress (nature of work) and what are the effects of their timing and scheduling (job demand) on their work stress. The following results are found:

34% reported that they often have stress, where as 60% reported that they feel stressed sometimes during their work. However, no one replied that there is no work pressure (0% response). The weighted mean of this question is 2.73 which show the existence of work pressure on more than 50% of time. The SD of this item is 2.06.

More than half of the respondents (52%) reported the stress during other non- teaching assignments. 27% feels stress during examination and evaluation period. As far as teaching is concerned, no faculty reported any stress on them. It clearly shows that the teaching faculty enjoy their teaching work and do not feel any stress during teaching. The weighted mean of this question is 2.68 that mean faculties feel stressful while doing non-teaching assignments. The SD of this item is 2.86.

Sometimes, faculties have been given more responsibilities without much authority. 30% respondents admit that they feel moderate stress when they have been given more responsibilities but less authority. 25% reported a source of little stress. The weighted mean of this question is 2.48 and confirm that giving more responsibilities but less authority is a source of stress during their work. The SD of this item is 3.38.

In some of the institutes, there is flexible office timing and irregular schedule according to the classes and other job related work. When asked is this a source of stress? Here, half of the respondents (50%) supported this flexibility of work environment and reported not a source of stress. For 30%, it is a source of little stress. Only 15% feels this as a source of stress. The weighted mean is 1.91 which shows this factor can be considered as one of the sources of stress. Also there is no enough evidence to negate this aspect. The SD of this item is 3.59.

#### **Stress due to heavy use of Information Technologies:**

This variable contains total 6 items to investigate the work stress due to increasing use of Information technology in every aspect of their work. Here 47% respondents do not feel any stress due to heavy use of Information technologies, but 40% reported moderate to little stress and remaining (13%) confirmed it a source of stress. The weighted mean of this item is 1.91 which means this factor is also responsible for stress among faculties at their work place. The SD of this item is 3.37.

It has been observed that most of the institutes deploy automatic system of recording employees' attendance using Biometric attendance system. Faculties are rushing to mark their attendance on time otherwise they will be marked late/absent. Teaching staff should focus more on teaching and should feel more relaxed before reaching to the class. For this item, the respondents were divided equally, 50% feel no stress but for 50%, it is one of the stress factors. Out of 50%, 18% reported much stress due to strict office attendance system. Weighted mean and SD of this are 1.98 and 3.96 respectively.

Because of applying Information technologies as a teaching aid, faculty has to prepare softcopy of their presentation and notes. It requires additional time and afford and also proficiency in software like Microsoft office. For 50% of the faculties it is not a source of stress but for rest of the faculties (50%), it is a source of stress. That means this point cannot be neglected while



allocating the teaching load to the faculties. In smart class rooms, LCD projectors are installed for displaying power point slides. Sometimes it may happen that the teacher has made the full presentation and when he/she enters into the class room, the LCD projector is not working. This point has been explored as a source of stress. However, no respondent considered it a source of extreme stress but 78% confirmed this as a source of little to moderate stress. Only 22% reported not a source of stress. The weighted average of this item was 2.27 which show that once a teacher prepares a good presentation and LCD projector is not responding, he/she feels stressed and this factor should be considered a source of stress while teaching with advanced Information technologies. The SD of this item is 2.92.

Most of the Institutes now demand a softcopy of all types of examination question papers and their marking scheme. Even some of them have started online submission of those documents. In e-learning environment, the teacher has to upload the feedbacks and comments to the students. All this heavy use of Computers and Internet may lead an extra burden to teaching faculties. Here only 30% responded that they do not have any stress on this but remaining (70%) reported this factor as a source of stress. The weighted mean 2.18 confirms this as a source of stress. The SD of this item is 2.96.

Today, most of the organizations are using paper less working environment where all communications are done online. That means everyone has to check e-mails and Internet time to time to read and respond. This is not only wastage of time; it is also giving more strains on eyes and mind. In this study, 78% respondents confirm this as a source of stress. Only 22% reported not a source of stress. The weighted mean of this item is 2.34 which confirm this heavy use of Information technologies as a source of stress. The SD of this item is 2.82.

### **Mobile Phone misuse by students:**

There is growing use of mobile phones even by the students and faculties are facing difficulties and distractions because of them (Shrivastava and Shrivastava, 2014). There are 4 items regarding this. Only 18% of faculties realized that there is no stress due to mobile phone usage by the students. Others (more than 80%) clearly confirmed the stress during teaching when students use their mobile phones. The weighted mean is 2.86 and there is no doubt that this is one of the major sources of stress in today's work environment. The SD of this item is 3.41.

The mobile phones are also responsible for lack of concentration among students and teaching faculty is not comfortable in this situation and a sense of irritation is felt which subsequently leads to stress. A majority of responses (85%) and a good value of weighted mean (2.89) confirm this as a major source of stress on faculty members. The SD of this item is 3.04. Sometimes, students are sending missed calls to other students to disturb the class and it is also recognized a source of stress. Majority of respondents felt this as a big source of stress. Only 20% do not feel any stress but 80% accepted this as a source of stress. The weighted mean of this item is 2.91. This means, most of the faculties feel stressed in this type of unnecessary and disturbing mobile communication. The SD of this item is 3.70.

It has been observed that students got the mobile numbers and email address of their faculties and they do not feel any hesitation in sending sms and mails to them at any time even for some non-academic purposes. Normally, faculties do not like this communication in their private time and also in their busy time. However, 43% respondents do not find any stress due to this communication, but rest (57%) reported feeling of stress when they get unwanted sms and emails. The weighted mean and SD of this item are 2.18 and 4.08 respectively.

### **Teaching Performance:**

The tension and stress have been associated with teaching faculties because of their teaching performance. This section has 5 items to explore the relationship between teaching performance and stress.

The poor performance of students in examination certainly gives stress on teaching faculty. This factor is confirmed by the respondents. A large percentage (90%) of faculties admitted that it is a source of stress on them. Out of 90% respondents, 30% feels moderate level of stress and 27% identified this factor as a source of much stress. 13% recognized this as a source of extreme stress. Only 9% reported that students' poor performance is not a source of stress at all. The weighted mean is 3.09 and it confirms a big source of stress. The SD of this item is 3.05.

The teaching faculties feel uncomfortable and sometimes much stressed when they have been given subjects other than their choices. They face this phenomenon very often during subjects' assignments. 96% respondents reported that giving a subject to teach for which they are not expert/comfortable is a big source of stress. Out of 96% respondents, 34% reported moderate

level of stress and 34% reported much level of stress. The weighted mean of this item is 3.11 that show a clear acceptance from faculties that this is a big factor of stress. The SD of this item is 3.01.

In some institutes, the academic work (teaching, setting exams and marking) is evaluated by other peers and external experts. This evaluation and remarks creates stress on faculty members. Only 29.5% faculties responded that there is no stress on them regarding this evaluation. For 34%, it is a source of little stress and 30% reported that it is a source of moderate stress. The weighted mean is 2.14 which show that this factor is a source of moderate stress. The SD of this item is 2.97. Faculties are facing a big challenge to teaching to inadequately prepare or not interested students. This is also a source of stress. Only 6% faculties reported no stress due to this reason but the remaining (94%) identified this factor as a source of stress. 13% of them reported this factor as a source of extreme stress. The weighted mean is 3.02 and it clearly confirms this as a source of stress. The SD of this item is 3.43.

It has been observed that faculties are not receiving insufficient recognition for good teaching performance. The improper recognition has been a source of stress in many occupations. Only 13% did not consider this a source of stress but the remaining 87% accepted this factor a valid source of stress. In this, 22% each recognized this factor as a source of moderate and much stress respectively. The weighted mean of 2.77 supported the views of faculties in accepting this factor as a source of stress. The SD of this item is 3.24.

### **Time Pressure:**

Working under time pressure is a natural cause of stress. Strict deadlines leads to unpleasant tension which leads to work stress. In this section 4 items were included for checking the factors responsible for work stress. The first and basic factor of time pressure is to complete the course and all course related work in due time. A clear majority of respondents (82%) admitted that strict time lines for completing all teaching related work are stressful. The weighted mean is 2.52 which mean this factor is source of stress. The SD of this item is 2.98. The other problem is continuous teaching hours and less relaxation. 94% respondents feel stress in this situation. Out of 94%, 11% identify extreme stress in this situation. The weighted mean is 2.95 with SD value 3.16 which supports that continuous teaching is a source of stress. Sometimes, faculties have to

complete their work (making notes, assignment checking etc.) in their private time or after college timing. To identify this factor as a source of stress, 80% respondents confirm that they feel stress in doing so. The weighted mean of this item is 2.61 and it is enough evidence to support that completing academic work in extra time is a source of stress. The SD of this item is 3.17.

Most of the faculties complain that they want to do more research work but unable to do their research and publication work on time due to more workload and shortage of time. This item was heavily supported by respondents with a weighted mean of 3.14. The SD of this item is 2.60. Only 6% reported that this is not a source of stress. The rest 94% recognized this factor as a big source of stress. 22% of 94% marked this as a source of much stress where as 11% rated this as a source of extreme source of stress.

### **Conclusion and future scope of work:**

Occupational stress and its effect have been among the most popular topics in research literature. However, investigating its effect on teaching faculty of higher academic institute is relatively new area of study. This paper focuses on identifying various causes of work stress on teaching faculty of higher education in Oman. The changing working environment and heavy use of Information technology specially use of mobile phones are new source of work stress for the teaching faculties. Evaluation of teaching performance and time pressure specially the shortage of time and more work load for doing research work are also causes of work stress. This paper presented the responses their weighted mean and standard deviation. Further an in-depth analysis is required that will be presented in the next paper.

### **Acknowledgement**

Authors acknowledge the support of Dr. Manish Shrivastava, Assistant Professor in Middle East College, Muscat for distributing and collecting the data.

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