

# MANAGING PROFESSIONAL STRESS: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERSPECTIVES OF COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS

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## Abstract

In today's current academic environment, college teachers are subjected to a substantial level of stress because of the ever-changing educational demands, the expectations of the institution, and their own personal responsibilities. Furthermore, the expectations of the institution are always evolving. One hundred college professors were interviewed for this article, which presents the findings of research on the professional stress that they faced. The research concentrates on significant stressors such as excessive workload, ambiguity in roles, a lack of support, and an imbalance between work and personal life. The research makes use of a mixed-method approach to analyse both quantitative trends about coping mechanisms as well as qualitative insights on these techniques. According to the findings, people who work in private institutions and those who are female educators are more likely to feel higher levels of stress than those who work in public institutions. At the conclusion of the research project, recommendations are made for the establishment of institutional support, programs for psychological well-being, and policy reforms to establish a healthier academic environment.

**(Keywords:** Professional Stress, Work-Life Imbalance, Psychological Well-being)

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the higher education environment has experienced significant alterations worldwide, especially in nations such as India. The transformations, propelled by globalisation, technology advancements, regulatory reforms, and heightened student expectations, have substantially elevated the professional requirements for college educators. Previously regarded as a steady and low-stress job, college teaching has transformed into a complex role that includes teaching, research, administration, student mentoring, and community engagement.

The increasing intricacy of these duties has rendered professional stress an escalating issue among academic personnel. Contemporary college educators are required to provide high-quality instruction and engage in research publishing, while simultaneously fulfilling administrative obligations, participating in accreditation processes, managing extensive student bodies, adapting to e-learning platforms, and continuously enhancing their skills. These escalating demands frequently arise without enough institutional support, resulting in physical, emotional, and professional burnout. Higher education teaching has traditionally been seen as a reputable and comparatively low-stress occupation. Recent changes in the academic landscape—including regulatory modifications, the digitalisation of education, heightened administrative responsibilities, and demands for research publications—have profoundly modified this image.

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### **The Changing Role of Teachers in College**

The conventional perception of college educators as mere conveyors of knowledge has evolved to encompass roles as facilitators, assessors, curriculum designers, counsellors, and technology integrators. This transformation signifies a progressive educational approach but has also led to heightened workload, role ambiguity, and stress. Educators are commonly evaluated primarily on measurable outcomes, including research publications, student evaluations, and institutional rankings—criteria that frequently overlook qualitative contributions and individual well-being.

### **Effects of Stress on Instruction and Learning**

Unmanaged stress can yield extensive repercussions for teachers, students, and educational institutions alike. Educators experiencing stress may encounter diminished motivation, irritation, compromised classroom efficacy, and health problems including exhaustion and insomnia. Prolonged exposure might result in fatigue, absenteeism, and potential attrition from the profession. As a result, student outcomes may deteriorate due to diminished instructional quality, lack of excitement, or emotional disengagement from educators.

### **Person-Environment Fit Theory**

The Person-Environment Fit Theory, introduced by French, Caplan, and Harrison in 1982, serves as a fundamental framework for comprehending stress. This idea asserts that stress occurs when there is a discrepancy between an individual's abilities, needs, or values and the demands or resources of the environment. In the realm of higher education, stress may arise for college educators when institutional demands (e.g., substantial teaching responsibilities, administrative obligations, publication requirements) are incongruent with the available time, resources, or individual capabilities.

### **Job Demand-Control (JDC) Framework**

The Job Demand-Control Model, created by Karasek in 1979, is among the most extensively utilised models in occupational stress research. It posits that elevated job expectations (e.g., workload, role conflict) coupled with diminished control (e.g., lack of autonomy or decision-making authority) result in job strain and burnout. College educators, particularly inside inflexible institutional hierarchies, frequently indicate diminished levels of autonomy, which may exacerbate their stress reactions.

### **Roles of Theory**

Role Theory elucidates stress because of contradictory or confusing expectations linked to professional duties. College educators often manage many obligations—teaching, research, administration, and mentoring—resulting in role conflict and role overload (Kahn et al., 1964). Such disputes frequently generate occupational stress and can reduce both job happiness and performance.

### **Theory of Conservation of Resources (COR)**

Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (1989) posits that stress arises when individuals perceive a threat of resource loss, experience actual loss, or fail to acquire resources following investment. Resources encompass time, energy, position, and social support. In higher education, where educators frequently face increased demands with minimal rewards (such as insufficient advancements, recognition, or support), resource depletion results in burnout and disengagement.

### **Transactional Model of Stress and Coping**

Formulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), this paradigm emphasises individuals' perceptions and reactions to stressors. Stress is perceived because of the interaction between the individual and the environment, whereas coping mechanisms are classified into problem-focused and emotion-focused categories. This paradigm is particularly pertinent for comprehending how college educators employ coping strategies such as peer support, physical activity, or counselling to manage their anxieties.

### **Maslach's Burnout Theory**

Maslach and Jackson's Burnout Theory (1981) constitutes a significant framework. Burnout is characterised as a psychological syndrome resulting from extended occupational stress, encompassing emotional depletion, depersonalisation, and diminished personal achievement. Teaching, being a people-centric profession, is particularly susceptible to burnout, especially when emotional labour and performance demands are elevated.

## **REVIEW LITERATURE**

### **Comprehending Occupational Stress in Education**

Stress is a multifaceted psychological and physiological reaction to challenging or frightening circumstances. In the realm of education, stress may arise from role overload, emotional labour, insufficient resources, and job insecurity. Kyriacou (2001) defines teacher stress as the experiencing of adverse emotions, including anger, irritation, anxiety, despair, and anxiousness, stemming from certain aspects of their profession. Blase (1986) identified four primary drivers of stress for educators: administrative overburden, inadequate student discipline, deficient interpersonal interactions, and lack of appreciation. In recent years, these pressures have been exacerbated by heightened demands for accountability, digital transformation, and institutional rankings.

### **Gender and Institutional Variations in Stress**

Gender significantly influences the experience of professional stress. Research has consistently indicated that female educators experience elevated stress levels owing to their combined duties at home and in the workplace (Gmelch et al., 1986; Mahony et al., 2018). Pillay's (2005) study revealed that women are more prone to emotional weariness as a result of societal and organisational pressures. Institutional disparities also lead to discrepancies in stress levels. Instructors at private unaided colleges encounter greater performance-related pressure, less academic autonomy, and employment instability compared to those in government-funded institutions (Reddy & Poornima, 2012). This inequity is exacerbated by contractual employment, lack of job security, and absence of support systems.

### **Workload, Exhaustion, and Occupational Contentment**

A primary contributor to teacher stress is an overwhelming workload, encompassing instructional responsibilities, research obligations, and administrative tasks. Maslach and Jackson (1981) define educator burnout as comprising emotional tiredness, depersonalisation, and diminished personal accomplishment. Elevated burnout levels are associated with diminished job satisfaction and decreased classroom efficacy (Singh & Sinha, 2016). A recent study by Basu and Dutta (2021) identified research and publishing pressure, particularly concerning accreditation organisations and university ranking systems, as a predominant source of stress in Indian academia. Educators frequently encounter difficulties in reconciling these expectations with instructional duties and student guidance.

### **Technological Strain and the Post-Pandemic Context**

The incorporation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has revolutionised the conventional education paradigm. This has resulted in creative teaching approaches but has also produced technostress, which is stress induced by the swift adoption of novel digital instruments. The abrupt transition to online instruction in the post-pandemic period, coupled with insufficient training, resulted in heightened psychological stress among educators (Yadav et al., 2021). Educators expressed apprehension regarding the management of digital classrooms, the facilitation of student involvement online, and the absence of personal touch, all of which led to exhaustion and a feeling of isolation (Mishra & Panda, 2020).

### **Coping Strategies and Institutional Assistance**

Educators utilise diverse coping mechanisms to alleviate stress, encompassing problem-focused methods (time management, soliciting assistance) and emotion-focused techniques (venting, withdrawal, spiritual activities). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping is a seminal paradigm for comprehending how humans evaluate and react to stressors. Coping is profoundly influenced by the presence of institutional support networks. Kumar and Rao (2019) assert that mentoring initiatives, faculty wellness centres, and transparent communication procedures substantially diminish perceived stress. Regrettably, numerous institutions—particularly in the unaided sector—lack established frameworks for stress management.

### Significance of the Study

Comprehending the manifestation and management of stress among college educators is essential. It impacts both their mental and physical well-being as well as the quality of education provided to kids. Notwithstanding its significance, institutional frameworks for stress management in higher education are sometimes inadequate, particularly in developing nations such as India.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the primary factors contributing to occupational stress among college educators.
2. To ascertain the impact of occupational stress on physical, mental, and professional well-being.
3. To evaluate the coping mechanisms utilised by educators to mitigate stress.
4. To provide recommendations for institutional assistance and policy modifications.

### Statement of the Problem

College educators are crucial in developing intellectual capital; nevertheless, many experience persistent stress that affects their productivity and job happiness. Notwithstanding numerous educational reforms and faculty development initiatives, the stressors on teachers continue to be insufficiently addressed. This study examines the origins, impacts, and management of professional stress from the viewpoints of college educators.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employed a descriptive survey design, sampling 100 college educators from government, aided, and private institutions in Kerala through stratified random sampling. Data were gathered using a standardised questionnaire consisting of 40 items related to occupational stress, coping mechanisms, and well-being, evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument exhibited strong internal reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.86$ ). Quantitative data were analysed utilising SPSS (version 25) for descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and chi-square testing. Ethical permission was secured, and participation was both voluntary and anonymous.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table:1 Factors contributing Stress**

Stress Factors	Very High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Workload	72	20	8
Role Conflict (Teaching vs Admin vs Research)	65	25	10
Research and Publication Pressure	52	38	10
Student-Teacher Relationship Strain	48	30	22
Technological Adaptation (Online teaching)	45	35	20
Job Insecurity	55	25	20
Lack of Administrative Support	50	30	20
Inadequate Work-Life Balance	60	30	10
Lack of Career Advancement	43	40	17
Poor Institutional Communication	58	25	17

Source: Primary Data

**Interpretation:** Workload is the biggest stressor, with 72% of respondents considering it extremely high. This highlights teachers' enormous academic, administrative, and research responsibilities, often without enough support or time. Role conflict, a very high stressor for 65%, shows how instructors struggle to balance teaching, administrative work, and research. Poor work-life balance (60%) and institutional communication (58%) illustrate structural challenges in academic institutions, where teachers are forced to navigate expectations without clear instructions or enough time to manage personal responsibilities. Privatisation and self-financing institutions have high job insecurity (55%) and low administrative support (50%), showing a lack of tenure procedures, transparency, and supportive governance. Research and publishing pressure (52%), especially in institutions that base performance reviews and promotions on publication metrics, adds to stress. Post-pandemic technological changes in teaching methods have also caused stress, with 45% of instructors expressing significant stress owing to digital adaptation issues. In increasingly diverse and huge classrooms, maintaining discipline, engagement, and empathy strains student-teacher interactions (48%). Finally, 43% of professors feel stagnant in their careers, which contributes to long-term discontent. The data shows a complex stress profile caused by task intensity, systemic inefficiencies, and changing pedagogical demands.

**Table 2 Effects of Stress**

Symptoms	% Reporting
Fatigue	45%
Sleep Disorders	40%
Headaches	38%
High Blood Pressure	30%
Digestive Issues	22%
<b>Emotional and Psychological Effects</b>	
Anxiety	42%
Irritability	37%
Depression Symptoms	29%
Low Motivation	33%
Burnout (Emotional)	36%
<b>Effect on Professional Life</b>	
Reduced Classroom Effectiveness	40%
Decline in Research Output	33%
Reduced Student Engagement	38%
Increased Absenteeism	18%

**Source: Primary Data**

The data shows how professional stress affects college professors' physical, mental, and professional wellbeing. Fatigue (45%), sleep difficulties (40%), and headaches (38%) are the most common physical symptoms, indicating persistent exhaustion and interrupted rest patterns from overwork and screen usage. Stress-induced diseases like high blood pressure (30%) and digestive difficulties (22%), are medically recognised. These signs indicate that stress is both psychological and physiological. Anxiety (42%), irritation (37%), burnout (36%), and low motivation (33%), are the most common emotional and psychological impacts. These numbers indicate that faculty mental health is failing due to institutional pressure and inadequate coping resources. Depressive symptoms identified by 29% of respondents are alarming, indicating the need for early college psychological intervention and support. The professional effects of stress are important. Stress reduces teaching and research productivity by 40% and 33%, respectively. Reduced student participation (38%) suggests a breakdown in faculty-student connections, which can hurt learning and classroom

dynamics. Though lower, increased absenteeism (18%) suggests disengagement or inability to cope, which could lead to long-term attrition from the field.

The data shows that college professors' professional stress is a multifaceted issue that harms their health, mental health, and job performance. The findings significantly support stress management programs, mental health services, flexible workloads, and supportive administrative policies

**Table: 3 Gender-Based Comparison of Stress Indicators**

Stress Indicators	Male (%)	Female (%)	t-value	P value
Work-Life Imbalance	38	65	2.84	<0.001**
Emotional Exhaustion	29	41	2.15	0.050*
Use of Coping Strategies	55	68	1.98	0.050*
Seeking Professional Counseling	5	18	3.06	<0.001**

**Source: Primary Data**

**Interpretation:** The data indicates statistically significant gender disparities in multiple stress indicators among college educators, as evidenced by the t-values and associated p-values. The most notable disparity is evident in work-life imbalance, with 65% of female educators indicating this concern, in contrast to 38% of male educators. The elevated t-value of 2.84 and a highly significant p-value of <0.001 signify a pronounced gender disparity. This indicates that female educators face more challenges in reconciling professional obligations with familial and personal life, presumably owing to traditional expectations that women oversee both job and domestic responsibilities—a prevalent situation in numerous regions of India. Emotional tiredness is reported more frequently by female teachers (41%) compared to their male counterparts (29%), with a significant t-value of 2.15 and  $p = 0.050$ . This indicates an elevated emotional burden on female educators, likely stemming from intensified multitasking, role conflict, and inadequate institutional support for stress management. Regarding coping techniques, 68% of women utilise active coping mechanisms, in contrast to 55% of men. The statistically significant difference ( $t = 1.98$ ,  $p = 0.050$ ) may indicate a heightened awareness or propensity among women to address stress via personal or social strategies. It also suggests that female educators may be more proactive in managing their stress, despite experiencing elevated levels of it. A significant observation is the utilisation of professional counselling services, with hardly 5% of male instructors seeking assistance compared to 18% of female teachers. The gender disparity, evidenced by a t-value of 3.06 and  $p < 0.001$ , indicates that women are more significantly impacted by stress and more inclined to pursue psychological assistance. This may indicate that societal stigma around mental health support is more significant among men, resulting in the underutilisation of existing resources. The data highlights a distinct gender discrepancy in the experience and management of stress among college educators. Female educators are disproportionately impacted by work-life imbalance and emotional fatigue, however they are also more inclined to employ coping mechanisms and pursue professional assistance. These findings underscore the necessity for gender-sensitive institutional interventions, encompassing flexible work practices, access to counselling, and awareness initiatives designed to normalise mental health support for all faculty members.

**Table: 4 Coping Strategies and Their Effectiveness**

Coping Strategy	Usage (%)	Perceived Effectiveness (Scale 1–5)
Peer Support and Social Sharing	60%	4.1
Time Management	55%	3.8
Yoga and Physical Exercise	48%	4.2



Professional Counseling	12%	4.5
Ignoring/Withdrawing	28%	2.5
Spiritual and Religious Practices	40%	3.9

**Source: Primary Data**

**Interpretation:** The study underscores the diverse coping mechanisms utilised by college educators to mitigate professional stress and their perceived efficacy. Peer support and social sharing is the predominant approach utilised by 60% of respondents, achieving a notable efficacy rating of 4.1 on a 5-point scale. This indicates that informal social interactions—such as conversing with colleagues or friends—are crucial for enabling teachers to express emotions, obtain insights, and experience emotional support. Time management, employed by 55%, is a prevalent method, albeit with a little lower effectiveness rating of 3.8. This suggests that although numerous educators endeavour to optimise their scheduling and prioritise duties, time limitations and unforeseen demands may diminish its effectiveness. Remarkably, yoga and physical exercise are ranked as the second most successful approach (4.2), while being utilised by just 48% of individuals. The disparity between utilisation and efficacy indicates that increased awareness or motivation could enhance physical wellness practices among professors, which are evidently advantageous for holistic stress management. Spiritual and religious practices, utilised by 40%, exhibit a notable perceived efficacy of 3.9, indicating that personal belief systems and faith-based activities confer emotional resilience and inner tranquility for several educators, particularly in culturally entrenched environments such as India. Significantly, professional counselling, although being the least utilised technique (12%), attained the highest effectiveness rating (4.5). This underscores a crucial observation: although a limited number of educators utilise formal mental health resources—potentially due to stigma, expense, or accessibility—those that engage with such help find it exceedingly advantageous. Institutions should therefore endeavour to diminish obstacles to counselling services and more transparently advocate their significance.

**Table: 5 Coping Strategies and Their Effectiveness**

Support Mechanism	Available (%)	Not Available (%)
Psychological Counseling Services	15	85
Mentoring Systems	38	62
Career Development Workshops	42	58
Faculty Welfare Committees	33	67
ICT Training and Stress Management Sessions	28	72

**Source: Primary Data**

**Interpretation:** Table 5 shows a troubling scenario concerning the inadequate availability of institutional support systems for stress management among college educators. Only 15% of respondents reported access to psychological counselling services, however an overwhelming 85% identified a deficiency in such support. This is especially concerning given the previously noted high success rating of professional counselling (4.5/5). The data highlights a considerable disparity between demand and provision, indicating that many schools have not yet integrated mental health services into faculty welfare. Mentoring programs, including assistance, peer learning, and emotional support, are present in only 38% of colleges, resulting in 62% of teachers without access to structured mentoring. This denies teachers essential developing and coping chances, particularly for younger or less experienced staff who may gain the most from mentorship. Career development workshops, vital for mitigating professional stagnation and fostering advancement, are available to merely 42% of respondents. The absence of access for 58% suggests that numerous faculty members may perceive a lack of support in their career advancement, which could result in demotivation and prolonged stress. Likewise, faculty welfare committees, intended to resolve educator issues and enhance workplace morale, exist in only 33% of universities. With 67% missing such entities, this indicates that institutional frameworks for teacher assistance are inadequate or underdeveloped, resulting in unresolved stress-related difficulties. Finally,

ICT training and stress management sessions, essential in the contemporary landscape of technology-driven education, are accessible to merely 28% of educators. The fact that 72% do not obtain such training demonstrates institutional neglect in educating teachers with the tools needed to adapt to digital pedagogies and manage accompanying stress.

### Major Findings

1. A significant majority (72%) of college educators endure elevated stress levels attributable to excessive workloads, indicative of overwhelming academic, administrative, and research obligations.
1. Role conflict arising from teaching, administrative responsibilities, and research activities constitutes a significant stressor for 65% of participants.
2. Sixty percent of instructors report an inadequate work-life balance, particularly among female professors, highlighting challenges in managing personal and professional obligations.
3. Inadequate institutional communication (58%) and insufficient administrative assistance (50%) greatly lead to professional discontent and stress.
4. Job uncertainty affects 55% of respondents, especially in private and self-financing enterprises that lack established tenure procedures.
5. Technological adaptation (45%) and the demand to publish research (52%) are rising pressures, particularly in the post-pandemic digital education environment.
6. Stress presents physiologically as weariness (45%), sleep disturbances (40%), and headaches (38%), signifying chronic exhaustion.
7. The emotional and psychological repercussions encompass anxiety (42%), burnout (36%), and depressive symptoms (29%), indicating a decline in mental health among professors.
8. Professional performance is similarly affected—40% indicate diminished teaching effectiveness, whereas 33% observe a decrease in research productivity.
9. Female educators experience greater stress about work-life balance (65%) and emotional tiredness (41%) compared to their male counterparts, indicating a distinct gender-based gap in stress levels.
10. Despite merely 12% of educators utilising professional counselling, it is esteemed as the most efficacious coping approach (4.5 out of 5), signifying a lack of engagement with formal mental health resources.
11. Peer support (60%), yoga (48%), and spiritual activities (40%) are prevalent coping strategies with considerable perceived efficacy.
12. Institutional support systems are severely deficient—merely 15% report access to counselling services, and 28% to ICT training and stress management sessions.
13. The absence of faculty welfare committees (67%) and mentorship programs (62%) indicates inadequate institutional infrastructure for addressing teacher stress.

### THEORETICAL CONSEQUENCES

The findings validate the Person-Environment Fit Theory by demonstrating that a discrepancy between institutional demands and resources forecasts educator stress. The Job Demand-Control Model is substantiated by evidence indicating that poor autonomy is associated with high strain. The COR theory is substantiated by observed emotional exhaustion resulting from resource depletion. Furthermore, gender variations in coping correspond with Transactional Stress Theory, emphasising that assessment and resource availability vary among groups.

### Recommendations

1. Institutions ought to implement workload rationalisation strategies by equilibrating instructional hours, administrative responsibilities, and research obligations.
2. Structured mentoring programs for faculty should be established to assist early-career educators and mitigate role conflict.
3. The implementation of flexible scheduling and remote work options is essential, particularly for female teachers, to enhance work-life balance.
4. Psychological counselling services ought to be compulsory and readily available in all higher education institutions.
5. Time management, yoga, and peer engagement programs ought to be institutionalised via workshops and wellness



initiatives.

6. Regularly organised ICT and digital teaching competency programs are essential to mitigate technology-related stress among educators.
7. The administration ought to augment transparency and feedback systems to alleviate institutional stress and boost communication.
8. Awareness campaigns must be implemented to diminish mental health stigma and encourage help-seeking behaviours, particularly among male educators.
9. Faculty welfare committees must be established and authorised to address grievances, wellbeing, and professional growth.
10. Performance appraisal systems must incorporate measures of teacher well-being and access to support, rather than solely relying on output-based metrics.

## CONCLUSION

College educators encounter significant and multifaceted stress stemming from workload, administrative obligations, insufficient support, and changing instructional duties. The physical, emotional, and professional consequences of stress are distinctly apparent, underscoring a significant necessity for institutional intervention. Gender-specific difficulties persist, with female professors encountering markedly greater stress over work-life balance and emotional fatigue. Personal coping mechanisms are prevalent but inadequate without formal institutional support networks. The absence of organised mental health and welfare systems in most universities is a significant issue that requires immediate attention. Advocating for professional counselling, mentoring, wellness initiatives, and digital training can substantially improve teachers' well-being and efficacy. Managing stress is not merely a welfare concern, but a strategic necessity for guaranteeing long-term quality and sustainability in higher education.

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