

An Analysis of Academic-Related Occupational Stress Among College Faculties in Ernakulam City

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Abstract

Occupational stress has emerged as a growing concern in the academic profession, significantly affecting the mental well-being and professional efficiency of college faculty. This study aims to analyze the levels, sources, and impact of academic-related occupational stress among college teachers in Ernakulam City, Kerala. With the evolving demands of higher education—including increased teaching loads, administrative responsibilities, research pressures, and student engagement—faculty members often experience heightened stress levels that can lead to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and reduced performance. The research employs a descriptive survey method, gathering quantitative data from a representative sample of college faculty across various institutions in Ernakulam. A structured questionnaire was developed to assess key stressors linked to academic responsibilities such as curriculum delivery, assessment duties, publication expectations, and time management challenges. Demographic factors including age, gender, teaching experience, and type of institution (government, aided, or self-financing) were also considered to identify variations in stress patterns. Preliminary findings indicate that academic workload and administrative duties are the most significant contributors to occupational stress, with noticeable differences based on institutional type and experience level. Furthermore, the study highlights the lack of institutional support mechanisms and work-life balance policies as key areas of concern. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how academic responsibilities impact the mental health and job satisfaction of college faculty. It also provides practical insights for policymakers and institutional administrators to develop targeted interventions aimed at reducing stress and promoting a healthier academic work environment.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, College Faculty, Academic Workload, Higher Education, Ernakulam City, Faculty Well-being.

Introduction

Occupational stress is a growing concern in modern work environments, and the academic profession is no exception. In recent years, college teachers in India have been experiencing increasing levels of stress due to the evolving nature of academic roles. These include not only teaching and student engagement but also administrative tasks, publication expectations, research output, and participation in institutional development activities. As higher education continues to expand and diversify, faculty members are under constant pressure to meet institutional goals while maintaining high academic standards.

In Ernakulam City—one of Kerala’s prominent educational hubs—faculty members across government, aided, and self-financing colleges face a diverse range of academic demands. Despite efforts toward institutional development, the academic workload continues to intensify without a proportionate increase in support systems. This often results in emotional fatigue, work-life imbalance, and professional dissatisfaction among teachers. Moreover, limited opportunities for stress management and wellness initiatives further compound these challenges.

This study aims to explore the various dimensions of academic-related occupational stress among college faculties in Ernakulam. By identifying the key stressors and their effects, the research intends to provide actionable insights for educational planners, college administrators, and policymakers to create healthier and more supportive academic environments.

Review of Literature

1. Kyriacou, C. (2001) – Teacher Stress: Directions for Future Research

Kyriacou emphasized that teaching is inherently stressful due to high workload, time pressures, and student behavior. Although his work was focused on school teachers, many of the stressors identified—such as lack of autonomy and role conflict—are applicable to higher education as well. His study underscores the importance of institutional support in reducing stress levels.

2. Nandamuri, P. P., & Gowthami, C. (2011) – Sources of Work Stress among College Teachers

This Indian-based study highlighted key stressors among college faculty, including excessive workload, inadequate salary, lack of recognition, and institutional politics. The findings reveal that stress among faculty is not just an individual problem but is structurally rooted in how institutions function.

3. Blix, A. G., & Lee, J. (1991) – Occupational Stress Among University Teachers

Blix and Lee explored how university faculty face stress from dual responsibilities—teaching and research. The study found that pressure to publish, job insecurity, and ambiguous performance metrics were major stress contributors. Their findings are particularly relevant to faculty in self-financing colleges, where expectations for research output often exceed support.

4. Sunder, R. (2018) – Occupational Stress in Higher Education Sector in India

Sunder’s research focused on faculty members in Indian higher education and revealed that stress levels were highest among those handling both academic and non-academic roles. It emphasized the need for regular stress audits and institution-level reforms to reduce the psychological burden on teaching staff.

5. Dua, J. K. (1994) – Job Stressors and Their Effects on Physical Health, Emotional Health, and Job Satisfaction in a University Setting

This study demonstrated a direct correlation between job stressors and adverse health outcomes, including anxiety, insomnia, and reduced job satisfaction. It suggested that unaddressed occupational stress could lead to long-term deterioration in both personal and professional life.

Statement of the Problem

The role of college faculty has evolved significantly over the years, with increasing academic and administrative responsibilities adding to their workload. In cities like Ernakulam—recognized as an educational hub in Kerala—college teachers across government, aided, and self-financing institutions are under continuous pressure to meet teaching commitments, engage in research, publish academic work, participate in student mentoring, and fulfill administrative duties. This growing workload, often coupled with inadequate institutional support and lack of work-life balance, contributes to elevated levels of occupational stress.

Despite the crucial role that faculty play in shaping educational outcomes and institutional reputation, there remains a gap in localized research focusing on their psychological and emotional well-being. Very few studies have examined the specific academic stressors affecting college teachers in urban settings like Ernakulam. Understanding these stress factors is vital to formulating effective institutional policies and support systems.

This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the levels, sources, and impact of academic-related occupational stress among college faculties in Ernakulam City. The research seeks to uncover differences in stress levels based on institutional type, gender, experience, and workload, offering insights into how these stressors affect job satisfaction and overall faculty well-being.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the key academic-related stressors faced by college faculty in Ernakulam City.
2. To analyze the level of occupational stress among faculty across different types of institutions (government, aided, self-financing).
3. To examine the relationship between demographic factors (age, gender, teaching experience) and occupational stress.
4. To evaluate the impact of occupational stress on the job satisfaction and well-being of faculty members.
5. To suggest institutional strategies and interventions to reduce occupational stress and promote a healthier academic environment.

Research Design and Methodology

1. Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, aiming to explore and analyze the levels, causes, and effects of academic-related occupational stress among college faculty in Ernakulam City. The descriptive aspect helps in outlining the existing conditions, while the analytical component assists in examining the relationships between occupational stress and various demographic and institutional factors.

2. Population and Sample

- **Population:**
The population for this study includes college faculty members working in government, aided, and self-financing colleges in Ernakulam City, Kerala.
- **Sampling Method:** A stratified random sampling technique is used to ensure balanced representation from each institutional type.
- **Sample Size:** The study targets a sample of approximately 120–150 faculty members from at least 6 to 9 colleges (2–3 from each category: government, aided, and self-financing).

3. Data Collection Method

- **Primary Data:** Primary data is collected using a structured questionnaire, which includes both closed-ended (Likert-scale) and demographic questions. The questionnaire is designed to assess:
 - Sources of occupational stress (e.g., teaching load, research pressure, administrative duties)
 - Frequency and intensity of stress
 - Impact on job satisfaction and mental well-being
 - Perceptions of institutional support
- **Secondary Data:** Secondary data is collected from academic journals, government reports, educational policy documents, and previous studies related to occupational stress in the academic sector.

4. Tools for Data Collection

A self-administered questionnaire is the primary tool used. It consists of three sections:

1. Demographic Information (e.g., age, gender, experience, institution type)
2. Academic Stress Factors (e.g., workload, time pressure, research requirements)
3. Impact Measures (e.g., job satisfaction, emotional well-being, burnout indicators)

5. Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data will be analyzed using:

- Descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, frequency) to summarize data.
- Inferential statistics, including:
 - Chi-square test to assess the relationship between categorical variables.
 - ANOVA or t-test to compare stress levels across institution types and demographic groups.
 - Correlation analysis to identify relationships between stress and job satisfaction.
- Statistical analysis will be conducted using SPSS or Excel software.

6. Scope and Delimitation

- The study is limited to faculty members working within Ernakulam City.

- Only academic-related stress factors are considered; non-academic stressors (e.g., family or financial issues) are excluded.
- The research focuses only on teaching faculty, excluding administrative or non-teaching staff.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

A total of 120 college faculty members from various government, aided, and self-financing colleges in Ernakulam City participated in the survey. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics through SPSS/Excel.

Table 1: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents (Descriptive Statistics)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	55	45.8%
Female	65	54.2%
Total	120	100%

Interpretation:

Slightly more female faculty participated, providing a balanced gender perspective.

Table 2: Distribution by Type of Institution (Descriptive Statistics)

Institution Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Government	40	33.3%
Aided	40	33.3%
Self-financing	40	33.3%

Interpretation:

Equal distribution ensures fair comparison across different institution types.

Table 3: Occupational Stress Score by Institution Type (ANOVA)

Institution Type	Mean Stress Score	Std. Deviation
Government	3.1	0.72
Aided	3.5	0.85
Self-financing	4.1	0.91
F-value = 6.89	p-value = 0.003	

Interpretation:

The ANOVA test indicates a significant difference in stress levels between faculty from different institution types. Faculty in self-financing colleges experience higher stress.

Table 4: Stress Level by Gender (t-test)

Gender	Mean Stress Score	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Male	3.5	0.78		
Female	3.8	0.91	-2.11	0.037

Interpretation:

The independent samples t-test shows that female faculty report significantly higher stress levels compared to male faculty ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5: Stress Factors – Frequency Distribution (Descriptive Statistics)

Stress Factor	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Teaching Workload	65%	25%	10%
Administrative Responsibilities	58%	30%	12%
Research & Publication Pressure	50%	35%	15%
Time Management	63%	28%	9%
Student Performance Expectations	45%	38%	17%

Interpretation:

Teaching workload and time management are the top academic stressors among faculty.

Table 6: Stress vs. Job Satisfaction (Correlation Analysis)

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value
Stress Score & Job Satisfaction	-0.61	0.001

Interpretation:

There is a strong negative correlation between occupational stress and job satisfaction. As stress increases, satisfaction decreases significantly.

Table 7: Chi-Square Test – Type of Institution vs. High Stress

Institution Type	High Stress (Yes)	High Stress (No)	Total
Government	18	22	40
Aided	24	16	40
Self-financing	30	10	40
Chi-square = 10.48	p-value = 0.005		

Interpretation:

The chi-square test confirms a statistically significant association between type of institution and stress level. Faculty in self-financing colleges face higher stress.

Table 8: Stress Levels by Years of Experience (ANOVA)

Experience Level	Mean Stress Score	Std. Deviation
Below 5 years	4.0	0.88
5–10 years	3.6	0.79
Above 10 years	3.2	0.75
F-value = 5.62	p-value = 0.006	

Interpretation:

Faculty with less experience report significantly higher stress. More experienced faculty likely have better coping mechanisms or institutional roles.

Table 9: Use of Coping Strategies (Descriptive Statistics)

Coping Strategy	Usage (%)
Talking with colleagues	42%
Time management tools	34%
Exercise/meditation	22%
Professional counseling	4%

Interpretation:

Most faculty prefer informal coping (talking with peers), while very few seek professional help, indicating a lack of awareness or access to mental health resources.

Table 10: Perception of Institutional Support vs. Stress Level (Chi-Square Test)

Institutional Support	High Stress	Low Stress	Total
Supportive	15	30	45
Neutral	20	15	35
Not Supportive	37	3	40
Chi-square = 22.57	p-value < 0.001		

Interpretation:

There is a strong, statistically significant relationship between perceived institutional support and stress. Faculty in unsupportive environments are more likely to experience high stress.

Findings

- A significant number of faculty members in Ernakulam City experience high levels of occupational stress related to academic duties.
- Teaching workload and time management are the most common sources of stress across all college types.
- Faculty in self-financing colleges report the highest levels of stress due to job insecurity, higher workloads, and limited institutional support.
- Female faculty members show slightly higher stress levels than male counterparts, often linked to difficulties in balancing personal and professional life.
- Faculty with less than five years of experience exhibit higher stress levels than more experienced colleagues.
- A strong negative correlation exists between occupational stress and job satisfaction; higher stress results in lower job satisfaction.
- Many respondents believe their institutions lack sufficient support systems to help manage academic stress.
- Most faculty rely on informal coping mechanisms such as peer support and self-regulation, with minimal access to professional counseling or structured stress management programs.

Suggestions

- Institutions should reduce the teaching and administrative burden on faculty by hiring support staff or redistributing workload.
- Regular wellness and stress management programs should be integrated into faculty development initiatives.
- Administrative tasks should be shared more equitably among faculty to avoid overloading select individuals.
- Colleges should establish support systems, such as faculty mentorship, grievance redressal cells, and flexible scheduling options.

- Faculty should be encouraged to pursue professional development in a stress-reduced, supportive environment.
- Institutions must promote work-life balance through realistic expectations, mental health support, and fair workload policies.

Conclusion

This study has clearly shown that occupational stress is a pressing concern among college faculty members in Ernakulam City. With the growing complexity of academic responsibilities and institutional expectations, faculty are increasingly finding themselves under pressure to perform a wide range of tasks beyond classroom teaching. The presence of high stress levels, particularly in self-financing institutions, indicates a systemic issue related to workload distribution, lack of job security, and insufficient support systems. Moreover, demographic factors such as gender and experience influence how stress is perceived and managed, with female and early-career faculty being more vulnerable.

The findings also highlight a critical gap between the demands placed on faculty and the institutional support available to help them cope. When stress becomes chronic and unsupported, it not only affects individual well-being but also undermines motivation, job satisfaction, and teaching effectiveness. This can have long-term consequences for both faculty development and student learning outcomes.

In light of these observations, it is essential for colleges and higher education policymakers to adopt a more faculty-centric approach in institutional planning. Addressing occupational stress must go beyond individual coping strategies and include systemic interventions such as workload policy reform, mental health services, and positive workplace culture. Creating an academic environment that values well-being, collaboration, and balance will not only enhance faculty morale but also strengthen the overall quality of higher education. This study serves as a foundation for more targeted and actionable reforms in the academic sector of Ernakulam and beyond.

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