PERCEIVED STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG EXPATRIATE TEACHERS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract:

This study investigates the perceived level of stressors and coping strategies among the faculty of higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. The faculty stress index (FSI) and a coping strategies questionnaire were used for the collection of data from faculty members. The FSI has five subscales. The higher the score on each of the subscales, the greater would be the stress experienced and perceived by the respondents. The coping strategies are subdivided into seven subscales. The data was collected from 100 faculty members from various institutions in Saudi Arabia. The findings reveal that faculty members with different job titles are experiencing varying levels of stress on each subscale. Three groups of faculty, assistant professor, lecturers, and instructors were significantly different on a reward & recognition subscale of FSI and regarding their viewpoints on tenure. Some coping strategies are found related considerably with the FSI subscale score. There are a few similar studies on Saudi Arabia in the health sector only. This study contributes to the literature by providing insight into perceived stress in the Higher education sector of Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Stress, Coping strategies, Teaching, Saudi Arabia.

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Introduction

Stress is a complex phenomenon. Researchers have explained it differently in different contexts. Walter Cannon was one of the pioneers in stress-related research during the 20th century. He defined stress as an emergency in which the body reacts by either "fight" or "flight" – an involuntary response of a person to either confront or escape. The term stress is used to explain the excessive pressure and demand, which goes beyond the capacity of the individual to sustain physiological, psychological, and emotional stability.

The research on occupational stress in the educational sector is very limited in Saudi Arabia as most of the institutions are mainly focused on teaching. Academic research conducted by Saudis or expatriate is still lacking recognition and significance across the Kingdom. However, stress-related research has been done in the health and industrial sectors. Therefore, there is a need to explore whether faculty at higher education institutions are experiencing noteworthy stress or not, and if so, what are these and how they cope with these stressors.

Literature Review

Stress has become a part of everyone's life and is a modern-day phenomenon. It is no longer restricted to certain professions, i.e., physicians, engineers, air traffic controllers, nurses, police officers, and firefighters, but now also includes the teaching profession. Formerly teaching was perceived as a low-stress profession, but many researchers have reported that teachers are experiencing increased levels of stress (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Košir, Tement, Licardo, & Habe, 2015; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, 2017).

The teaching profession has undergone tremendous changes over the last 20 years due to the advancement of technology, restructuring of business and service industries, own institutional challenges, and other factors. A faculty member at all levels is not only required to teach but also to conduct research, as well as oversee other administrative, supervisory, or managerial activities at the college/university level (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). This often creates an imbalance between the increased work demands, and his/her free time and individual capabilities (Outcalt, 2002).

Findings of research on teachers' stress reveal that teachers are experiencing stress due to several stressors they are dealing with daily, i.e., over workload, teaching students with no or little motivation, maintaining classroom discipline, continuous changes at the workplace, poor working conditions, evaluation and scrutiny by others, increased workload, and challenging relationships with colleagues and administrators (Kyriacou, 2001; Nelson & Smith, 2016). Teachers are under stress due to lack of resources, time pressure, lack of professional recognition, discipline problems, lack of support, and the diversity of tasks required (Kokkinos, 2007).

It has been reported by the research that teachers are leaving their jobs in response to the continuous exposure to stress (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Chang, 2009; Chaplain, 2008; Hong, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). A survey conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) researchers has reported that the faculty was more stressed than business executives (Orlans, 2003).

Stress can be either functional (healthy) or dysfunctional (unhealthy) (Clark, Nguyen, & Barbosa-Leiker, 2014). When academics are under severe stress conditions and are over-burdened, it is often unhealthy & dysfunctional (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). When stress is moderate and challenging – but tasks are do-able – then it is functional. Excessive stress levels, however, produce adverse outcomes (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007; Sawatzky et al., 2012). High levels of stress for an extended period may lead to burnout (Azeem & Nazir, 2008; Enns, Eldridge, Montgomery, & Gonzalez, 2018; Košir et al., 2015; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Pestonjee & Azeem, 2001). Continuous stress is the cause of many health-related issues for an individual, such as burnout and cardiovascular problems (Attridge, Bergmark, Parker, & Lapp, 2000; Clark et al., 2014; Ryan, Tipu, & Zeffane, 2011; Shimanoe et al., 2018). The reasons for increased levels of anxiety amongst faculty members to a great extent relates to increased workloads, maintaining high professional standards and deliverables, keeping pace with administrative and faculty-required changes, and the increased usage of technology in education (Košir et al., 2015).

Whenever stress is experienced, there are invariably strategies that people use to cope with stress. Humans find ways to deal with or avoid pain (pain caused by stress), especially if the pain continues to affect their day-to-day lives. Coping strategies are found very specific to an individual's experience of stress and his or her reaction to it, so people react to stressors differently. Coping strategies help instructors to manage unpleasant conditions, but if they are inappropriate, stress continues and may severely affect the health and performance of teachers.

Coping strategies help teachers in reducing the effects of stress (Taylor et al., 2016). Teachers who receive social support from others can relieve their stress, and it positively impacts on their health (Shimanoe et al., 2018; Wiegel, Sattler, Göritz, & Diewald, 2016). Stress is a good and natural process; finding the coping strategies can help you reduce the stress in instructors (Gibbons, Dempster, & Moutray, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Another research published in 2015 by (Wolf, Stidham, & Ross, 2015) reported that the sense of control and hardiness have a "buffer effect" on occupational stress. The "tougher," more "hardy" teachers can better meet the stress. The instructors who accept they are stable in their capacity to deal with their negative states of mind revealed lower levels of burnout and misery than those having more fragile self-conviction (Mearns &

Cain, 2003; Ross, Boonyanurak, & Stopper, 2014). Teachers who had more access to coping resources reported less stress and burnout (Betoret, 2006). Individuals utilize various systems to limit pressure (for example, physical exercise, eating a healthy meal, keep a positive attitude and accepting that they cannot control each and everything in their life (Curtis, 2000).

The study aims to investigate the sources of stressors perceived by the expatriate faculty members at higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia and how they cope up with the perceived stress in their life.

Research Questions

This study is an effort to know:

1. Perceived levels of occupational stress among the faculty members?

2. What adapting techniques do employees use to deal with their word related

stressors?

3. Is there any difference in the stress levels concerning the "title" which faculty members hold?

4. Is there a noteworthy relationship/correlation that exists between variables in the study?

Methods

Design: A correlational design was used to answer the research questions taken in the study—the potential causes of stressors perceived by teachers at higher education institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, how teachers at HEI cope up with the stressors they experience is also to be investigated. The study determines the relationships among stressors, coping strategies, and certain demographic variables.

Setting: The study was conducted in the higher education institutions of Saudi Arabia. The higher education institutions at the Yanbu city were the intended target along with other approachable institutions in the Kingdom. Other higher education institutions were also selected from Medina and Jeddah cities to increase the representation.

Participants" Employees who were working in higher education institutions of Saudi Arabia were the target population of the present study. The questionnaires were emailed to 175 faculty members at different institutions of higher education in Saudi Arabia to collect data. Only 102 teachers responded, but 2 of the responses were rejected as they were incomplete.

Measure: Faculty stressors were extracted from the Faculty Stress Index (FSI) (Gmelch, 1993) to measure the sources of stress. The study used 20 stressors that were more relevant to the cultural context in the modern setting. Items for the

coping strategies were adopted from (Allison, 2004).

Demographic Information: Age, tenure, academic title, and marital status of the participants were also considered to establish relationships with perceived stressors and coping strategies.

Results and Discussion

The motivation behind the study was to research and recognized the wellsprings of work-related stressors saw by employees at higher education institutions and how they cope up with the perceived stress in their life. The data were analyzed through SPSS, and the findings are discussed in this section of the paper.

Table 1 shows the demographic details of the data. It consists of the age, gender, marital status, academic title, and tenure of the respondents. The majority of the respondents fall within the 31-50 year of age category. The majority belongs to the lecturer and instructor titles. These two titles are heavily engaged in teaching assignments across the higher education institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. All the respondents are Non-Saudi expat workers who operate and teach in different places throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Table 1. Demographic details of the respondents

Variables		Percentage
Age	20-30	8%
	31-40	48%
	41-50	40%
	51-60	4%

Gender	Male	100%
Marital Status	Married	86%
	Unmarried	14%
Academic Title	Assistant Professor	18%
	Lecturer	48%
	Instructor	34%
Tenure	1-5	30%
	6-10	40%
	11-15	18%
	16-20	10%
	Above 20	2%

Table 2 shows the mean scores on the faculty stress index and three groups of coping strategies. In the case of assistant professor, four subscales of the faculty stress index received the highest ratings as compared to the other two groups (3.78, 3.00, 3.11, and 2.81). In other words, assistant professors faced time constraint challenges, student interaction challenges, college/ departmental problems & introspection challenges the greatest. Faculty members who are instructors are found more stressed due to professional identity (2.82) as compared to the other two groups. To the extent the adapting methodologies are concerned, all the three gatherings are discovered fundamentally the same as in their scores on the strategy they prefer to avoid stress. Assistant professors prefer avoidance strategies (3.56) while the remaining two groups – namely lecturers and instructors – prefer social support in dealing with stress (3.44 and 3.40, respectively). Associate professors are also influential in social support as a

coping mechanism, but this is not their primary mechanism. Scores in the table are answering the research question number 1 and 2.

Table 2. Faculty groups with mean scores on faculty stress index subscales and coping strategies subscales

Variables	Assistant Professor N=18 (Mean score)	Lecturer N=48 (Mean score)	Instructor N=34 (Mean score)
Reward & recognition	3.78	2.79	2.88
Time constraints	3.00	2.76	2.44
College/Departmental influence	3.11	2.85	2.61
Professional identity	2.33	2.25	2.82
Student interaction	2.81	2.64	2.64
Avoidance	3.56	3.27	3.14
Housework behavior	2.40	2.46	2.30
Changing Behavior	2.82	2.66	2.59
Social Support	3.73	3.44	3.40
Active participation	3.17	3.30	2.80
Passive participation	2.89	3.30	3.12
Introspection	**3.11**	**3.03**	**3.09**

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for the faculty stress index (FSI). Mean and standard deviation scores are shown for the stressors and coping subscales. The reward subscale receives the highest mean score, which indicates that the faculty is under more stress due to a lack of proper reward and recognition of their contribution

(3.00, 1.06). The second major reported stressor is the college/department influence (2.81, 0.89). This is due to the lack of facilities, repetitions of teaching assignments, lack of clarity in performance evaluation procedures, etc. Results revealed that time constraint is the third major stressor (2.70, 0.73). This is obvious sometimes that you, as a faculty, often have to perform tasks that are not directly related to teaching but rather being a departmental staff member who is engaged in extensive committee work, which often interferes or detracts from their core teaching assignments. The fourth subscale, namely "student interaction," receives a score almost similar to the time constraints (2.68, 0.79). Students are sometimes not prepared for teaching or showing a lack of interest and motivation in the class, which can cause stress among the teaching staff. Sometimes the added burden of increased class sizes (larger classes) and related assessments and marking requirements also create increased stress. Professional identity receives the lowest mean score (2.46, 0.99). It appears from the research findings that respondents experience reduced stress when they are presenting a paper or a talk in various situations such as a departmental presentation, a seminar or a conference (possibly because they are confident in this domain or perhaps because they perceive this as a low-stress activity or something they enjoy doing).

As far as the coping strategies are concerned, faculty scored social support, the highest coping strategies they use while under stress (3.43, 1.07). Similarly, avoidance (3.28, 0.83), active participation (3.10, 1.01), passive participation (3.16, 1.03), introspection (3.08, 0.79). The least preferred coping strategies reported by the respondents are changing

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behavior (2.66, 0.63) and
housework behavior (2.40, 0.98).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the faculty stress index and coping strategies subscales

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Avoidance	100	1.00	5.00	3.28	.82975
Housework behavior	100	1.00	5.00	2.40	.98473
Changing Behavior	100	1.00	4.20	2.66	.63856
Social Support	100	1.00	5.00	3.42	1.07873
Active participation	100	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.01079
Passive participation	100	1.00	5.00	3.16	1.03162
Introspection	100	1.00	5.00	3.08	.79433
Reward & recognition	100	1.00	5.00	3.00	1.06363
Time constraints	100	1.10	4.80	2.70	.73113
College/Departmental influence	100	1.00	5.00	2.81	.89118
Professional identity	100	1.00	5.00	2.46	.98903
Student interaction	100	1.00	5.00	2.67	.79336
Age	100	23.00	53.00	39.30	6.39207
Tenure	100	1.00	24.00	9.02	5.15807
Valid N (listwise)	100				

The top ten stressors reported by the faculty members are shown in table 4. The most elevated mean scores are gotten for going for meetings, which occupy a lot of time and having work requests that meddle with other individual exercises (3.07). The last two

stressors were, having repetitions in teaching assignments and having insufficient time to keep abreast of current developments in my field (2.71). The scores are reflections of the prevailing culture in the higher education institution where more emphasis is given to work-related activities, i.e., teaching, committee's work, student advising, etc. There may be less emphasis on recreational and professional development activities for the faculty members.

Table 4. Top ten ranked stressors

#	Ranked Means For The Ten Highest Stress	Mean
1	Long Meetings	3.07
2	Having work requests which meddle with other individual exercises	3.03
3	Autonomy to perform given tasks	2.91
4	Communication in writing overeating of the time	2.93
5	Unknown performance evaluation criteria	2.92
6	Teaching assignments outside of area expertise	2.83
7	Unrecognized efforts	2.81
8	Assignment of duties that take me away from my office	2.82
9	Having repetitions in teaching assignments	2.74
10	No time for personal development	2.71

The top ten coping strategies are listed in table 5. The first two coping strategies reported by the faculty members are praying and using the internet (4.11, 3.82). That means praying and using the internet helps those in reducing the impact of daily work-related stressors. Watching TV has received the least preferred

coping strategy to combat the effects

of daily stressors in their life (2.94).

Table 5. Top ten ranked coping strategies

#	Ranked Means For Top Ten Coping Strategies	Means
1	Praying	4.11
2	Using the internet	3.82
3	Avoiding problems	3.63
4	Making a phone call or chatting with friends and relatives	3.52
5	Talking to peer/s about events	3.43
6	Dealing with the problem immediately	3.32
7	Using social media	3.33
8	Working on hobbies	3.12
9	Exercising	3.02
10	Watching TV	2.94

Table 6 indicates the relationships among the faculty stress index (FSI) subscales, coping strategies subscale, and the demographic variables. The avoidance coping strategy was found significantly related with reward & recognition (0.355), time constraints (0.370), departmental influence (0.484), student interaction (0.308), age (0.393) and tenure (0.244). This correlation is the reflection of how faculty members are coping with a variety of stressors by just avoiding them or overthinking them. Housework is significantly related with reward & recognition (0.251), age (0.234) and tenure (0.285). Changing behavior is correlated with reward &

recognition (0.236), time constraints (0.406), departmental influence (0.431) and tenure (0.250). Social support is significantly correlated with reward & recognition (0.310), time constraints (0.406), departmental influence (0.307), student interaction (0.298) and age (.329). Active participation is significantly related with reward & recognition (0.315), time constraints (0.581), departmental influence (0.462), and student interaction (0.207). Passive participation is significantly related with reward &

recognition (0.226), time constraints (0.334), departmental influence (0.329), and student interaction (0.259). Introspection is significantly related with reward & recognition (0.218), time constraints (0.256), departmental influence (0.283), and age (.23). The obtained results indicate that stressors categorized under subscales are significantly related to the reported coping strategies. The table scores are reflecting the research question number 4.

Table 6. Correlation between stressors and coping strategies

	Av	HW	CB	SS	AP	PP	INT	RW	TC	DI	PI	SI	Age	Tenure
AV	1													
HW	.331**	1												
CB	.680**	.424**	1											
SS	.642**	.294**	.473**	1										
AP	.570**	.211*	.551**	.591**	1									
PP	.602**	.215*	.443**	.640**	.655**	1								
INT	.762**	.404**	.684**	.654**	.546**	.626**	1							
RW	.355**	-.251*	.236*	.310**	.315**	.226*	.218*	1						
TC	.370**	0.034	.406**	.460**	.581**	.334**	.256*	.639**	1					
DI	.484**	-0.056	.431**	.307**	.462**	.329**	.283**	.571**	.790**	1				
PI	0.051	-0.025	0.122	0.052	0.057	0.08	0.19	.442**	.397**	.347**	1			
SI	.308**	-0.045	0.162	.298**	.207*	.259**	0.12	.383**	.681**	.744**	.443**	1		
Age	.393**	.234*	0.095	.329**	0.065	0.023	.223*	0.071	-0.02	0.007	-0.19	-0.092	1	
EXP	.244*	.285**	.250*	0.152	-0.02	-0.17	0.04	-0.01	0.04	0.099	-0.13	0.016	.527**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 shows the one-way analysis of variance among the three job titles viz. instructor, lecturer, and assistant professors. The F values indicate that three groups are significantly different on their level of stress due to reward & recognition (F=6.61, P=0.002) and tenure (F= 7.86, P= .001). They did not differ on the other stressors and coping strategies reported by them significantly. Scores are the reflection of the research question number 3.

Table 7. One way ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Avoidance	1.972	2	0.986	1.445	0.241
Housing work	0.58	2	0.29	0.295	0.745
Changing Behavior	0.649	2	0.324	0.792	0.456
Social Support	2.998	2	1.499	1.296	0.278
Active participation	5.219	2	2.609	2.639	0.077
Passive participation	2.185	2	1.092	1.027	0.362
Introspection	0.146	2	0.073	0.114	0.893
Reward & recognition	13.443	2	6.721	6.615	0.002
Time constraints	3.981	2	1.99	3.945	0.023
Departmental influence	3.208	2	1.604	2.063	0.133
Professional identity	6.899	2	3.449	3.72	0.028
Student interaction	0.374	2	0.187	0.293	0.747
Age	232.765	2	116.382	2.961	0.056
Tenure	367.574	2	183.787	7.866	0.001

Conclusions

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the teachers with higher rank are under stress due to lack of proper reward and recognition of their work, time constraints, and departmental influence. These are the three main stressors with the highest scores among assistant professors as compared to the other two ranks (lecturer and instructor). They are involved in more specialized committee work within their departmental and institutional level. Sometimes, their work and efforts are not given proper recognition or reward, which may cause stress among them. Although higher-ranked faculty is given a lesser teaching load in comparison to lower-ranked teachers (lecturers and instructors) since highly ranked faculty is busy in administrative work, which is not visible to others have reported a higher level of stress concerning time constraints as well. All the groups are found almost similar in adopting and using coping strategies. The faculty members with doctorate degrees experience excessive pressure than Masters and Bachelor degrees as the doctorate needs to perform three degrees of administration (scholastic, research, and administration) to accomplish the top administration desires. To the extent, the adapting techniques are concerned; the three groups of assistant professor, lecturer, and instructor are not found significantly different. Their preferences for the use of coping strategies while experiencing stress or stressful situations are almost similar. This is probably due to their learning of the environment and the culture of the place. As shown in table 5, praying is found to be the most preferred coping strategy among the groups of respondent.6.

This has been noted in the study of Danish, Shahid, and Ali (2019) which stated that work stress increases the dissatisfaction among the employees. It may lead them to think about leaving the organization. Another study of Hussain, Khaliq, Nisar, Kamboh, and Ali (2019) and went on stating that stress has a negative impact on the employee performance. Increased stess level in the employees will distract them from the job and they will not be able to do their jobs efficiently and effectively (Yao, Zhang, Liu, Zhang, & Luo, 2019; Yunita & Saputra, 2019).

The managers need to address these stressers so that their employees can do the job to best of their abilities.

Limitations and future implications

The data for the study was gathered from the government institutions of higher learning in Saudi Arabia. So, the obtained findings cannot be generalized as the evidence does not represent the whole community of teachers in the Kingdome of Saudi Arabia. The importance and recognition of research efforts still lack in the Kingdom. Data collection is a big issue, and due to the potential areas of research are still unexplored. The findings of the present study may be useful for administrators to have an understanding of the potential stressors in a teaching profession and how to overcome the detrimental effects of stress on teaching performance and the learning of students.

Acknowledgement:

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