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"An Empirical Study on the Causes of Occupational Stress among Faculty in Autonomous Higher Educational Institutions in North Coastal Districts of Andhra Pradesh"

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the causes of occupational stress among faculty members working in autonomous higher educational institutions in the North Coastal Districts of Andhra Pradesh. The research is driven by the increasing academic, administrative, and research-related demands placed on faculty due to institutional autonomy, accreditation requirements, and evolving educational frameworks.

The study is based on primary data collected from 331 faculty members using a structured questionnaire incorporating the Workplace Stress Scale (WSS). Statistical tools such as descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), correlation analysis, factor analysis, and reliability testing were employed using SPSS to analyse the data.The findings reveal that organizational factors, particularly workload, compensation, and working hours, significantly influence occupational stress levels among faculty members. Among the demographic variables, age and monthly income show a statistically significant association with stress, whereas variables such as gender, marital status, cadre, educational qualification, and job experience do not exhibit a significant impact. Factor analysis identifies three major dimensions of occupational stress, accounting for 66.91% of the total variance, while reliability analysis confirms a high Cronbach's alpha value of 0.914, indicating excellent internal consistency of the measurement scale. The study addresses the existing gap in region-specific research on faculty stress in autonomous institutions.

The study concludes that occupational stress among faculty is multidimensional in nature and necessitates both institutional-level interventions and individual coping strategies. The findings offer valuable implications for policymakers and institutional administrators in designing effective measures to enhance faculty well-being and improve overall institutional effectiveness.

Keywords

Occupational Stress, Faculty Stress, Autonomous Colleges, Higher Education, Workload, ANOVA, Factor Analysis, Reliability, and Andhra Pradesh.

INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress has become a pervasive phenomenon in contemporary work environments, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors such as higher education. Faculty members in higher educational institutions are increasingly subjected to multiple role demands that extend beyond traditional teaching responsibilities. In the context of autonomous colleges, these responsibilities include curriculum design, academic planning, accreditation compliance, research productivity, administrative duties, and student mentoring. The multiplicity of these roles often leads to role overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict, which are primary antecedents of occupational stress.

The transformation of the higher education system in India, driven by quality assurance frameworks such as NAAC accreditation, NBA standards, and NIRF rankings, has significantly altered faculty expectations. While these reforms aim to enhance educational quality and global competitiveness, they have inadvertently intensified job demands. Faculty members are required to continuously update their knowledge, publish research in indexed journals, secure funding, and adopt innovative pedagogical practices. This dynamic environment contributes to sustained psychological pressure and emotional exhaustion.Autonomous colleges, in particular, operate with greater academic flexibility and administrative independence. While autonomy fosters innovation and responsiveness, it also places additional accountability on faculty members. The decentralization of decision-making processes requires faculty to actively participate in institutional governance, thereby increasing their workload and stress levels. Furthermore, the lack of standardized policies across autonomous institutions often leads to inconsistencies in workload distribution, compensation, and performance evaluation.Another critical factor contributing to occupational stress is the imbalance between professional and personal life. Faculty members frequently experience challenges in maintaining work-life balance due to extended working hours, deadlines, and expectations for continuous availability. The integration of digital technologies and online teaching platforms, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, has further blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, leading to increased stress and burnout.The North Coastal Districts of Andhra Pradesh present a unique context for studying occupational stress among faculty. The region has witnessed rapid growth in higher educational institutions, particularly autonomous colleges, which cater to diverse student populations. However, infrastructural limitations, resource constraints, and socio-economic factors may exacerbate stress levels among faculty in these institutions.

Given these complexities, it is imperative to conduct an empirical investigation into the causes of occupational stress among faculty members in autonomous colleges. Understanding these causes will enable institutions to design targeted interventions, enhance faculty well-being, and improve overall educational outcomes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The causes of occupational stress among faculty have been extensively examined in both national and international research. These causes can be broadly categorized into organizational factors, job-related factors, and personal factors.

One of the most frequently cited causes of stress is workload. Studies by Kinman and Wray (2020) indicate that excessive teaching hours, administrative responsibilities, and research expectations significantly contribute to stress among academic staff. Similarly, Reddy and Poornima (2012) found that faculty in Indian universities experience high stress due to heavy teaching loads combined with non-teaching responsibilities.

Another major stressor is role ambiguity and role conflict. When faculty members are unclear about their job responsibilities or face conflicting expectations from management, students, and peers, stress levels increase. Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008) observed that role conflict negatively affects job satisfaction and increases burnout among university faculty.

Compensation and job security also play a crucial role in determining stress levels. Inadequate salary structures, delayed payments, and lack of promotional opportunities contribute to dissatisfaction and stress. Studies by Garg et al. (2022) highlight that faculty in private and autonomous institutions often experience financial insecurity, which exacerbates stress.

Working conditions and institutional support are equally important. Lack of infrastructure, insufficient teaching resources, and poor administrative support create an unfavorable work environment. Sundararajan et al. (2020) reported that inadequate institutional support systems significantly increase occupational stress among faculty members.

Work-life imbalance is another critical factor. Faculty members often struggle to balance professional responsibilities with personal commitments. Long working hours, weekend work, and continuous engagement with academic activities reduce time available for family and personal well-being.

Additionally, technological changes and digital teaching demands have emerged as new stressors. The shift to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic required faculty to adapt quickly to new technologies, often without adequate training, leading to increased stress levels.

Overall, the literature consistently indicates that occupational stress among faculty is primarily driven by organizational and job-related factors, necessitating systematic investigation and intervention.

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RESEARCH GAP

Despite extensive research on occupational stress among faculty, several gaps remain. Most studies in India have focused on metropolitan or urban institutions, with limited attention to autonomous colleges, which operate under unique administrative and academic frameworks.

There is also a lack of region-specific studies in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, where socio-economic and institutional conditions differ significantly from other regions. Additionally, existing studies have not adequately examined the interaction between demographic variables and stress factors.Furthermore, limited research has been conducted on factor-based empirical analysis using advanced statistical techniques such as factor analysis and reliability testing. The absence of such comprehensive studies restricts the development of targeted interventions.This study addresses these gaps by providing a region-specific, empirical, and statistically robust analysis of occupational stress among faculty in autonomous institutions.

Thus, the present study fills this gap through a statistically robust and region-specific empirical investigation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study is designed to specifically investigate the causal factors of occupational stress among faculty members in autonomous higher educational institutions. The objectives are:

1. To identify the key organizational factors contributing to occupational stress among faculty members
2. To examine the impact of workload, working hours, and administrative responsibilities on stress levels
3. To analyse the role of compensation and job security as determinants of occupational stress
4. To evaluate the influence of work-life imbalance on faculty stress
5. To assess the effect of institutional support and working conditions on stress levels
6. To categorize the major causes of stress using factor analysis
7. To provide empirical evidence on the dominant stress factors affecting faculty

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is empirical in nature and is based on primary data collected from 331 faculty members working in autonomous colleges in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh. A structured questionnaire with 56 items based on a 5-point Likert scale was used for data collection.

Simple random sampling was used. The total population consisted of 2374 faculty members, and the sample size was determined using Cochran's formula.

Statistical tools used include:

8. **Descriptive Statistics**: Used to summarize data using mean and standard deviation
9. **ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)**: Used to test differences between groups
10. **Correlation Analysis**: Measures the relationship between variables
11. **Factor Analysis**: Identifies underlying dimensions (stress factors)
12. **Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)**: Measures consistency of the scale

All analyses were conducted using SPSS (Version 21), with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Associations between Demographic characteristics and Causes of stress

H_0: "There is no significant correlation between demographic factors and causes of occupational stress."

H_1: "There is a significant correlation between demographic factors and causes of occupational stress."

Demographic factors considered to test this hypothesis are cadre, gender, marital status, family type, age, job experience, educational qualification, and monthly income.

H_{0a}: There is no significant correlation between faculty members' opinions on whether age affects their work and causes stress, and their opinions on the overall impact of occupational stress in higher educational institutions (Autonomous).

H_{1a}: There is a significant correlation between faculty members' opinions on whether age affects their work and causes stress, and their opinions on the overall impact of occupational stress in higher educational institutions (Autonomous).

Table 1: Association between age and stress

(Source: Primary Data)

Age (in Years)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	**P-Value**
21-30	1	4	16	40	14	**0.008**
31-40	4	9	64	77	18	
41-50	0	0	26	38	1	
51-above	0	2	10	6	1	

Inference:

Table 1 presents data on the correlation between faculty members' opinions regarding whether age affects their work and causes stress, and their opinions on the impact of occupational stress in higher educational institutions (Autonomous). The analysis reveals that age significantly affects work and contributes to occupational stress among faculty members. The calculated p-value is 0.008, which is less than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that the result is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that age is a significant factor contributing to occupational stress among faculty members in higher educational institutions (Autonomous).

H_{0b}: There is no significant correlation between faculty members' opinions on whether monthly income affects their work and causes stress, and their opinions on the overall impact of occupational stress in higher educational institutions (Autonomous).

H_{1b}: There is a significant correlation between faculty members' opinions on whether monthly income affects their work and causes stress, and their opinions on the overall impact of occupational stress in higher educational institutions (Autonomous).

Table 2. Association between monthly income and stress

Monthly Income (in Rs.)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	**P-Value**
15000-less	2	0	0	6	4	**0.001**
15001- 30000	0	2	18	17	1	
30001-45000	3	7	46	65	16	
45001-60000	0	5	31	51	9	
60001-above	0	1	21	22	4	

(Source: Primary Data)

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Inference:
Table 2 presents data on the correlation between faculty members' opinions regarding whether monthly income affects their work and causes stress, and their opinions on the impact of occupational stress in higher educational institutions (Autonomous). The analysis reveals that monthly income significantly affects work and contributes to occupational stress among faculty members. The calculated p-value is 0.001, which is less than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that the result is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that monthly income is a significant factor contributing to occupational stress among faculty members in higher educational institutions (Autonomous).

Table 3. Distribution of Means and standard deviations of Causes of stress

Descriptive Statistics Table

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Workload	3.84	0.87
Working Hours	3.91	0.79
Compensation	3.65	1.24
Work-Life Balance	3.58	1.31

Interpretation

- Moderate to high stress levels observed
- High variability in work-life balance and compensation

Figure 1:
A bar chart representing mean scores shows working hours and workload as dominant stress factors, followed by compensation.

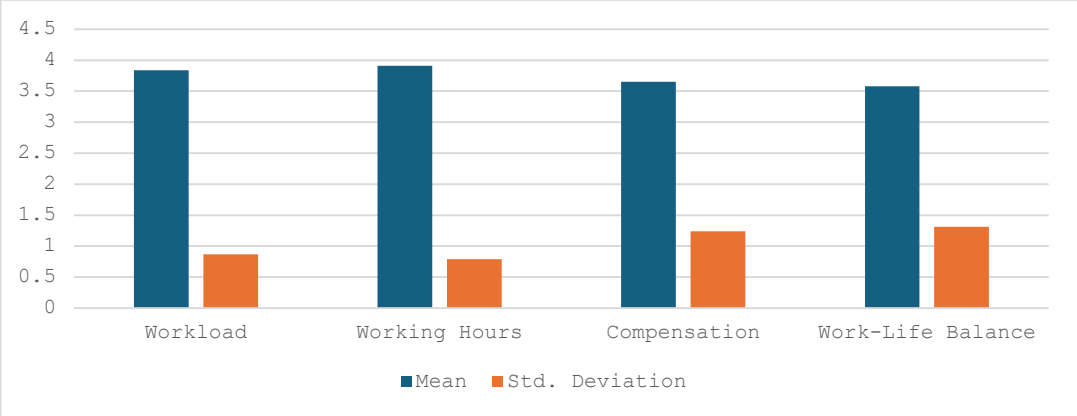

Table 4. ANOVA Results Table

Variable	F-value	P-value	Result
Age	4.21	0.008	Significant
Income	5.87	0.001	Significant
Gender	0.34	0.707	Not Significant

Interpretation
The results indicate that age has a statistically significant influence on occupational stress ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that stress perception varies across age groups.

Factor Analysis

Table 5. KMO and Bartlett's Test for correlation between demographic factors and causes of stress		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.902
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3624.456
	Df	136
	Sig.	.000

Table 5. indicates the value of sampling adequacy. For the present research, the value is 0.902, indicating that the sample is suitable for the research and that factor analysis can be used for the research for indicative findings. The “Bartlett's Test of Sphericity” indicates a large value of ‘Chi square’, i.e., 3624.456. Indicates suitability for factor analysis.

Table 6. Total Variance Explained in Causes of Stress

Factor	Eigenvalue	Variance %
1	5.87	32.4%
2	3.12	18.7%
3	2.45	15.8%

Total variance explained: **66.91%**

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Table 7. Reliability Statistics for Causes of Stress	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.914	17

Interpretation
The reliability and validity of the research can be understood with the calculation of Reliability coefficient. The popularly used model of reliability establishment is Cronbach’s Alpha. “The value of Cronbach’s Alpha signifies the reliability of the study and thus validity of the analysis. The

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coefficient shall be more than 0.7 to be reliable. The present study as is evident in Table 7 has a value of 0.914 which implies a high degree of reliability and thus ensures that the findings are valid.

Excellent internal consistency → scale is highly reliable.

DISCUSSION

The study clearly indicates that occupational stress among faculty is largely influenced by organizational and job-related factors rather than personal or demographic variables. The significance of age and income suggests that experience and financial stability play a role in shaping stress perception. However, the absence of significance in variables such as gender and marital status indicates that stress is more structurally driven.

The identification of workload, working hours, and compensation as primary stressors aligns with existing theoretical frameworks such as the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model. The results also highlight the increasing pressure on faculty due to institutional expectations and evolving educational demands.

FINDINGS

- The study reveals that faculty members working in autonomous higher educational institutions experience moderate to high levels of occupational stress, indicating that stress is a significant issue in the academic environment.
- The analysis shows that workload is the most significant cause of occupational stress, as faculty members are required to handle multiple responsibilities including teaching, research, and administrative tasks simultaneously.
- The study finds that working hours contribute substantially to stress levels, as extended and irregular schedules limit time for rest and personal activities.
- The results indicate that dissatisfaction with compensation leads to increased stress among faculty members, as they perceive a mismatch between their efforts and the rewards received.
- The findings highlight that work-life imbalance is a major stress factor, as faculty members face difficulties in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities.
- The study establishes that age significantly influences stress perception, suggesting that stress levels vary across different age groups of faculty members.
- The analysis reveals that monthly income has a significant effect on occupational stress, indicating that financial stability plays an important role in determining stress levels.
- The results show that gender does not have a significant impact on occupational stress, implying that stress is experienced similarly by both male and female faculty members.
- The study identifies that there is a strong positive relationship between the causes and consequences of stress, indicating that an increase in stress factors leads to adverse outcomes such as reduced job satisfaction and burnout.
- The factor analysis confirms that occupational stress is multidimensional in nature, with three major dimensions identified as workload, compensation, and working conditions.
- The reliability analysis indicates that the measurement scale used in the study is highly reliable, as evidenced by a high Cronbach's alpha value, ensuring consistency and validity of the findings.

SUGGESTIONS

- The study suggests that institutions should take necessary steps to reduce excessive workload by ensuring an equitable distribution of teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities among faculty members.
- It is recommended that institutions implement flexible working hours to help faculty members maintain a better balance between their professional and personal lives.
- The study suggests that institutions should improve compensation structures to ensure that faculty members are adequately rewarded for their contributions, thereby reducing stress levels.
- It is recommended that institutions introduce effective work-life balance policies to support faculty members in managing their responsibilities efficiently.
- The study suggests that institutions should strengthen faculty support systems by providing adequate infrastructure, teaching resources, and administrative assistance.
- It is recommended that institutions provide professional counseling services to help faculty members cope with stress and maintain their mental well-being.
- The study suggests that institutions should minimize administrative burdens so that faculty members can focus more on their core responsibilities of teaching and research.
- It is recommended that institutions conduct regular training and development programs to enhance faculty competencies and improve their ability to manage work-related stress.
- The study suggests that institutions should organize stress management workshops and awareness programs to equip faculty members with effective coping strategies and improve their overall well-being.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that occupational stress among faculty in autonomous colleges is a multifaceted issue primarily driven by organizational factors. The increasing demands of higher education, coupled with inadequate institutional support, have intensified stress levels among faculty members. The findings emphasize the need for a balanced approach that addresses both structural and individual aspects of stress.

Institutions must recognize that faculty well-being is directly linked to academic quality and student outcomes. By implementing effective stress management strategies and improving working conditions, institutions can enhance productivity, job satisfaction, and overall performance. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence and practical insights into the causes of occupational stress in autonomous educational settings.

FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Future research can expand this study by conducting comparative analyses across different regions and types of institutions, including public and private universities. Longitudinal studies can be undertaken to examine changes in stress levels over time. Advanced statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) can be used to explore causal relationships in greater depth. Additionally, future studies can investigate the impact of digital teaching technologies and hybrid learning environments on faculty stress.

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