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Original Research Article

Psychological stress among faculty members of colleges and universities: a survey study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Psychological stress is a common issue among faculty members due to increasing academic, administrative, and professional responsibilities. Prolonged stress negatively affect mental well-being, job satisfaction, and work performance. Therefore, assessing the level of psychological stress among faculty members is essential for identifying the need for stress-management strategies. This study aimed to evaluate the level of psychological stress among faculty members of colleges and universities.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 101 faculty members from colleges and universities. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique. Data were collected through structured online questionnaire consisting of demographic information and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used for data analysis.

Results: A total of 101 faculty members participated in the study. The majority of participants were above 30 years of age (46%), female (64%), worked 40-50 hours per week (41%), and possessed a master's degree (68%). Assessment of stress levels using the perceived stress scale revealed 91% of participants experienced moderate stress, 6% experienced low stress, and 3% experienced high stress. Most respondents reported experiencing stress-related feelings such as being upset unexpectedly, inability to control important things in life, nervousness, and difficulty coping "sometimes," indicating a moderate level of perceived psychological stress.

Conclusions: The findings indicate that psychological stress is prevalent among faculty members of colleges and universities, with moderate stress being the most commonly reported level. These results highlight need for effective stress-management interventions and workplace wellness programs to promote psychological well-being among faculty members.

Keywords: Colleges, Faculty members, Perceived stress scale, Psychological stress, Universities

INTRODUCTION

Stress is considered a normal response to challenging situations; prolonged or excessive stress can negatively affect mental and physical health.[1] When individuals perceive a lack of control or insufficient coping resources, stress levels tend to increase, resulting in emotional discomfort and psychological strain.[2,3] Although stress is often considered a normal response to challenging situations, prolonged or excessive stress can negatively affect mental and physical health.[1]

Psychological stress is defined as the emotional and physiological response that occurs when individuals perceive that environmental demands exceed their coping abilities.[2,3] It is commonly characterised by feelings of tension, anxiety, irritability, and emotional imbalance, often accompanied by physiological changes such as

increased heart rate and fatigue. It is associated with emotional instability, cognitive impairment, and physiological disturbances such as fatigue, sleep disruption, and increased autonomic arousal.[1] Prolonged exposure to stress may contribute to various adverse health outcomes, including depression, anxiety disorders, cardiovascular diseases, and impaired occupational functioning.[4]

Occupational stress is the mental and emotional pressure that arises when job demands exceed an individual's ability or resources to manage them effectively.[3] Occupational stress has emerged as a significant issue in the teaching profession as teachers are required to handle growing responsibilities and professional demands in contemporary educational systems.[5]

Teaching is recognised as one of the most stressful professions due to increasing educational demands, administrative responsibilities, student management challenges, and research expectations. Faculty members in colleges and universities are often required to balance teaching, research, publication activities, administrative duties, and student mentorship simultaneously. These multiple responsibilities may contribute to occupational stress and emotional exhaustion.[6]

Occupational stress is the mental and emotional pressure that arises when job demands exceed an individual's ability or resources to manage them effectively. Occupational stress has emerged as a significant issue in the teaching profession as teachers are required to handle growing responsibilities and professional demands in contemporary educational systems.[5] In the educational setting, teachers often experience stress because of heavy workloads, difficulties in managing classrooms, administrative duties, and the high expectations placed on them by both institutions and students. The teaching profession is commonly considered highly stressful since educators are required to handle instructional responsibilities, student behaviour, assessment activities, and institutional tasks at the same time.[7]

Occupational stress has been associated with reduced job satisfaction, impaired work performance, burnout, and decreased psychological well-being among educators. Managing these multiple roles can result in emotional fatigue and lower levels of job satisfaction among teachers.[8] Therefore, this survey study attempts to assess the psychological stress among faculty members of colleges and universities.

METHODS

Study setting

This study was conducted among Faculty Members of Colleges and Universities of Fatehgarh Sahib to evaluate the Psychological Stress.

Study design

A cross-sectional survey was conducted during the academic year of 2025-2026.

Inclusion criteria

Teachers aged 23 to 60 years, minimum one year of teaching experience, willingness to participate and provide informed consent were included.

Exclusion criteria

Not willing to participate, diagnosed with migraine headache or psychological disorders, any history of neurosurgery or cognitive impairment were excluded.

Outcome measure

Data were collected through structured online questionnaire consisting of demographic information and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).

Data collection

A web-based self-administered questionnaire produced using Google Forms was circulated for completion using a link through online platforms after explaining the motive and procedure for filling out the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes informed consent for the voluntary participation of faculty members. The questionnaire includes a total of 10 multiple-choice questions to evaluate the effectiveness of brain gym exercise on psychological stress among faculty members of colleges and universities. The questionnaire is divided into the following two sections:

Section A: Consists of information on the subject's demographic data, including consent form, email ID, name, age, gender, and contact number. Discipline/department, no. of working hours per week, and highest educational qualification.

Section B: Consists of questions from the PSS, which are used to assess the level of psychological stress among faculty members.

Sample size

$n = Z^2p(1-p)/d^2$

where; n=required sample size, Z=confidence level at 95% (Z=1.96), p=estimated proportion/prevalence (p=0.5), 1-p=complement of proportion, d=margin of error (precision) (d=0.1).

Based on the above formula, the calculated sample size was 96. Therefore, a total of 96 participants were included in the study. However, a total of 101 participants were recruited and included in the study.

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and stress levels.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University, Fatehgarh Sahib (Reference No. SGGSWU/IEC/2026/62). A written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection.

RESULTS

A total of 101 faculty members from colleges and universities participated in the survey study. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The majority of participants were above 30 years of age (46%), followed by those aged 27-30 years (26%), 24-26 years (21%), 21-23 years (7%), and 18-20 years (1%). Female participants constituted 64% of the sample, whereas males accounted for 36%. Regarding weekly workload, 41% of participants reported working 40-50 hours per week, followed by 31% working 50-60 hours per week and 29% working 30-40 hours per week. In terms of educational qualification, most participants possessed a master's degree (68%), while 20% held a PhD and 12% had a bachelor's degree (Table 1).

Analysis of individual PSS items demonstrated that the majority of participants selected "Sometimes" for most stress-related experiences. Specifically, 50% of participants reported feeling upset due to unexpected events sometimes, 45% sometimes felt unable to control important things in life, and 41% sometimes felt nervous and stressed. Similarly, 44% of participants sometimes felt unable to cope with all the things they had to do, while 41% sometimes felt able to control irritations in their lives. Furthermore, 33% of participants sometimes felt angered by situations beyond their control, and 31% sometimes felt that difficulties were accumulating to an overwhelming extent. Across most PSS items, responses were concentrated within the "Sometimes" and "Fairly Often" categories, indicating the presence of moderate perceived stress among the majority of faculty members. Overall, the survey findings demonstrated that moderate psychological stress was highly prevalent among faculty members of colleges and universities (Table 2).

The findings revealed that 91% of faculty members experienced moderate perceived stress, while 6% reported low stress and 3% reported high stress.

Table 1: Demographics characteristics of participants (n=101).

Parameters	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age in years		
18-20	1	1
21-23	7	7
24-26	21	21
27-30	26	26
Above 30	46	46
Gender		
Female	65	64
Male	36	36
No. of working hours per week hours		
30-40	29	29
40-50	41	41
50-60	31	31
Highest educational qualification		
Bachelor's	12	12
Master's	69	68
PhD	20	20

Table 2: Responses regarding the perceived stress scale (n=101).

Parameters	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Unexpectedly upset		
Never	7	7
Almost never	7	7
Sometimes	51	50
Fairly often	22	22
Very often	14	14
Unable to control important things in life		
Never	9	9
Almost never	12	12
Sometimes	45	45
Fairly often	22	22
Very often	13	13
Nervous and stressed		
Never	3	3

Continued.

Parameters	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Almost never	12	12
Sometimes	41	41
Fairly often	36	36
Very often	9	9
Confident handling personal problems		
Never	3	3
Almost never	8	8
Sometimes	36	36
Fairly often	41	41
Very often	13	13
Things go your way		
Never	3	3
Almost never	10	10
Sometimes	35	35
Fairly often	44	44
Very often	9	9
Could not cope		
Never	9	9
Almost never	14	14
Sometimes	44	44
Fairly often	25	25
Very often	9	9
Control irritations		
Never	4	4
Almost never	8	8
Sometimes	41	41
Fairly often	35	35
Very often	13	13
On top of things		
Never	6	6
Almost never	15	15
Sometimes	41	41
Fairly often	27	27
Very often	12	12
Angered by things outside your control		
Never	7	7
Almost never	13	13
Sometimes	33	33
Fairly often	33	33
Very often	15	15
Difficulties feel overwhelming		
Never	8	8
Almost never	15	15
Sometimes	31	31
Fairly often	27	27
Very often	20	20

DISCUSSION

The present survey study was conducted to assess the level of psychological stress among faculty members of colleges and universities. A total of 101 faculty members participated in the study. The findings provide important insights into the demographic characteristics of the participants and their perceived levels of psychological stress.

The demographic findings revealed that the majority of participants were above 30 years of age (46%), followed by those aged 27-30 years (26%). This indicates that a substantial proportion of the respondents were experienced

professionals actively engaged in academic responsibilities. In terms of gender distribution, females constituted 64% of the sample, while males accounted for 36%. The higher participation of female faculty members may reflect the increasing representation of women in higher education institutions. Regarding workload, the largest proportion of participants (41%) reported working 40-50 hours per week, while 31% worked 50-60 hours per week. These findings suggest that faculty members are exposed to considerable professional demands, including teaching, research, administrative responsibilities, student mentoring, and academic assessment activities. Furthermore, most participants possessed a master's degree (68%), indicating a highly educated workforce with substantial academic responsibilities.

Assessment of psychological stress using the perceived stress scale demonstrated that the majority of faculty members (91%) experienced moderate levels of stress, whereas only 6% reported low stress and 3% reported high stress. The predominance of moderate stress suggests that faculty members frequently encounter stressors in their professional and personal lives but may still possess coping mechanisms that prevent stress from escalating to severe levels. However, the high proportion of moderate stress highlights the presence of significant psychological demands within the academic environment.

Analysis of individual PSS items further supported these findings. Most participants selected “Sometimes” for stress-related experiences, indicating that stress was a common but not constant occurrence. A considerable proportion of faculty members reported occasionally feeling upset by unexpected events, unable to control important aspects of life, nervous and stressed, unable to cope with responsibilities, and overwhelmed by difficulties. These findings suggest that faculty members regularly encounter challenges that require continuous psychological adaptation and coping.[8]

The observed prevalence of moderate stress may be attributed to the multifaceted nature of academic work. Faculty members are expected to balance teaching responsibilities, research productivity, publication requirements, curriculum development, administrative duties, student supervision, and professional growth activities. In addition, the pressure to maintain academic excellence and meet institutional expectations may contribute substantially to perceived stress levels. Such demands often require sustained mental effort and effective time management, which can increase psychological burden when resources or support systems are inadequate.

The findings of the present study are consistent with those reported by Johnson et al (2005), who found that work-related stress is prevalent across various professions and can negatively affect occupational performance and psychological well-being.[6] Similarly, Kyriacou (2001) identified teaching as a profession associated with significant occupational stress due to workload, role conflict, time pressure, and student-related challenges. The present findings also align with those of Klassen and Chiu (2011), who reported that job stress among educators is associated with professional demands and workplace pressures.[9]

Although only a small proportion of participants reported high stress levels, the overwhelming prevalence of moderate stress should not be overlooked. Persistent moderate stress may gradually affect mental health, job satisfaction, work efficiency, and overall quality of life if appropriate coping strategies are not adopted. Therefore, educational institutions should recognize faculty stress as an important occupational health concern and implement supportive measures to promote psychological well-being.

Overall, the findings of the present survey study indicate that psychological stress is common among faculty members of colleges and universities, with moderate stress being the predominant level. The results emphasize the need for regular stress assessment, mental health awareness programs, and workplace interventions aimed at reducing occupational stress and enhancing the well-being of academic professionals.

CONCLUSION

The present survey study revealed that psychological stress is prevalent among faculty members of colleges and universities, with the majority experiencing moderate levels of perceived stress. The findings highlight the psychological demands associated with academic and professional responsibilities and emphasize the importance of implementing effective stress-management strategies and supportive workplace initiatives to promote the well-being of faculty members.

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