# A Study of Job Stress on Personal Health and Work Behavior among University Teachers in Iran

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## Abstract

*This article investigates the relationship between job stress and its effect on the personal health and work behaviors of Islamic Azad University teachers in Iran. The study also aimed at addressing the issue of how stress at work can be effectively managed, reduced, or prevented by the university officials in order to enhance personal health of the teachers, as well as to improve their work behaviors. The sample consists of Islamic Azad University teachers in Ardebil province. So the study process was carried out among 154 teachers working in two branch of Islamic Azad University in Ardebil and Pars Abad cities. A questionnaire tagged "Stress Assessment Questionnaire for University Teachers (SAQFUT) was developed and used for the study. It contains 72 items, measuring demographic variables, job stress, physical and mental symptoms, personal and work behavior. Two hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study, using analysis of variance and independent t-test. The study established that job stress has significant effect on physical and mental health of the teachers. It also established that there was a significant difference in personal and work behavior of highly stressed teachers and less stressed teachers. Based on these findings, it was recommended that the University officials should improve the welfare of the teachers. It was also recommended that their morale should be boosted by involving them in policy, decision making concerning their welfare and their salary.*

## Introduction

Due to the competitive nature of the job environment most of the people in the world are spending their time for job related work purposes. Usually people are worrying more about their work outcome that can even affect the way they treat other people and how they communicate with their peers and customers. For instance, people with a higher percentage of occupational stress may not be satisfied with their job and they will not feel happy working in the organization. They may feel frustrated or burned out when they are having problems with peers or customers. This may leave a negative impact to the organization itself. Therefore, it is very important for employer and employees to realize the stress and the stressor that cause all the negative effects.

The number of universities in Iran has increased tremendously for the past few years. Due to the increasing number of universities in Iran, university teachers may face more problems in their job as the managements are facing competitive pressure from other universities. Almost, all universities are now setting new goal to compete with other universities as well as the staff are involving with the ultimate goal. This may causes the university staffs to face plenty of stress and affect their satisfaction, even their personal health and work behavior.

The aim of this study is to identify the stressors that influence the academic staffs' personal health and work behaviors.

**Literature Review**

Numerous studies found that job stress influences the employees' job satisfaction and their overall performance in their work. In fact, modern times have been called as the "age of anxiety and stress" Coleman (1976).The stress itself will be affected by number of stressors. Nevertheless, Beehr and Newman (1978), had defined stress as a situation which will force a person to deviate from normal functioning due to the change in his/her psychological or physiological condition, such that the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning. Management role of an organization is one of the aspects that affect work related stress among employees. Staffs in an organization can face occupational stress through the role stress that the management gave. Role stress means anything about an organizational role that produces adverse consequences for the individual. Management will have their own role that stands as their related. Role related are concerned with how individuals perceive the expectations other have of them and includes role ambiguity and role conflict, Stamatios, A. et al. (2008). Stress is an important psychological concept that can affect health, well-being and job performance in negative dimensions, Olaleye (2002). It is regarded as a force that pushes a physical or psychological factor beyond its range of stability, producing a strain within the individual. Stress is the process by which environmental events threaten us, how these threats are interpreted, and how they make us feel, Baum, et al. (1997). Lazarus (2007) conceived stress to be a threat of anticipation of future harm, either physical or psychological events that lower an individual self-esteem. It is an affective behavior and physical response to aversive stimuli in the environment.

Stress is a state within the organism characterized by general adaptation syndrome. In other word, it is the nonspecific response of the body to the demand made upon it. It suggests excessive demands that produce disturbance of physiological, sociological and psychological systems. Stress may be acute or chronic in nature Akinboye, et al. (2002). It exists in different forms.Stress experienced by workers at work is called job stress. It may be due to a number of factors such as poor working condition, excessive work load, shift work, long hours of work, role ambiguity, role conflicts, poor relationships, with the boss, colleagues or subordinate officers. Certain responses indicate the presence of job stress in an individual, or group. It may manifest by the presence of headache, sleep disturbances, difficulty in concentration, short temper, upset stomach, job dissatisfaction and low morale Niosh (2005). Several studies have confirmed that the combination of high demands and low control produces job stress and also

related to heart disease. For instance, Vitaliano, et al. (1990) found that physicians whose jobs include a very high level of demands but also a high degree of control suffer less from stress than other job, who are burdened with undesirable combination of high demands and low control. Alterman, et al. (1994) in their study found that the more latitude men had in making decisions on their job, the lower was their death rate from coronary heart disease. In addition, they found that workers in high demand and low decision jobs had an elevated risk of heart disease mortality and the risk was greater for white-collar workers than for the blue-collar workers.

Control at work has been found to play significant role in physical and mental health of workers. The actual use of the control the individuals have in their job to cope with stressful working situation is a determinant of their health and well-being. For instance in a study Rijik, et al. (2007) found that overall job control was positively related to employees, well-being, but for teachers who used active or control coping, high job control reduced the increase in emotional exhaustion due to job demands. In contrast, for teachers with low active coping, and high job control overtaxed such individuals when they faced with high job demands, resulting in a lowered well-being; having high levels of control acted as a stressor for these individuals.

Increased managerial pressure can impact on employee well-being. By virtue of their superior position in an organization, managers and supervisors, intentionally or unintentionally can cause stress for their subordinates. For example, Gauster, et al. (2009) found that type of a behavior patterns exhibited by supervisors were positively related to subordinates' physical health symptoms.

Managerial support such as effective communication and feedback are important factor for employee well-being. Poor supervisor support has been linked with increased stress level and symptoms of depression. Hoel. (1999) found that bullying at work is linked with employee ill-health including psychosomatic stress symptoms muscles-skeletal symptoms, anxiety and depression. Repetti (1993) found strong evidence that jobs with the combination of high demand and low control constitute a risk factor for hypertension and heart disease. He observed that social environment at work is an important factor contributing to stress on the job, which play a role in both physical and mental health. He also found that poor relationship between the superior and the workers contribute to the level of stress experienced by the workers. He found that the workers experienced more negative moods on days when they had distressing interactions with superiors and coworkers.

Holt (2008) found that shift work can lead to a variety of physical complaints, including sleep and gastro-intestinal problems and can also interfere with the family life. Albar Marin

and Garcia-Ramirez (2005) in their study examined the effect of social support on job stress and emotional exhaustion in servile, south of Spain. They found that social support had significant buttering effect on the level of stress and emotional exhaustion experienced by the employees at work. Olaleye (2002) in her study among staffs working in government sector found that job stress and burn out syndrome had greater effect on their health and coping ability at work. Cheng and Kawachi (2002) in their study among female registered teachers in America, examined the association between psychosocial characteristics and health functioning. They found that examined separately, low job control, high job demands and low work related social support were associated with poor health status at baseline as well as greater functional decline over the four year follow up period. They concluded that adverse psychosocial work conditions are important predictors of poor functional status and its declines over time. Occupational or job stress has been found to be negatively related to job satisfaction. For instance, Achalu (1995) found that employees experienced high level of stress were less satisfied with their career, had higher absenteeism rate and significantly less career commitment.

In a study carried out by Kennedy, et al. (2005), there were some evidences that creating supportive and enabling work environment for academic staff is a way of finding solution to the problem of stress and burn out associated with their duties. He found that employees who perceived their work as supportive were more satisfied with their jobs and in their ability to provide high quality at their work place.

Piko (2003) investigated the relative effects of socio-demographics, socio-economic factors, and some variables of psycho-social work environment on the psychosomatic health of female employees. According to Lasky (1995) demands associated with family and finances can be a major source of extra organizational stress that can complicate, or precipitate, work place stress. Most research suggests that role ambiguity is indeed negatively correlated with job satisfaction, job involvement, performance, tension, and propensity to leave the job and job performance variables.

The various studies reviewed, point to the fact that job stress has adverse effects on physical health, mental health, personal and work behavior of academic staff's. These studies have highlighted the deleterious consequences of high workloads or work overload. A study of work stress among professionals found that teachers were most likely to experience work overload and that is one of the cause of work stress Chan, et al. (2000).

Hence, we can conclude that it is truly important for an individual to recognize the stresses that are faced by them in their career. Some demographic factor may influence the way a

university academic staff act in their workplace.

## Research Methodology

The study includes two hypotheses as following:

1. There is a significant effect of job stress on health of teachers of Islamic Azad University in Iran.
2. There exist a significant difference in personal and work behavior of highly stressed teachers and fewer stressed teachers of Islamic Azad University in Iran.

The study was carried out among teachers working in two branches of Islamic Azad University in Ardebil province of Iran. One hundred and twenty four teachers working in the Islamic Azad University Ardebil branch and thirty teachers working in Pars Abad branch constituted the sample used for the study. The major instrument used for the study was a single questionnaire tagged "Stress Assessment Questionnaire for University Teachers (SAQFUT)". It contains items measuring job stress, state of health, personal and work behaviors. The items were drawn from Stress Less INC (2005) Job Stress Assessment Scale. The scale contains items measuring symptoms of stress, physical and mental symptoms, and signs of personal and work behaviors. The instrument was reliably validated, yielding coefficient alpha of 0.80 at 0.05 level of significance. The teachers were randomly selected from two branches. They were asked to assess the level of stress they experienced at work in the last six months. They were also asked to assess the effect of such stress on their health, as well on their personal and work behavior. The data collected after two weeks were analyzed, using one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent t-test. The stated hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

First hypothesis: There is a significant effect of job stress on health of teachers of Islamic Azad University in Iran. The hypothesis was put to test, using analysis of variance. This was based on items measuring signs of job stress and items measuring physical and mental symptoms. The results obtained from the test are summarized in table 1. The table reveals the effect of job stress on state of health of teachers in Islamic Azad University. Also the table shows that there was a significant effect of job stress on health of teachers in Islamic Azad University. ($F = 2.736$, $df = 10/153$, $P > .05$). The result gives support to the first hypothesis. Hence, the hypothesis was accepted.

Second hypothesis: There exist a significant difference in personal and work behavior of highly stressed teachers and fewer stressed teachers of Islamic Azad University in Iran. The hypothesis was put to test using independent t-test. This was based on items, measuring

symptoms of stress and signs of personal behavior of Islamic Azad University teachers. The results obtained from the test are summarized in table 2.The difference observed in personal and work behavior of the Islamic Azad University teachers is presented in table 2. The table revealed that there was a significant difference in personal and work behavior of the highly stressed teachers and less stressed teachers in Islamic Azad University ($t = 2.178$, $df = 152$, $P > .05$). The result gives support to the hypothesis. Therefore, the second hypothesis was accepted.

**Discussion**

The results obtained from testing the first hypothesis revealed that there was a significant effect of job stress on health of teachers of Islamic Azad University in Iran ($F = 2.376$, $df = 10/153$, $P > .05$).

The above result is supported by the finding of Cheng and Kawachi (2002) that employees who reported low job control, high job demand, and low work related social support had greater declines in the physical health subscales and less improvement in mental health subscales.

The result is consistent with the findings of Olaleye (2002) that job stress and burn out syndrome had significant interactive effect on state of health and coping ability of teachers. It is also in line with the finding of Wong, et al. (2001) that one-third of Chinese teachers had poor health. Findings from the study revealed that 85 (or 55.5%) of the teachers experienced high level of stress at work. This is due to work overload, lack of promotion, inadequate staffing, poor working and salary conditions, job dissatisfaction and frustration of all kinds. The effects of the stress on their health were manifested ~~in~~ form of headache, back or neck pain, muscular aches, worry, high blood pressure, lack of concentration or attention, mental chatter, and difficulty in making decision. This implies that both their physical and mental health was adversely affected by job stress.

Table 1: ANOVA showing the effect of job stress on physical and mental health of teachers

| *Source of variance* | *Sum of squares* | *df* | *Mean square* | *F-critical* | *F-cal* | *P* | *Remark* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Within group variance | 23656.318 | 143 | 165.429 | 1.63 | 2.376 | .05 | Significant |
| Between group variance | 3931.247 | 10 | 393.125 | | | | |
| Total variance | 27587.565 | 153 | | | | | |

F = 2.376, df = 10/153, P > .05

Table 2: Independent t-test showing the difference in personal and work behavior of highly stressed academicians and less stressed academicians in University

| *Category of academicians* | *N* | *Mean* | *Standard Deviation* | *Standard Error mean* | *df* | *t-cal* | *t-critical* | *P* | *Remark* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Highly stressed academicians | 85 | 60.2471 | 14.36174 | 1.55775 | 152 | 2.198 | 1.96 | .05 | Sig. |
| Less stressed academicians | 69 | 55.5662 | 11.77420 | 1.41745 | | | | | |

t = 2.178, df = 152, P > .05

In situations where teachers experienced high level of stress and their health being greatly injured, their level of functioning at work will become greatly reduced. It is imperative therefore, that the workload of teachers be reduced to the level they can cope with in order to become efficient at work and give effective instruction. Adequate facilities and instructional equipment should be provided in universities to enable the teachers perform their duties effectively. Their welfare should be addressed, and psycho-social needs adequately met.

The result of the second hypothesis indicated a significant difference in personal and work behavior of highly stressed academicians and less stressed academicians (t = 2.178, df = 152, P > .05). It is not gain saying the fact that the highly stressed academicians will engage in behaviors quite different from the less stressed academicians at work.

Findings from the study revealed that the highly stressed academicians (85 or 55.5%) exhibited personal and work behavioral problems like bullying, absenteeism, resignation or turnover.

Due to being stressed or frustrated, some of the academicians engage in aggressive hostile or vindictive behavior on their wards. The result was supported by the finding of Mojoyinola (2008) that junior academicians who experienced greater stress at work behaved

differently than the senior academicians. There were cases of bullying, absenteeism, and turnover from them than their seniors.

It should be noted that negative personal and work behavior may not bring about positive treatment outcomes. The students and their families may become afraid of negative attitude and behaviors of the teachers. For this reasons, the student may not receive best instruction from them. In situations where the teachers adopt negative personal and work behaviors like absenteeism, apathy, dissatisfactions, tardiness irresponsibility, irritability demoralization and withdrawal from universities, adequate treatment and instructional care cannot be given to the students.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, we can conclude that constant appraisal programs and appreciation should be given to reinstate and motivate the teachers, as motivation is a key factor as well in affecting job stress among teachers.

The complaints of physical and mental symptoms indicate the presence of stress in the teachers, and this suggests that their state of health is greatly injured. As revealed in this study, the presences of stress among the teachers also make them to engage in withdrawal, displaced or hostile aggressive behavior to their student. Hence, under stressful working conditions, they could not give humane treatment to their students.

To ensure that efficient education is given to the students, the university officials and management boards should help in reducing sources of stress in the teachers. Their working conditions need to be quickly improved by giving them adequate salary that commensurate with the demands of their jobs. Their promotion should be done as at when due to boost their morale. They should also be involved in vital decisions concerning their jobs and. In-service training, workshops and seminars should be organized for teachers to update their knowledge and skills. They should be sent for courses on human behavior, resource management, interpersonal relation, stress management and crisis interventions. It is hoped that when teachers are given adequate support by officials or when their needs are adequately met many of them will experience less tension or stress at work. They will become less aggressive or hostile to the students. The students will also receive better and adequate instruction from them

## Limitation of Study

Like other empirical studies, this study is not without its limitations. The sample consisted of two branches of Islamic Azad University in Ardebil province may limit the general disability of the results. The study can be strengthened by increasing the sample size as the data analysis results and findings may vary substantially when the sample size is increased or decreased.

As only two branches of university may not represent whole universities in Iran, more universities' involvement would create a more diffused results and findings. Lastly, more factors or variables can also be included in the questionnaire as stress can be caused by many different aspects of the working environment. With and increased sample size, a more detailed empirical study among independent variables and the variables that have multiple categories can be performed. Potential correlation between some of the independent variables (e.g. gender, race, education level, organization culture, impact of technology, organization climate, emotional demands of work and unclear work roles) need to be reported in a future study.

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