

Teaching: A Stressful Profession

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In the whole educational process there are many factors, which separately or collectively determine the quality of education. The teacher is the most significant factor responsible for the reformation, success and advancement of educational programs. Teachers play an essential role in the teaching and learning process upon their proficiency and competence and the quality of education depends. But now a day teaching profession has become a very stressfull profession. Teacher's stress has also been recognised by the court. In 1999 Secondary school teacher Muriel Benson won \$47,000 in compensation for stress. Stress is a part of everyone's life. Depending on the level of stress, it may affect people's health and lives. Stress in the workplace may come from different sources. They typically spend long hours at work, and thus have less time for other things. Stressed teachers may feel emotionally taxed and thus produce nominally. Stress may deteriorate social and family relationships and ultimately may take a toll on their health.

In a survey of head teachers by the National Association of Head Teachers (N A H T), U.S.A, in May 2000, 40 % of respondents reported having visited their doctor with a stress-related problem in the previous year. 20% considered that they drank too much and 15% believed they were alcoholics. 25% suffered from serious stress related health problems including hypertension, insomnia, depression and gastrointestinal disorders. Cary Cooper, BUPA professor of organizational psychology and health at the University of Manchester's Institute of Science and Technology, says teaching is not intrinsically stressful in the same way as the job of a bomb disposal officer. But teaching in most countries at this moment can be very stressful. Teacher stress is now firmly on the political agenda, and representations of the nature of stress have become unhelpfully polarised between unions and employers, the former seeing stress as organisational and the latter as an individual issue.

It is very clear that teachers' stress is no different to stress for anyone else. Stress can be defined as: 'The reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them.' Just like anyone else, teachers get stressed when they feel they are not coping with their workload or other pressures of the job. There are many studies conducted in the area of teacher's stress. Majority of studies reveal that teaching is indeed a stressfull profession. Leung, Mark, Chui, Chiang and Lee (2009) found in their study that the majority of teachers (75.3 percent) reported fair

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to very low satisfaction with the teaching career & 82 percent of them felt unaccountably tired or exhausted.

In Klassen's study (2010) female teachers reported significantly higher levels of stress from workload and student misbehaviour. In another study, Klassen and Chiu (2010) investigated that female teachers had greater workload stress, greater classroom stress from student behaviours, and lower classroom management self-efficacy. Teachers with greater workload stress had greater classroom management and self-efficacy, whereas teachers with greater classroom stress had lower self-efficacy and lower job satisfaction.

Torres, Lawver and Lambert (2009) said that time-related job tasks were found to be a source of stress in teachers, and "excessive paperwork" was identified as the highest stressor.

On the basis of the above and many other studies, it is found that there are some particular features in teacher's stress. Some common causes of teacher stress are:

- Long working hours
- Excessive workload
- Pressures of school inspections
- Providing cover for teacher shortages and absences
- Poor management
- Disruptive pupil behaviour
- Unnecessary bureaucracy
- Low self esteem
- Criticism by politicians and media

According to many counselors who help the teachers to solve and cope with their problems, mostly teachers complain about the workload, working hour, problems with their managers, head teachers, department heads etc. Many teachers complain about long working hours, working a lot at home and at weekends. They find it hard to wind down and relax and recuperate. These situations produce anxiety and depression within them. If the situation does not improve, teachers then get physical symptoms and start going off sick. Researches have suggested that a number of stressors are intrinsic to teaching. In the Travers & Cooper (1997) study workload and long working hours emerged as particular issues for English teachers as opposed to colleagues in France. When Travers & Cooper (1997) questioned British teachers across all educational sectors high workload, poor status and poor pay emerged as three of the seven major sources of stress - the others being systemic in origin. These situations are not only for Britain, but very common in other countries also. The irregular workload throughout the year caused pressures on teachers. In primary schools, most teachers have no time outside the classroom to prepare and plan their work. A factor related to workload is role overload, which takes place when an employee has to cope with a number of competing roles within

their job. Kokkinos, Constantinos and Davazoglou (2009) conducted a study to examine the sources of job stress in a national sample of 373 Greek special education teachers. The participants in general considered their job moderately stressful, they felt stressed by issues concerning the special needs child, such as the child's progress, safety, and social development. It was found that special educational curriculum was the most important predictor of job stress, followed by the social and academic progress of children.

There are many factors that are not intrinsic to the nature of teaching, but rather dependent on the climate of the educational institution or the wider context of education including the political domain that also affects teacher's stress level. Travers & Cooper (1997) found that teachers named lack of government support, lack of information about changes, constant change and the demands of the National Curriculum as the greatest sources of stress.

Many teachers complain that the school inspection process is stressful from beginning to end. The build-up to an inspection, the visits themselves and the feedback can all pile on pressure. In one of the most extreme examples, a primary school teacher in U.K took her own life in January 2000 due to the extreme stressful condition during school inspection. The teacher, with 36 years' experience, left a suicide note, which read: 'I am finding the stress of my job too much. The pace of work and the long days are more than I can do.' The inquest revealed, however, there were also stresses in the teacher's home life.

All these incidents are enough for one to think that what steps should be taken to help teachers. At least some action is needed now to tackle stress in teaching. Some initiatives should be taken to develop ideas for cutting workload. In U.K, a report, commissioned by the Government from the School Teachers' Review Body and published in May 2002, recommends reducing teachers' workload in England and Wales to an average 45 hours a week within four years. To overcome teacher's workload, extra support including computer or lap top facilities for every teacher, more support staff, guaranteed teacher time for lesson planning and marking, and professional help for head teachers, are helpful. The action plan should:

- remove excessive tasks from teachers and heads.
- improve teachers' 'ownership' of their work and their self esteem.
- make better use of support staff.
- use IT to ease the load .
- help schools redesign the working day to improve efficiency .
- improve the way government and its agencies bring in change .

There is a facility in western countries that provides advices from qualified counselors through telephone. This type of service is very helpful for teachers who can discuss work or personal problems, large or small. In U.S.A there is a website

that offers general advice, including a stress assessment quiz for teachers and online counseling, at www.teachersupport.info. This type of facility should be started in our country also.

Generally many stresses can be changed, eliminated, or minimized. Here are some tips that can reduce the stress of teachers:

- They should be aware of their own reactions to stress.
- Reinforce positive self-statements.
- They should be focused on their own good qualities and accomplishments.
- Avoid unnecessary competition.
- Develop assertive behaviours.
- Recognize and accept their limits. Remember that everyone is unique and different.
- Get a hobby or two. Relax and have fun.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a balanced diet daily.
- Share their own worries and problems with friends or parents or someone they can trust.
- Learn to use their time wisely:
 - Evaluate how they are budgeting their time.
 - Plan ahead and avoid procrastination.
 - Make a weekly schedule and try to follow it.
- Set realistic goals.
- Set priorities.

There are many relaxation techniques which are very helpful to avoid stress of teachers. These techniques have been proven to be a stress reliever and thus may be helpful to avoid the stress. For example, whenever someone feels tense, slowly breathing in and out for several minutes. It helps to cool down the body tension and reduce the stress. Some basic tips on managing stress are:

- Recognize stress within yourself. Don't wait until you are in crisis.
- Identify what stresses you. Change what you can and work realistically with what you can't.
- Identify achievable goals and then take a 'small steps' approach to achieve them.
- Teachers tend to say 'yes'. Don't say 'yes' if what you actually mean is 'no'.
- Teaching demands a lot of you. Every now and then put yourself first.

- Caffeine, alcohol and self-prescribed drugs don't always help. Be aware and take control.
- Healthy environments are important. Take active responsibility for your school.
- Protect your own time. Relaxation and leisure time are not treats – they are essential ingredients in a healthy lifestyle.
- Keep things in perspective. Remember your achievements and the positive impact you have in your school.

Teacher stress is a real phenomenon and is associated with problems of recruitment, health and retention of teachers. Researches have shown that teacher stress is reliably associated with a number of variables, including those intrinsic to the job, individual cognitive vulnerability and systemic factors. A teacher occupies an important place in the school and society. Since the teacher plays somewhat crucial part in the process of education, a great deal would depend on teacher's role and performance in achieving the goal of education. To improve their performance and to help them to be enthusiastic and increase their professional competence, it is necessary to provide them more convenient work situation with less pressure.

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