

Occupational Stress of Academic Staff in Higher Education: A General Observation

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Abstract

“Every stress leaves an indelible scar, and the organism pays for its survival after a stressful situation by becoming a little older.”. Dr.Hans Salye

The education sector continues to experience significant changes. This includes restructuring, use of short-term contracts, external scrutiny and accountability, and major reductions in funding. Occupational stress in higher education institutions have also increased and it is an unavoidable part of our activities at work.

Occupational stress is really the body's reaction to what are called stressors. Under stress the body 'gears up' and response to situations to protect itself. The study is carried out using a stratified random sample of all categories of Academic staff from universities and colleges. The study shows that the most significant source of stress for all higher education staff in job insecurity. In comparison to the normative data, staff also stated significantly higher levels of stress relating to work relationships, control, and resources and communication, and significantly lower levels of commitment both from and to their organization. However, they also described significantly lower levels of stress relating to work-life balance, overload and job overall and lower levels of physical ill- health.

Keywords: Job stress, Academic staff, HR policies, Lists of stress.

Introduction

“And so off I go, into a new career where the workload is probably just as heavy, but where I hope I will not be stressed and will not have to stress anyone else into working.”

Stress is difficult to define precisely. The concept of stress was first introduced in the life sciences by Selye Hans in 1936. It was derived from the Latin word 'stringere'; it meant the experience of physical hardship, starvation, torture and pain. Selye Hans, 1936 defined stress as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand placed upon it”. Further, stress was defined as “any external event or internal drive which threatens to upset the organismic equilibrium.

Teaching is no longer merely hard work; it has become a highly stressful profession. The nature and new teaching methodologies are evolving rapidly. This change makes more demanding academic staff roles and responsibilities in an effective way and inherently difficult.

Occupational stress can be defined as the “harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements if the job do not match the capabilities, resources or need of the worker” (Sauter and Muphy,1999).

Main causes of stress in academic staff are their multiple academic and administrative roles assigned to them. It will not affect the performance of work but also affect health of faculty members in the form of heart attack migraine.(Yahaya, et.al 2010)

The present paper expands reasons of academic occupational stress and suggestions for reducing occupational stress.

Objectives

The following objectives are frame for the study:

- To study the level of occupational stress in academic staff.
- To study causes and impact of occupational stress on academic staff.
- To study remedies to reduce academic staff occupational stress in higher education.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data.

- Primary data: The primary data for this research is collected through survey method using a well-structured.
- Secondary data: The secondary data for this research is collected through books, journals, research studies, internet sources, magazines.

Causes and Impact of Occupational Stress on Academic Staff in Higher Education

- **Hectic schedule:** Continuous classes and long administrative work don't allow the faculty members to relax and time for their families. This hectic schedule makes professors frustrated.
- **Non Academic Activities:** Duties apart from academic work are a cause of stress in number of faculty members interviewed higher educational institutions. A professor stated that invigilation duties and similar work hindering their interest in academic work.
- **Job Insecurity:** Several faculty members stated that so many members are kept on contractual basis they always in a fear that when the contract will be completed, Management will renew the contract or not.
- **Poor leadership and management:** Major sources of stress reported by all groups are the lack, or limited nature, of staff consultation by management. Half of the groups expressed the view that decisions made by management are based too heavily on corporate and financial considerations, with little consideration of teaching, research and staff interests and needs. Such decision-making has contributed to staff distrust of senior management.
- **Lack of promotion, reward and recognition:** one of the groups identify that the limited opportunities for promotion and high level of competition within their work- place, as a source of stress. Management doesn't provide better reward for good work by providing proper benefits and remuneration.
- **Unnecessary rules and regulations:** Another important factor for occupational stress found in study is too many rules and regulations for the staff members in higher education and it make them uncomfortable in working hours.
- **Repetitive curriculum:** Most of Academic staff says that repetitive curriculum and no change in course of time make them uninteresting.
- **Non Cooperative Colleagues:** Another factor we found in our study is "non cooperative colleagues". Many members say that when their colleagues are not cooperative they feel exhausted and alone.

- Impact of Work-related occupational Stress on Academic Staff in Higher Education Research is demonstrated that work-related stress can have a wide-ranging negative impact on the individual. Stress is observed at several different levels: colleagues
- Cognitive (e.g. poorer quality decision making, lower levels of creativity, impaired memory); · Behavioral (e.g. absenteeism, poor time management, substance abuse, irritability); · Physical (e.g. headaches, digestive disorders, cardiovascular disease); · Psychological (e.g. depression, anxiety, low self-esteem).

Remedies to Reduce Academic Occupational Stress in Higher Education

- **Increase staff consultation and transparency of management:**-The groups highlighted the need for open and honest consultation of staff by management, particularly in regard to proposed organizational changes. Management should inform staff about the reasons, processes and anticipated benefits of organizational change in a timely manner, and consider the realistic impact of changes on staff. Staff should also support that organizational change processes be designed with the clear aim of facilitating teaching and research. Greater transparency of decision making and general openness of management should be clear. A greater transparency of management should be in decision making. It can reduce academic occupational stress.
- **Improve communication:**- Higher education sector should be develop and improve two-way communication processes between staff and various management departments units. A healthy communication in higher education can develop good relationship between staff and management .It can reduce occupational stress among Academic staff.
- **Develop management skills:**-One-third of all groups say that formal training should in leadership skills, human resources management and communication skills for academic staff. Staff emphasized that management should to provide a stronger direction and vision at both the departmental and university level. Management should be more accountable by introducing regular evaluation of management driven changes and initiatives, and communicating the outcome of such evaluations to staff. Management can improve their management skills by regular training and understanding. It helps Academic staff to reduce their occupational academic stress
- **Provide greater job security:**-One third of the group says that the higher education sector should adopt strategies and processes to provide Academic staff with greater job security. In higher education which members are keep on contract basis they always in fear about job insecurity so management should be renew the contract on time. Contractual basis faculty members will give their high potential in academic activities if they will not in job insecurity.
- **Flexible timing:** Repetitive classes and long working hours of faculty members make them exhausted. If management gives flexible working hours to academic staff they will do their work with more energy. Many leaves are not approved by management A long breaks should be provide by management to academic staff after some point of time so they can spend their time with family members and friends to overcome their academic stress.
- **Better HR Policies:** Change in HR Policies motivates teachers to get energy and use these inputs towards their work. The policies of educational institutional towards a student centric educational model and not on a Bureaucratic or corporate models of education. Better HR policies must be proper planned so that the work load does not come on a single individual. Clear hierarchy and defined roles

must be implemented so that they could perform their duty freely and independently and reduce their occupational stress

- **Career Growth:** If academic staff are not getting promotion and career opportunities they can't happy with their current job and always try to go another job. Career clarity and good career growth plan from management help to faculty members to remain engaged in their work and can reduce their academic -.
- **Rewards:** Reward is another important factor to reduce work stress when academic staff get proper rewards and recognition from the employers, they will not get stress out. Management should provide rewards for good work by providing proper benefits and remuneration they motivate faculty members .Management can provide good facilities which also motivate academic staff.

Conclusion:-

- Stress is very common in day to day life. Now a day's it's become our part of life. We can overcome stress but we cannot avoid stress. The objective of the study is to study the reasons for academic stress. These qualitative results of this research highlight the pertinent need to address the issue of occupational stress within educational sector.
- This study identifies the underlying causes of occupational stress in current teaching –learning milieu in India. The Top management of education Sector must use these inputs to develop a preventive strategy to mitigate the stress level and maximize the teacher's engagement. This paper explores few variables to reduce occupational stress: (a) flexible timing (b) Better HR policies (c) long breaks (d) teaching method.
- This study clearly suggests that occupational stress is having a debilitating impact on the personal and professional. The second quantitative phase of this research provide a prime opportunity for government, higher education sector management, and tertiary education unions to gain a detailed understanding of the causes of occupational stress and Design and implement strategies to reduce occupational stress.

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