Perceived Stress Among School Teachers and its Associated Factors

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A B S T R A C T

Background: Teaching involves a heavy workload, emotional strain, and performance expectations, making it a very stressful job. This study looked at perceived stress among school teachers in Pune, India. It also examined links with age, gender, experience, school type, educational board, teaching level, and salary.

Material & Methodology: We conducted a cross-sectional study with 258 teachers. Participants filled out a socio-demographic questionnaire and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). We calculated descriptive statistics and analyzed the associations between stress levels (low, moderate, high) and demographic factors using the chi-square test, setting significance at $p < 0.05$.

Results: The average PSS-10 score was 20.24 ± 4.85, indicating moderate stress. Most teachers (84%) reported moderate stress, while 8% reported high stress and 8% reported low stress. Younger teachers (25–34 years) and those with fewer years of experience reported significantly higher stress ($p < 0.001$). Teachers earning ₹20,000 or less reported the highest stress (mean = 22.13; $p = 0.029$). Female teachers had slightly higher scores than males, but this difference was not significant. We found no significant link with the educational board or teaching level.

Conclusion: Most teachers experienced moderate stress, especially younger, less experienced, and lower-paid teachers in private schools.

Key words: Teacher stress; Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10); school teachers; occupational stress.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way we respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to our overall well-being" by WHO. [1]

Stress is a sensation that arises from our responses to specific situations. It's the body's method of stepping up to the plate and being ready to face a difficult circumstance with increased strength, endurance, focus, and attentiveness. [2]

Chronic stress is linked to the development of anxiety and depression as well as other psychiatric disorders. It can also hinder day-to-day functioning and emotional balance.

The WHO has identified workplace experiences as one of the factors determining well-being. A negative environment at workplace leads to physical and mental health problems. [4]

Job-related stress is common in today's work environment. It occurs when a person's stress management is inadequate and they operate in a challenging atmosphere. In many working scenarios, particularly in human services, high levels of stress are an essential and generally inevitable aspect of the job. [5]

Stress levels vary by work. Teaching is one of the professions that causes more stress than others. According to Forlin, Douglas, and Hattie (1996), stress affects both the instructor and the students' learning experiences. According to Kyriacou (1987), who has conducted multiple research on the subject, teacher stress is the result of carrying out one's duty as a teacher while experiencing negative emotions such as anxiety, concern, despair, and jealousy. [6]

Teacher workload is one of the most common sources of stress, but there is a lack of systematic understanding about how stress is measured, its prevalence globally, what factors lead to stress, and what causes the associated negative outcomes among teachers.

Teachers are a priority demographic because they are important members of society and role models for pupils, with the power to affect kids' entire development. [4]

According to Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978), "Teacher stress" is the reaction syndrome of negative effects (like anger or depression) brought on by the teacher's job. [7]

Teaching has long been perceived as a "emotionally taxing and potentially frustrating" job. [8]

Teachers face stress from a mix of professional, administrative, and social factors. Long hours, heavy workloads, and larger class sizes contribute to their daily challenges. Responsibilities like lesson planning and dealing with difficult students increase this pressure. A lack of support from administration, frequent changes in curriculum and assessments, and insufficient supervision make their jobs even harder. Workplace problems, such as bullying, student misbehaviour, and pressure from parents, along with concerns about violence or job security, lead to emotional exhaustion. Additionally, bureaucratic tasks, low public respect, negative media coverage, and poor working conditions reduce teachers' morale and self-esteem. This makes teaching a very stressful profession.

When the brain cannot handle a situation, it activates the body's natural "fightor-flight" response. It does this by releasing stress hormones that raise blood pressure and prepare the body for action. This reaction causes a rapid heartbeat, less blood flow to the skin, slowed digestion, increased sweating, and the release of extra sugar and fats for energy. Meanwhile, the immune system slows down to save energy. Although this response helps in short-term emergencies, ongoing stress can result in serious long-term effects, such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, heart disease, and stress-related diabetes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted in the Pune area of Maharashtra, India, to evaluate perceived stress levels among school teachers. The study included teachers aged 25 and older who actively teach students in grades 1 through 12. Eligible participants were male and female educators who could read and understand English. We excluded teachers with a history of mental health problems or any medical issues. A convenience sample of 258 teachers was gathered based on available volunteers and time limits.

After obtaining informed consent, each teacher filled out a two-part questionnaire. The first part gathered socio-demographic and professional information, including age, gender, years of teaching experience, type of school (private or government), monthly salary categories (<₹20,000; ₹20,000 to ₹80,000; >₹80,000), education board (SSC, CBSE, ICSE), and the highest level they taught (primary,

middle, secondary, higher secondary). The second part included the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), a validated self-report tool designed to assess stress experienced in the past month. The PSS-10 consists of ten questions, five framed positively and five negatively. Responses are rated on a 5-point scale (0='never' to 4='very often'). We reverse the scores from the five positively framed questions, then sum all item scores to create a total PSS score (ranging from 0 to 40). Higher total PSS scores indicate a greater level of perceived stress.

We entered the data into Microsoft Excel and analyzed it using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics included means (with standard deviations) for PSS scores and frequencies (percentages) for categorical variables. We categorized the sample into Low (PSS 0 to 13), Moderate (14 to 26), and High (27 to 40) stress groups according to standard PSS interpretation. We examined the distribution of stress levels overall and among specific subgroups. We assessed relationships between categorical variables and stress level using chi-square tests (significance level $p<0.05$). Additionally, we calculated group mean PSS scores based on factors such as gender, age group, and experience group to show trends.

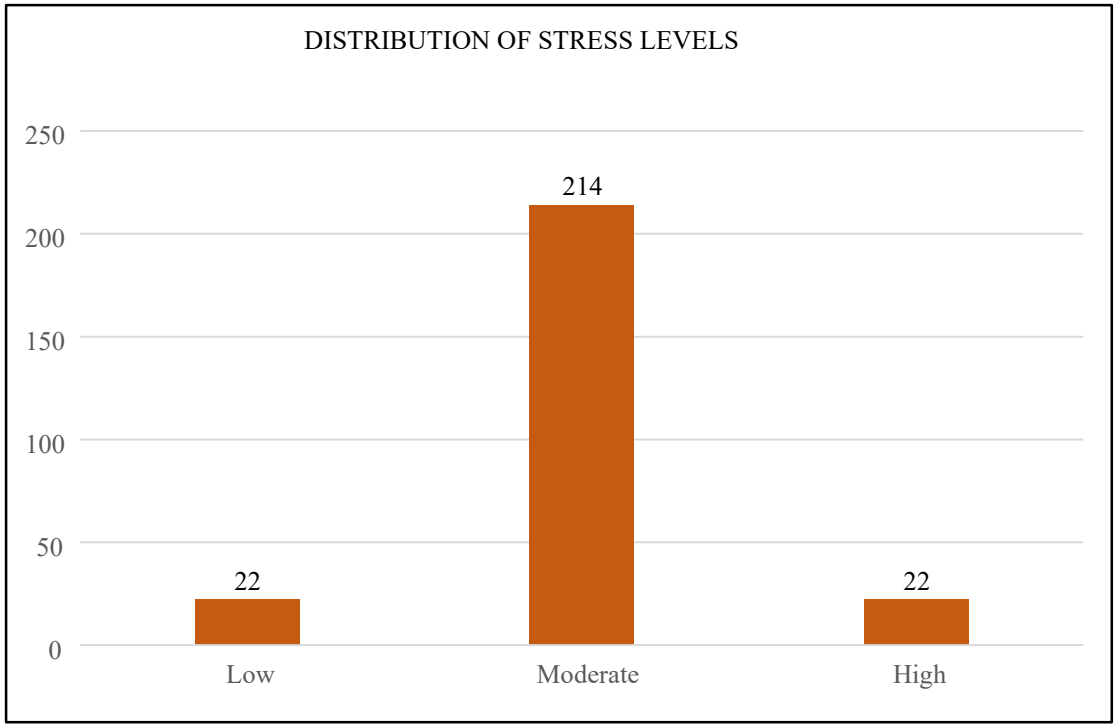
RESULTS

A total of 258 teachers participated in the study, showcasing a diverse demographic. The sample included 182 females (70.5%) and 76 males (29.5%). Most teachers were aged 25 to 34 years (42.6%), followed by those aged 35 to 44 years (33.3%), 45 to 54 years (19.4%), and those over 55 years (4.7%). In terms of teaching experience, many had between 1 to 5 years (29.5%) or 11 to 20 years (31.4%), showing a good mix of early and mid-career educators.

Regarding institutional characteristics, the majority (76.7%) of teachers worked in private institutions, while 23.3% were employed in government schools. Salary distribution showed that 8.9% of teachers earned less than ₹20,000 per month, 78.7% earned between ₹20,000 and ₹80,000, and 12.4% earned more than ₹80,000 monthly. The educational boards represented included SSC (47.7%), CBSE (34.1%), and ICSE (18.2%). A significant number of teachers (55%) taught at the secondary level (8th to 10th grade), followed by those in middle school (22.1%), primary (12%), and higher secondary (10.9%).

The overall mean PSS-10 score was 20.24 ± 4.85, indicating moderate levels of perceived stress among participants. Around 84% of teachers reported moderate stress, while 8% fell into both low and high stress categories. The median score was 20, with scores ranging from 3 to 35, further highlighting that most teachers experienced consistent moderate stress rather than extreme levels.

FIGURE NO: 1 Distribution of Stress Levels



In the gender-specific analysis, female teachers had a slightly higher mean stress score (20.58) compared to male teachers (19.42). Although females made up a larger part of the sample, the difference in stress levels between genders was not statistically significant, suggesting that stress was similarly felt across both groups.

Both age and experience showed strong links to stress levels. Younger teachers aged 25 to 34 years reported the highest mean stress scores, followed by those aged 35 to 44 years. Stress levels dropped significantly among educators aged 45 years and older, with the lowest stress reported by those over 55. Similarly, teachers with less than 10 years of experience had higher stress levels, while those with over 20 years reported lower stress scores. These results suggest that younger

and less experienced teachers may not have effective coping strategies or may face more pressures related to performance.

When comparing types of schools, teachers in private schools reported higher mean stress scores than those in government schools. Private school educators often deal with heavier workloads, performance evaluations, administrative tasks, and greater job insecurity, which may add to their stress. In contrast, while government school teachers face their own challenges, they generally experience more stability and better job benefits.

Salary also played a significant role in affecting stress levels. Teachers in the lowest income bracket (earning below ₹20,000 per month) had the highest mean stress scores (22.13), indicating that financial instability and low pay greatly impact occupational stress. On the other hand, teachers earning over ₹80,000 per month showed lower stress levels (mean 18.34), likely due to increased financial security and better working conditions.

In terms of educational boards, stress levels remained fairly consistent among SSC, CBSE, and ICSE educators, with mean scores around 20. This suggests that stress is influenced more by institutional and personal circumstances than by the type of curriculum. Teachers at the middle school level reported slightly higher mean stress than those at primary or secondary levels, possibly due to the difficulties of managing pre-adolescent students who require more behavioural guidance and academic support.

TABLE NO: 1 Association of Sociodemographic Variables with Stress Levels (N=258) (Chi-square test applied for categorical comparisons, $p<0.05$ considered significant)

Variable	Category	Low n	Moderate n	High n	Total	χ^2 value	p-value
Gender	Male (n=76)	10	61	5	76	3.08	0.214
	Female (n=182)	12	153	17	182		
Age Group	25–34 (n=110)	3	91	16	110	37.07	**<0.001**

	35–44 (n=86)	5	75	6	86		
	45–54 (n=50)	9	41	0	50		
	≥55 (n=12)	5	7	0	12		
Experience	1–5 years (n=76)	3	63	10	76	40.24	**<0.001**
	6–10 years (n=70)	4	61	5	70		
	11–20 years (n=81)	8	71	2	81		
	>20 years (n=31)	7	19	5	31		
School Type	Government (n=60)	9	47	4	60	7.06	**0.029**
	Private (n=198)	13	167	18	198		
Salary	<20k (n=23)	1	17	5	23	11.78	**0.019**
	20k–80k (n=203)	19	169	15	203		
	>80k (n=32)	2	28	2	32		
Board	SSC (n=123)	12	102	9	123	0.94	0.917
	CBSE (n=88)	6	72	10	88		
	ICSE (n=47)	4	40	3	47		
Level Taught	Primary (1–4, n=31)	4	25	2	31	7.92	0.16
	Middle (5–7, n=57)	4	48	5	57		
	Secondary (8–10, n=142)	11	119	12	142		
	Higher Sec (11–12, n=28)	3	22	3	28		

DISCUSSION

The current study examined perceived stress levels in 258 school teachers and looked at how these varied across different demographic and job-related factors like age, gender, years of experience, type of school, salary, educational board, and teaching level.

In this study, the average score on the PSS-10 was 20.24 ± 4.85, showing that most teachers experienced moderate stress. These results are consistent with previous research in India and worldwide, which confirms that teaching is a high-stress job. Over 80% of teachers reported moderate stress, which can negatively impact their performance, cause absenteeism, lead to burnout, and prompt early retirement. Similar findings were reported, indicating that teacher stress is a global issue. [4,6,9,10]

Analysis of individual PSS-10 items showed that most teachers answered

"sometimes" or "fairly often" to stress-related experiences. Higher scores indicated feelings of nervousness, lack of control, and being overwhelmed. In contrast, positive items like confidence and control received fewer endorsements. This suggests a decrease in self-efficacy and an ongoing sense of stress among teachers. Teachers often reported that their work duties cut into personal time, impacting family obligations and self-care. Research indicated similar patterns, showing that a poor work-life balance contributes to chronic stress and fatigue. [5,7] Ongoing work-life imbalance predicts emotional exhaustion, depression, and anxiety. This points to a gap between the stress teachers face and the resources they have to manage it. [3]

Female teachers (70.5%) experienced higher average stress than their male counterparts, although the difference was not significant. Suggesting that the multiple roles women juggle may increase their stress. [2] However, the differences can vary based on support and cultural factors. [5]

A significant link was found between age, teaching experience, and perceived stress levels ($p < 0.001$). Younger teachers, aged 25 to 34, and those with less than 10 years of experience reported more stress than their older and more experienced peers. This could be due to their limited classroom management experience, job insecurity, and fewer coping resources. These results match previous studies that show stress tends to decrease with age and experience as teachers build resilience and coping skills. [2,10] Similarly, a study of Indian university teachers showed that those under 45 experienced higher stress, underscoring the challenges of early and mid-career stages.[11]

A significant difference in stress levels was found between private and government school teachers ($p = 0.029$). Private school teachers reported higher stress. This may be due to heavier workloads, frequent assessments, larger classes,

and more administrative pressure. Limited job security and slower salary growth also contributed to financial dissatisfaction. As a result, low pay became a major source of stress among private school teachers in India. [8,12,13]

Salary also showed a significant link to stress ($p = 0.019$). Teachers earning below ₹20,000 per month experienced the highest stress, while those earning above ₹80,000 reported the lowest. Financial uncertainty can negatively impact mental wellbeing, family stability, and job satisfaction, which highlight the importance of fair financial compensation. [4,5] Interestingly, another study found that higher-paid teachers sometimes experienced greater stress due to increased administrative responsibilities, suggesting that pay alone may not balance role-related pressures. [9] Similarly, studies in Turkey and Macedonia found that beliefs about unfair pay strongly predicted job stress among teachers.[6] Feeling undervalued lowered motivation and increased psychological distress. These findings highlight the importance of fair pay and recognition systems to improve teacher satisfaction and well-being.[12]

No significant link was found between educational board and stress, showing that workload and salary are more important than curriculum type. Middle-school teachers reported slightly higher stress, likely because of students' behavioral and academic changes. Previous research also indicates that health and class size affect teacher stress more than the educational board. [13] Some teachers connected their stress to poor work relationships. Research found that supportive environments can help reduce stress. [6] The lack of empathy among peers, as reported by some teachers, highlights the need for collegial support and respect. [8]

Overall, the findings match earlier research from India and other countries. They confirm that teacher stress is a common issue. Global pressures, such as heavy workloads and administrative duties, lead to ongoing stress. In India, factors like privatization, exam-focused systems, and social expectations make the problem even worse. [4,6,9]

CONCLUSION

This study found that most school teachers in Pune experience moderate stress, with higher stress observed among younger, less experienced, female, private school teachers, and those with lower salaries.

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