

Assessing Stress Levels and Influencing Factors for Faculty in Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study in Visakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh



Tedlapu Narayana Rao, Uppu Venkata Subbarao, Vantaku Bala, Mehari Berhe Mezgebe

Abstract: Stress is common among faculty during their college work. They can often experience high levels of stress because they frequently encounter various challenges at their workplace that can negatively affect their academic performance and general health. However, familiar sources of stress among faculty working in higher education sectors have not been clearly defined. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the familiar sources of stress among them in the region of Visakhapatnam. One of the northeastern coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh belongs to south India. This was a descriptive, cross-sectional study. The convenience sample included 85 faculties working in various higher education colleges in Visakhapatnam. The Faculty Stress Index (FSI) was used to describe the sources of stress from four domains: academic load, financial concerns, personal problems, and interface worries. The majority (60%) of the participants were aged between 31 and 60. The primary source of stress was academic load and interface teaching and research responsibilities ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.156$), followed by financial worries ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.285$), lack of appreciation regarding their contributions ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.319$), and personal problems to excel in teaching evaluations ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.272$). The faculty's stress resulting from their academic load was higher than the other sources of stress, and it was related to a large number of materials like targeted assignments, extended working hours, or other research-related works required for faculty. It is suggested to create a positive and supportive work environment at the workplace, implement strategies for workload management, and professional development opportunities.

Keywords: Stress, Faculty, Higher Education Colleges, Faculty Stress Index.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic and demanding environment of higher education institutions,

faculty members play a pivotal role in shaping the academic landscape and nurturing the next generation of professionals. However, the nature of their work exposes them to various stressors that can significantly impact their well-being and effectiveness. Understanding the stress levels experienced by faculty members and identifying the triggers contributing to their stress is crucial for promoting a healthy work environment and enhancing faculty performance. Several studies have examined the phenomenon of stress among faculty members in higher education institutions, shedding light on the factors contributing to their stress levels and the effects resulting prolonged exposure to stress. For instance, [1] stated in their exploration of the critical role that resilience plays in the effectiveness of teachers. The researchers delve into the concept of teacher resilience, examining its importance, components, and the ways it influences the overall effectiveness of teachers. [2] Conducted a study exploring stressors and coping strategies among academic staff in Malaysian higher education institutions, providing insights into the challenges faced by faculty members and the strategies they employ to manage stress. One significant stress-related construct that has been extensively studied is burnout, which refers to a state of chronic physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from prolonged stress exposure [3]. Also [4]. conducted research in higher educational institutions in Gujarat, India, examining work stressors and coping mechanisms among faculty members. Their study shed light on the specific stressors faced by faculty in that context and the coping strategies they employed. Gender differences in the experience of burnout have also been investigated, revealing potential variations in stress levels between male and female faculty members. In their ground breaking study [5]. engaged in a randomized control trail to scrutinize the efficacy of a mindfulness-based intervention in alleviating stress among individuals navigating the intricacies of academia [6]. introduced a fresh perception on emotional labor, exploring how individuals manage emotions in their job [7]. conducted a meta-analysis exploring gender differences in burnout and found that females tended to experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization than males. Understanding these gender differences is crucial for addressing the unique stressors faced by female faculty members and developing targeted interventions. Furthermore, [8]. the impact of faculty stress extends beyond individual well-being. It can influence various aspects of faculty members' professional lives, including job satisfaction, engagement, and even the decision to leave the teaching profession. [9]

Manuscript received on 22 August 2023 | Revised Manuscript received on 28 August 2023 | Manuscript Accepted on 15 September 2023 | Manuscript published on 30 September 2023.

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conducted systematic review that resonates closely with our research focus on stress among faculty in higher education. Their study underscores the interconnectedness of work stress and employee well-being with in the higher education environment. Exploring the relationship between stress and these outcomes can offer valuable insights into the impacts of stress and inform strategies for improving faculty retention and job satisfaction. While existing research provides valuable insights into stress levels and triggers among faculty in higher education, there is a need for context-specific studies to understand the unique challenges faced by faculty members in different regions. Therefore, the present research aims to explore stress levels and triggers for faculty working in higher education colleges in Visakhapatnam, India, through a case study approach. By examining the specific stressors experienced by faculty members in Visakhapatnam, this research intends to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide evidence-based recommendations for mitigating stress and enhancing faculty well-being. Ultimately, the findings of this study have the potential to inform policy decisions and organizational practices aimed at creating a supportive work environment for faculty in higher education institutions in Visakhapatnam and beyond.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research design: This study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional design

2.2 Sampling technique: A convenience sample of faculty working in various higher education colleges. Inclusion criteria included faculty working in various private higher education colleges aged between 25-60. Exclusion criteria included faculty working in government colleges.

2.3 Sample Size: G*Power was used to estimate the required sample size [10]. A priori analysis was executed to compute the sample size for one sample means. The input parameters of an alpha of 5%, a power of 80%, and a medium effect size of 0.5 revealed a recommended sample size of 85

2.4 Data Collection tools: The study questionnaire contains two parts. The first part of the Questionnaire includes the socio-demographic characteristics. (gender, age, marital status, monthly income, educational qualifications, teaching experience, Academic rank, and department). The second part includes the Faculty Stress Index (FSI), a five-points Likert-type scale (Jones & Johnston, 1999). It contains four factors: personal problems, financial concerns, academic load, and interface worries. The FSI includes a total of 15 items, and each scored from one to five; a score of one means the thing is not stressful, while a score of five means the item is exceptionally stressful. The reliability of the FSI in this study was calculated by using Cronbach's Alpha and is 0.892.(Table 1.)

Table 1: Validity of the questionnaire

| Reliability Statistics | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .892 | 15 |

2.5 Procedure:

The researchers obtained permission from the authorities to use the FSI tool. An electronic questionnaire containing the consent form was created using Google Forms. The study was explained to the participants, and a link to the consent

form and the questionnaire was sent to the faculty via their smartphones. The participants took the approximately five minutes to complete to fill the questionnaire.

2.6 Data Analysis:

Statistical analysis was performed by using SPSS programs. The data were entered, and variables were categorized. Study variables were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency (percentage) to describe continuous and categorical variables.

III. RESULTS

Overall, 85 faculty participated in the study, and the results are presented in two parts. The first part includes socio-demographic characteristics and other environmental and personal variables that interfere with the most common stressors experienced by faculty, and the second part comprises the FSI.

3.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics:

Most participants (8.35%) were married and aged between 31 and 40. Most of them are males (65.9%), and their educational qualification is a master's degree (80%) and reported a monthly income of 15,000 to 25,000 Indian Rupee (INR)(50.6%). They are working in engineering departments (49.4%)in the rank of assistant professor(81.2%) with teaching experience between 11 and 15 years(43.5%). Socio-demographic characteristics are displayed in [Table 2](#).

Frequencies

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (N= 85)

| Gender | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Female | 29 | 34.1 |
| Male | 56 | 65.9 |
| Total | 85 | 100 |
| Age | Frequency | Percent |
| 20-30 | 16 | 18.8 |
| 31-40 | 51 | 60 |
| 41-50 | 15 | 17.6 |
| 51-60 | 3 | 3.5 |
| Total | 85 | 100 |
| Marital Status | Frequency | Percent |
| Married | 71 | 83.5 |
| Single | 14 | 16.5 |
| Total | 85 | 100 |
| Monthly Income | Frequency | Percent |
| 10,000-15000 | 3 | 3.5 |
| 15,000-25,000 | 43 | 50.6 |
| 25,00-35,000 | 22 | 25.9 |
| 35,000 -45,000 | 8 | 9.4 |
| 45,000 above | 9 | 10.58 |
| Total | 85 | 100 |

| Educational Question | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Doctoral degree | 17 | 20 |
| Masters | 68 | 80 |
| Total | 85 | 100 |
| Total Experience | Frequency | Percent |
| 0 to 5 | 15 | 17.6 |
| 6 to 10 | 18 | 21.2 |
| 11 to 15 | 37 | 43.5 |
| 16 to 20 | 4 | 4.7 |
| above 20 | 11 | 12.9 |
| Total | 85 | 100 |
| Academic Rank | Frequency | Percent |
| Assistant Professor | 69 | 81.2 |
| Associate Professor | 5 | 5.9 |
| Professor | 11 | 12.9 |
| Total | 85 | 100 |
| Department | Frequency | Percent |
| Arts and Humanities | 18 | 21.2 |
| Business | 11 | 12.9 |
| Engineering | 42 | 49.4 |
| Others | 2 | 2.4 |
| Sciences | 10 | 11.8 |
| Social Sciences | 2 | 2.4 |
| Total | 85 | 100 |

3.2 Sources of stress among faculty:

The following Table 3. Shows the Research questions in the questionnaire with their significance.

Table 3: Significance of the research questions

| Research Question | Significance |
|--|--|
| Experiencing personal and financial problems | It aims to assess the impact of personal and financial problems on job stress levels .They are known to be significant stressors in individual's lives, and they have a substantial influence on their well-being and job performance. |
| The academic load and workload are overwhelming | It helps to identify workload-related stressors and their impact on work-life balance and guides organizational interventions to facilitate comparative analysis |
| Worry about the interface between teaching and research responsibilities | It lies in its ability to identify the challenges, conflicts, and strains associated with balancing these dual responsibilities. It informs the development of support mechanisms and training programs to enhance employees' job satisfaction and overall work environment. |
| Personal and family commitments | To Understand the impact of personal and familial responsibilities on job stress and helps to identify the challenges in work-life balance, reveals external sources of stress |
| Financial compensation is inadequate | It helps to identify perceived inadequacy, informs discussions on fair compensation practices, and addresses employee satisfaction and stress. |
| Balancing work and personal life | It addresses the challenges of achieving a healthy work life balance, informs support strategies and promotes stress management |
| Worry about meeting the expectations and | It concerns about meeting students' expectations and demands lie in their impact |

| | |
|--|--|
| demands of students | on job stress, performance, professional growth, and collegial support. |
| Limited resources and funding for research | It is significant as it impacts research productivity, employee stress levels, career advancement, collaboration opportunities, institutional support, and the overall research environment. |
| Conflicts with administration or superiors | These are significant as they impact job stress, satisfaction, productivity, employee-management relationships, and retention rates. |
| Feel pressure to excel in teaching evaluations | The pressure to demonstrate excellence during evaluations can intensify stress, mainly when it adds to the already demanding workload of teachers. So it is also one of the causes of stress. |
| Lack of recognition or appreciation for my work | Recognition serves as a powerful motivator. When an individual receives recognition and praise for their efforts, it boosts their morale and motivation to continue performing well. Conversely, it is one of the stressors for the employee |
| Limited opportunities for career advancement | It is essential for academic institutions to recognize the significance of career advancement for faculty members and strive to create an environment that fosters professional growth, recognizes achievements, and provides opportunities for improvement. |
| Job insecurity is a significant source of stress | It is a significant source of stress due to uncertainty about future employment, financial concerns, disruption of work-life balance, impact on research, teaching, and emotional, adverse organizational climate. |
| Feel overwhelmed by the increasing demands of technology in teaching | Incorporating technology into teaching often requires additional time and effort. Faculty need to invest in researching and selecting appropriate tools, redesigning course materials, and familiarizing themselves with the technology is also a source for stress. |
| Lack of support for professional development | It increases stress among faculty members, hindering their growth, career advancement, work-life balance, motivation, and sense of value and support. |

Each participant (85 in total) reported that her primary source of stress was academic load and worry about the interface between teaching and research responsibilities (M = 3.74, SD = 1.156). The means of the categories of the FSI are shown in Table 3. The second source of stress reported by the faculty was financial compensation inadequate (M = 3.73, SD = 1.285). The third source of stress was balancing work and personal life (M = 3.64, SD = 1.132), and the fourth was a lack of recognition or appreciation (M = 3.61, SD = 1.1319). The last source of stress was feeling pressure to excel in teaching evaluations. The means and standard deviations of the 15-item of FSI are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Faculty stress index (FSI) of the respondents (N= 85)

| Descriptive Statistics | | | |
|---|----|------|----------------|
| Stressor | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| 1. Experience personal and financial problems | 85 | 3.45 | 1.323 |
| 2. The academic load and workload are overwhelming | 85 | 3.74 | 1.156 |
| 3. worry about the interface between teaching and research responsibilities | 85 | 3.74 | 1.156 |



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| | | | |
|--|----|------|-------|
| 4. Personal and family commitments | 85 | 3.42 | 1.357 |
| 5. Financial compensation is inadequate | 85 | 3.73 | 1.285 |
| 6. Balancing work and personal life | 85 | 3.64 | 1.132 |
| 7. worry about meeting the expectations and demands of students | 85 | 2.79 | 1.226 |
| 8. Limited resources and funding for research | 85 | 3.47 | 1.211 |
| 9. Conflicts with administration or superiors | 85 | 3.42 | 1.199 |
| 10. Feel pressure to excel in teaching evaluations | 85 | 2.75 | 1.272 |
| 11. Lack of recognition or appreciation for my work | 85 | 3.61 | 1.319 |
| 12. Limited opportunities for career advancement | 85 | 3.38 | 1.345 |
| 13. Job insecurity is a significant source of stress | 85 | 3.26 | 1.255 |
| 14. Feel overwhelmed by the increasing demands of technology in teaching | 85 | 3.27 | 1.051 |
| 15. Lack of support for professional development | 85 | 3.59 | 1.126 |

These values are shown in the following bar graph represented by [fig \(1\)](#)

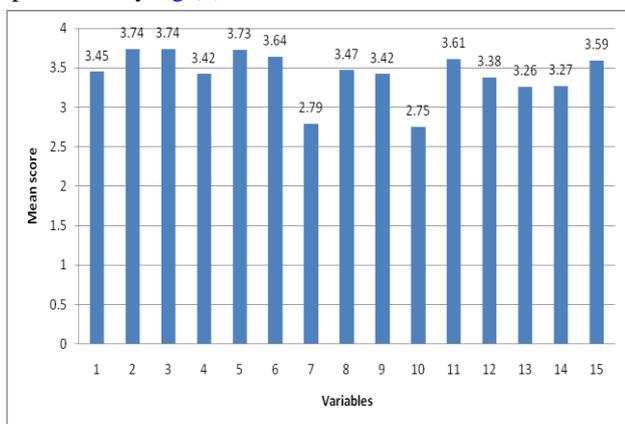


Fig. 1. Faculty stress Index variables Vs Means

In this study, there were significant relationships between academic load and monthly income ($R = -0.258, P \leq 0.05$), personal problems, and monthly income ($R = -0.253, P \leq 0.05$). Lack of support for professional development ($R = 0.251, P \leq 0.05$). However, there were no significant relationships between lack of recognition or appreciation, limited resources and funding for research, and monthly income. See [Table 3](#) for detailed information about the correlations among study variables.

Table 5: Relationship between the Faculty Stress Index (FSI) and monthly income

| Variables | Monthly Income | |
|---|----------------|--------|
| | R | P |
| The academic load and workload are overwhelming and cause me stress | -0.258 | 0.0253 |
| Balancing work and personal life | -0.196 | 0.0398 |
| Personal and family commitments | -0.253 | 0.0356 |
| Lack of recognition or appreciation for my work | 0.021 | 0.8460 |
| Lack of support for professional development | 0.251 | 0.0415 |
| Limited resources and funding for research | -0.059 | 0.5932 |

The income of the 85 respondents was shown in [fig \(2\)](#)

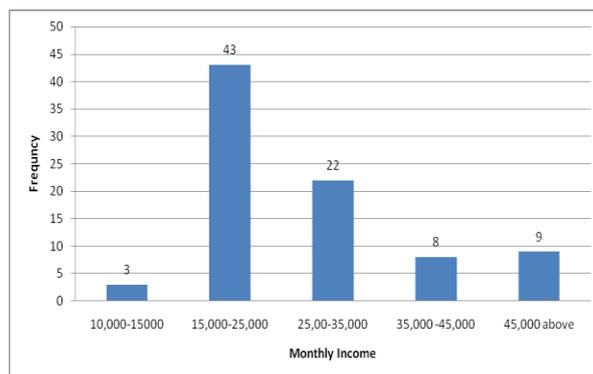


Fig. 2. Monthly income of the respondents Vs Frequency

Table 6: Case processing summary

| Case Processing Summary | | | |
|--|----------|----|-------|
| | | N | % |
| Cases | Valid | 85 | 100.0 |
| | Excluded | 0 | .0 |
| | Total | 85 | 100.0 |
| a. List wise deletion based on all variables in the procedure. | | | |

IV. DISCUSSION

Teaching faculty frequently experience several sources of stressors, which can have undesirable effects on their academic performance and emotional and physical health. Coping with various stressful situations can occur at their workplace. Faculty stress could be due to academic load, balancing work, personal problems, and interface worries. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the sources of stress among the faculty working in the higher education sector of various colleges in Visakhapatnam. The findings revealed that the significant source of stress among faculty was academic load and worry about the interface between teaching and research responsibilities ($M = 3.74$), followed by inadequate financial compensation ($M = 3.73$), balancing work and personal life ($M = 3.64$), lack of recognition or appreciation ($M = 3.61$), lack of support for professional development ($M = 3.59$), limited resources and funding for research ($M = 3.47$), personal and financial problems ($M = 3.45$), family commitments and conflicts with administration ($M = 3.42$), advancement ($M = 3.38$). Related to study subjects and according to the means of the FSI categories, the academic load was the highest source of stress among faculty because they often face heightened expectations from their institutions and students. They are expected to deliver high-quality teaching, produce impactful research, and contribute community through publications and presentations. The pressure to meet these expectations can be intense and can lead to feelings of self-doubt and anxiety. The atmosphere created by Excel in teaching evaluations was considered the lowest source of stress ($M = 2.75$).



These are based on established criteria and metrics, such as course organization, clarity of instruction, and responsiveness to student needs. When faculty members clearly understand these expectations, they can focus their efforts on meeting them, reducing uncertainty and stress. In this domain, there was a significant negative relationship between academic load and monthly income ($R = -0.258, P \leq 0.05$). As faculty's monthly income increases, their academic load stressor decreases. Faculty with a low socioeconomic status suffers from the academic load stressor more than those with high socioeconomic status. A significant negative relationship existed between balancing work, personal life, and monthly income ($R = -0.196, P \leq 0.05$). Faculty members may sometimes receive lower salaries or face financial constraints due to budgetary limitations. This can lead to added stress and pressure to work additional jobs or take extra responsibility to supplement their income, further impacting their personal life. The correlation between family commitments and the income of a faculty is -0.253 , which suggests a weak correlation between these two variables. There is a slight tendency for higher income to be associated with slightly fewer family and personal commitments or vice versa. A correlation coefficient of 0.021 suggests a weak positive correlation between a lack of recognition or appreciation and an employee's income. This value is very close to zero, indicating almost no meaningful relationship between the variables. This means that a faculty's income level doesn't significantly impact their perception of recognition or appreciation in the workplace. It's worth mentioning that numerous factors can influence an employee's perception, such as the work environment, company culture, management practices, and individual personality traits. The correlation between lack of support for professional development and faculty income is 0.251 . This reveals that faculty members who receive higher incomes may work in institutions that prioritize professional development and provide more resources and opportunities for growth. Another possibility is that faculty members who earn higher incomes may have negotiated better compensation packages that include provisions for professional development support. Individual, institutional, and systematic factors likely influence this relationship. There is a weak negative correlation -0.059 between limited resources for funding and faculty monthly income. This reveals that the availability or allocation of resources and funding for research has minimal impact on faculty income on a broader scale. Other factors, such as the college's budget, salary structures, individual qualifications, and negotiation skills, plays a more significant role in determining faculty income.

V. CONCLUSION

This study intended to determine the sources of stress among faculty members working in various higher education institutions in Visakhapatnam using the FSI scale. The results showed that the faculty suffered from the academic load and the interface between teaching and research responsibilities stressor more frequently than other stressors. Financial worries were the second most reported category; when the faculty encounters financial worries, they withdraw from

their social lives due to a lack of free time. The balancing work and personal life category was the third most reported source of stress, and it is experienced when faculty are exposed to new responsibilities; it impacts their personal life. Finally, there were few members who mentioned the individual and family commitments category as a source of stress. The outcomes from this study will help researchers to estimate the sources of stress and develop further management strategies to reduce these stressors.

VI. RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLICATIONS

It is essential to understand how stressors can affect faculty performance and how they can affect their ability to work. Therefore, future studies can expand these findings through more detailed interviews or qualitative studies and train faculty about stress management techniques to cope with unexpected events in their academic practice. Colleges should maintain a stable educational environment to help the faculty to achieve optimal outcomes. College administration should focus on the staff's personal needs and offer motivation programs before the academic year starts to reduce the sources of stress. In addition, given that academic load was the most reported source of stress, the administration should conduct periodic assessments of faculty workload to ensure it is reasonable and manageable. Avoid overburdening faculty with excessive responsibilities and seek ways to distribute workload equitably across the institutions. Future studies could examine intervention programs intended to reduce the academic load among faculty.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

| | |
|--|---|
| Funding/ Grants/ Financial Support | No, we did not receive. |
| Conflicts of Interest/ Competing Interests | No conflicts of interest to the best of our knowledge. |
| Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate | No, the article does not require ethical approval and consent to participate with evidence. |
| Availability of Data and Material/ Data Access Statement | Not relevant. |
| Authors Contributions | All authors have equal participation in this article. |

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