Gender Differences on Occupational Stress, Ways of Coping and Anxiety among College Teachers

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ABSTRACT :

The present investigation attempted to study the Occupational Stress, Ways of Coping and Anxiety in 250 college teachers (125 males and 125 females) within the age range of 35-45 years from colleges in and around Chandigarh. These teachers were administered Occupational Stress index by Srivastva and Singh(1984) State-Trait Anxiety Inventory by Speilberger et al.(1970) andWays of Coping Questionnaire by Lazarus and Folkman(1998).t-ratios were used to study the differences. Results indicated that significant differences emerged between male and female college teachers on Self control(t=2.47,f<m), Seeking social support(t=3.79,f>m) and State Anxiety(t=2.20,f>m).

INTRODUCTION

Gender plays an important role in personality and behaviour. In our society, males and females have never enjoyed equal status. Gender differences occur due to cultural norms and role behaviour. The widespread agreement that there are substantive differences in health among males and females in health underlies genetic, biological, social, cultural and above all developmental explanations.

Health protecting/health compromising behaviours are significantly related with stress and coping. Reviews of stress literature has revealed evidences of gender related behavioural, physiological and neuro-endocronological differences in stress and coping.(Taylor, et al.,2003).

Women are supposed to be very emotional, while men are supposed to be tough and unemotional. Because of the differences in the way men and women are brought up, they have different strengths and weaknesses with respect to stress and anxiety.

According to Bala (2007), a big chunk and volume of the educated female work-force in India are teachers who have opted for 'teaching' as their profession not because this is what they had always wanted, aspired and aimed for, but more so because of other social, cultural, economic and family considerations. Choice of teaching as a profession by females is- likely to meet least resistance from the family, husbands and important others.

There is a general common perception that teaching is the most noble and suitable profession for women because it not only helps to satisfy their need for employment, occupation and job satisfaction; for acquiring a respectable enough social status and pay-package, but also for providing sufficient time, space and freedom to do justice to all her roles viz teacher, mother, house keeper, wife etc. all together with ease and equanimity. It is not seen as a work area threatening the harmony and peace of normal, conventional family-life and hence a permissible ground for women to tread upon if she so desires.

Stress, Anxiety and Coping

Stress is an essential component in human life. According to Lazarus(1966)stress exists when the demands on the person are person are perceived as taxing or exceeding the persons' adjustment capacity. Individual employees have multiple roles and those often make conflicting demands and expectations. Work schedule, work orientation, marriage, children and spouse, employment patterns all produce pressures to participate extensively in the work role or family role. The potential for conflict and stress increases as most workers struggle with demands of balancing work place responsibilities and duties at home.(Muchinsky,2000).

Abel and Sewell (1999) used transactional model to define stress, this model emphasized that stress depends on individual's cognitive appraisal of events and circumstances at work and the perception of ones ability to cope with it. The experience of stress is due to perception of demands and inability to meet this demand, and finally threat teacher's mental or physical wellbeing.

According to Britannica Concise Encyclopedia: Anxiety is a feeling of dread, fear or apprehension. Marked by physiological signs such as sweating, tension and increased pulse, by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the perceived threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it.

Too much stress in our lives can result in higher levels of anxiety. Anxiety is also a perfectly normal response to threat, and in some situations that are really threatening it can be helpful in preparing us for action. Some degree of anxiety can improve our performance in certain situations such as job interviews, taking exams, sporting events, or even helping us to pay our bills on time. However, if anxietyoccurs too often and for no apparent reason, or if it begins to interfere with our life, then it has become a problem. (South West Yorkshire Mental Health NHS Trust)

According to Speilberger's (1972) "State and trait anxiety are analogous in certain respects to kinetic and potential energy. State anxiety, like kinetic energy, refers to a palpable reaction or process taking place at a given time and level of intensity. Trait anxiety, like potential energy, refers to individual differences in reactions. Potential energy refers to differences in the amount of kinetic energy associated with a particular physical object, which may be released if triggered by an appropriate force. Trait anxiety implies differences between people in the disposition to respond to stressful situations with varying amounts of state anxiety.

Coping is a continuous cognitive and behavioural process of overcoming stress and stressful consequences of external forces (Mohan, 2003). According to Weiten and Lloyd (2003), coping refers to active efforts to master, reduce or tolerate the demands created by stress. A given situation is appraised as stressful only when one lacks the resources to deal with it. People cope with stress in many ways.

Where effective coping helps to maintain equilibrium, ineffective coping leads to maladjustment and disease. Hence the ways of coping one employs has a significant role to play in combating stress (Lazarus, 1984).

The term coping is viewed as a stabilizing factor that helps individuals maintain psychological adaptation during stressful periods (Billing and Moss, 1984, Folkmanand Lazarus,1985). At a general level, coping has been broadly defined as, 'any efforts at stress management" (Folkman and Lazarus,1988).
Reglin and Reitzammer (2008) opined that, teachers regardless of what level they teach are exposed to high levels of stress.

Blasé (1982) found that when the teacher's coping resources were insufficient to overcome the effects of stressors, it resulted in residual stress . Teachers with high perceived coping resources, both internal (e.g., self-efficacy) and external (e.g., school resources), perceived fewer barriers and difficulties (potential stressors) for achieving learning objectives, and as a consequence they were less affected by stress and burnout.

Reese (2004) stated that around the world, the increasing numbers of teachers reported serious work-related stress. Coping with job-related stress was a significant predictor of both subjective well-being and its components; the positive affect and the negative affect. Teachers who had trouble in coping with stressors at the workplace also were found to have low level of subjective well-being and life satisfaction and high level of negative affects.

Betrot (2006) investigated the relationships among teacher occupational stressors, self-efficacy, coping resources, and burnout in a sample of 247 Spanish secondary school teachers. Teachers reported that when their pedagogical practice in the school setting was being interfered with or hindered by a set of factors from the multiple contexts involved in students' learning, problems of burnout occurred. In addition, results also revealed that teachers with a high level of self-efficacy and more coping resources reported suffering less stress and burnout than teachers with a low level of self-efficacy and fewer coping resources, and vice versa.

Davis (2007) conducted research on teaching anxiety with college teachers— especially psychology teachers, accounting educators, psychology and family life teachers, and librarians respectively. Self-report-style questionnaire to college psychology teachers in the United States, including 51 professors, 31 associate professors, and 20 assistant professors was used. Eighty-seven percent of the psychology teachers experienced teaching anxiety. Concerning the intensity and frequency of teaching anxiety, 65% of them underwent huge anxiety, "from definitely unpleasant to severe or extreme". Davis (2007) briefly summarized the differences between triggers depending on school levels as follows: "For elementary/secondary teachers, causes of anxiety ranged from class size, classroom management, and possible student violence to self-efficiency concerns regarding student assessment, administrative support, and salary issues.

Tamres et al. (2002) conducted a meta analysis of research into gender differences in coping. Women were found to report using all coping behaviors more often than men. Men reported engaging in more absolute levels of coping than women. In contrast, studies investigating relative coping showed that men were more likely to use problem-focused coping (relative to their use of emotion- or avoidance focused strategies), whereas women were more likely to seek emotional support (in preference to using problem-focused or avoidant strategies). Tamres et al., (2002) concluded that gender differences in coping may be due to appraisal rather than to preferred coping strategies.

METHOD

The main aim of the present investigation was to study gender differences among college teachers on Occupational stress, Anxiety and Ways of Coping.For this purpose, 250 college teachers (125 males and 125 females) in the age range of 35-45 years were taken. Male and female groups of teachers were compared onOccupational Stress Index,State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and Ways of Coping Questionnaire.

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Tools

Occupational Stress Index devised by Srivastva and Singh (1984) was used to assess Occupational Stress of the college teachers.The reliability index ascertained by split-half method and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale as a whole were found to be .93 and .90 respectively. The reliability indices of the 12 subscales computed by split-half method varies from 0.45 to 0.84

Scores on the eight coping styles viz Confrontive Coping, Seeking Social Support, Planful Problem Solving, Self-Control, Distancing, Positive Reappraisal, Accepting Responsibility and Escape Avoidance were measured by using Ways of Coping questionnaire devised by Folkman and Lazarus (1988).The alpha co-efficient for the Ways of Coping scales are quite variable ranging from 0.61 to 0.79.

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory by Speilberger et al. (1983) was used to assess Anxiety levels of the teachersTest-Retest reliability coefficient State-Trait Anxiety Inventory has been reported to be 0.33. On an average, alpha coefficient for State-Trait Anxiety Inventory has been reported to be -90. The test has adequate content, concurrent and constructs validity.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Scoring for all the given tests was done as per the instructions provided in the scoring manuals of the tests. The scores were then subjected to various statistical treatments and analysis. Descriptive Statistics, t-tests and Regression Analysis were carried out to analyze the data as per the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

t-ratios were calculated to find out the significance of differences comparing male and female teachers. The comparison revealed the following t-ratios to be significant: Female teachers scored higher than male teachers on Self Control (t=2.47 p<.05); Seeking Social Support (t=3.79 p<.01) and State Anxiety (t=2.20 p<.05).Means, Standard Deviations and t-ratios Comparing Male and Female Teachers. The results are shown in table-1 and graphically represented in figure 1 and 2.

Table 1.Means, Standard Deviations and t-ratios Comparing Male and Female Teachers (n=250)

S. No.	Names of the variables	Male Teachers (n=125)		Female Teachers (n=125)		t-ratio
1.	Occupational Stress	110.64	14.85	109.12	17.11	.75
2.	Confornative Coping	7.13	3.70	7.20	3.51	.15
3.	Distancing	6.44	3.43	7.28	3.49	1.91
4.	Self control	7.49	.79	8.72	4.06	2.47
5.	Seeking Social Support	7.18	4.07	9.11	3.95	3.79
6.	Accepting Responsibility	4.95	2.37	4.85	2.62	.33
7.	Escape Avoidance	6.93	4.28	7.70	4.23	1.42
8.	Planful Problem solving	9.60	3.28	9.18	3.14	1.02
9.	Positive Reappraisal	10.89	3.69	11.62	2.14	1.46
10.	State Anxiety	81.10	11.42	84.17	10.51	2.20
11.	Trait Anxiety	64.58	8.99	66.62	8.83	1.81

Note:
t-value significant at 0.05 level = 1.97
t-value significant at 0.01 level = 2.60

Figure-1: Showing Mean Scores of Male and Female Teachers on Occupational Stress, State and Trait Anxiety
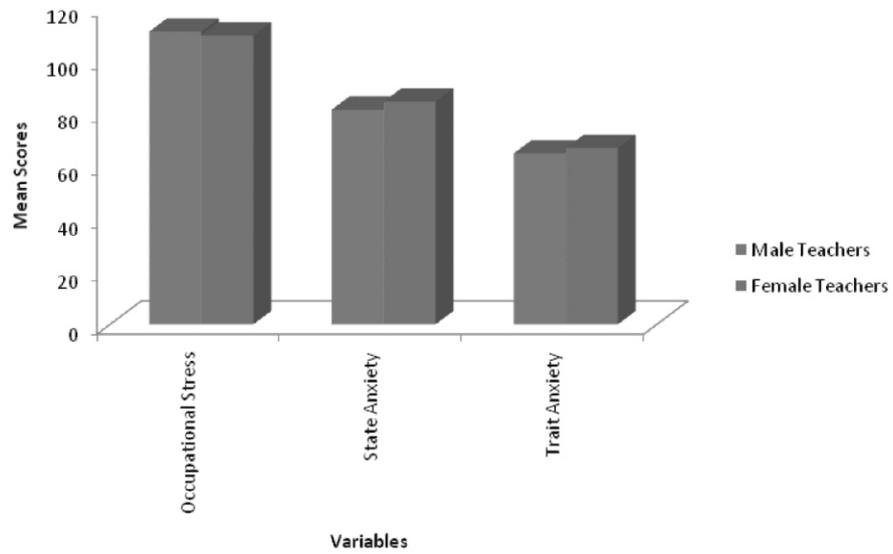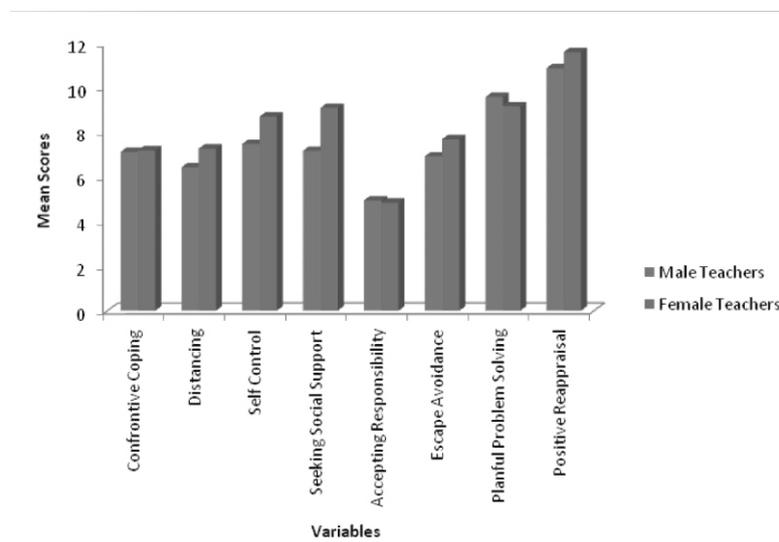

Figure-2: Showing Mean Scores of Male and Female Teachers on Ways of Coping

The findings of the present study are in line with a number of earlier researches depicting that the appropriate Ways of Coping reduced the Occupational Stress and Anxiety among college teachers.

According to Baum and Grunberg (1991) men and women exhibit a number of different physiological reactions to stress. Women tend to have higher heart rates and sympathetic nervous system tone. Men tend to exhibit stronger blood pressure and hormone reactivity during and immediately after stress.

According to Burke and Greenglass (1993) the relationship between social support and stress in the teaching profession indicated that teachers with high levels of social support enjoyed better physical and mental health.Bruke et al. (1996).

Cenkseven (2004) found that coping with stressful life events was an important predictor of subjective well-being. In terms of these findings, it can be said that teachers' abilities in coping effectively with bad and stressful events at the workplace may lead them to have higher level of subjective well-being.

Matthews and Falconer (2000, 2002)in their study reported that correlations between Neuroticism and task-related worry and distress were mediated by use of emotion-focused coping strategies such as self-criticism. Matthews, et al. (2002) also showed that a dispositional emotion-focused coping scale, referring to coping with work activities, correlated at about .40 with distress and worry in an occupational sample.

Baggley et al. (2005) reported that individuals high on Neuroticism were prone to experiencing negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, or anger and were impulsive and self-conscious. Neuroticism had been found to be related to the use of coping strategies that were typically related to poorer outcomes such as an increase in distress or increased anger and depression on subsequent days. Those higher on Neuroticism were found to use more passive or emotion focused strategies such as escape avoidance, self-blame, wishful thinking, and relaxation, as well as interpersonally antagonistic means of coping such as hostile reactions, catharsis (venting of negative emotions), confrontive coping or interpersonal withdrawal

Singh and Singh (2010) studied the role of coping style in the relationship between stress and health outcomes. The sample comprised of 210 managers from different private sector organizations in India. Data were collected by using occupational stress index, the general health questionnaire and coping scale.

Results indicated that role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict and coping significantly affected the health of managers. The results of moderated regression analyses showed that coping significantly moderated the relationship between role overload and health as well as role ambiguity and health. They also found that all types of role stresses were significantly and negatively correlated to the health status whereas coping was significantly and positively correlated with the health of managers. The results of stepwise regression analysis indicated that only coping and role conflict emerged as a strong predictor in explaining the health of individual.

Female teachers made efforts to regulate their feelings under stress i.e they would use behavioural ways of coping with stress as self-control and resigned acceptance and emotional discharge with praying and meditating whereas male teachers reported using cognitive avoidance or denial as drinking, smoking, unhealthy eating patterns and ignored the problemto cope with stress. Some of them also reported using alternative rewards (sex and masturbation).

Social support reduced stress, relaxed mental intensity and improved social ability to adapt through social relationships which includes family members, relatives, peer, organizations and communities in the mental and physical support. Female teachers when confronted by stressors tended to respond by turning to their children and providing caring, as well as seeking out contact and support from others.

Women were more likely to develop depressive or anxiety disorders when overwhelmed with stress while men may be prone to developing substance abuse problems or physical illnesses.
No significant differences between genders were reported on Occupational Stress and Trait anxiety.

Thus a combination of biological predispositions and physical differences act upon by social expectations and the strong socialisation pressures of society, men tend to develop psychologically masculine traits, behaviours and abilities whereas women tend to develop feminine ones. However in the changing socio cultural scenario where males and females own equal responsibilities of household as well as economic management, traditional gender role orientation and ideas about femininity and masculinity limit or restrict ones' abilities and skills there by reducing coping resources.

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