

STUDY ON STRESSFUL CONDITIONS AND COPING STRATEGIES OF TEACHER EDUCATORS IN MYANMAR EDUCATION DEGREE COLLEGES

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify stressful conditions and coping strategies of teacher educators and explore current stress of teacher educators in relation to gender, marital status, designation, academic qualification and teaching experiences. A total of 300 teacher educators from Education Degree Colleges participated. In this study, the present study followed the descriptive survey research design. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The findings of the study showed that 30% of teacher educators are moderately stressed and 24% are highly stressed and the task stress and role stress conditions are the highest level of stress that they experienced. Moreover, teacher educators tried to use engaged ways to cope with stressful conditions by adjusting their personal desires to match the situation and sometimes, they use disengaged coping such as avoidance from the situation to alleviate stress.

Keywords: Stressful conditions, Coping Strategies, Teacher Educators

Introduction

Teaching is not what it was, expectations have intensified today and the job of a teacher also includes different managerial functions. Today, when conceptualize the role of a teacher regard him as a manager, the teacher also performs a number of managerial functions -in the area of curriculum, planning, resource management, management of examination, management of co-curricular activities, time management, conflict management, management of innovation and change etc. Teachers like planners or architects are continuously involved in making innumerable practical, everyday small and big decisions which are of great importance to the students, colleagues and management.

Studies have examined various sources and consequences of stress. The widespread concern regarding teacher stress has led many researchers to focus on this area. Research (Marais, 1992) shows that teachers are exposed to a wide variety of multi-dimensional stressors within the work situation like inadequate working conditions, role conflict and ambiguity, pupil problems, time pressures, the threat of redundancy, work pressure, little participation in decision-making and distribution of tasks, stereotypes and discrimination against minority groups, as well as inadequate salaries. Furthermore, there has been an increasing recognition of the link between mental and physical health and occupational stress, and indeed concern to improve the working lives of teachers. However, stress has increased in workplaces because of increased performance requirements and competition- related changes in work life. Recent research shows that teacher training does not typically include stress management (Harris, 2011) and, as a result, teachers often feel poorly prepared to respond appropriately to the stressors of the job (Kerr, Breen, Delaney, Kelly, & Miller, 2011). To function effectively as educators, they need to be taught a fundamental suite of skills to manage the stressors that are intrinsic to the teaching profession, including management of their own individual stress management skills, clearer boundaries and

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processes for supporting students, and more sophisticated and collaborative approaches to relationship development with colleagues and parents.

Purposes of the Study

The main purposes of this study were as follow:

- (1) To identify the most stressful conditions and find out the coping strategies of teacher educators used
- (2) To explore the current stress conditions of teacher educators in relation to gender, marital status, designation, academic qualification and teaching experience

Definitions of Key Terms

Stressful Conditions: If a condition or experience is stressful, it causes the person involved to feel stress (COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary, 2018).

Coping Strategies: Coping strategies are behavioral and cognitive tactics used to manage crises, conditions and demands that are appraised as distressing (Encyclopedia of Gerontology, 2007).

Review of Related Literature

Psychological Stress: The Lazarus Theory

Two concepts are central to any psychological stress theory: *appraisal*, i.e., individuals' evaluation of the significance of what is happening for their well-being, and *coping*, i.e., individuals' efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands.

Since its first presentation as a comprehensive theory, the Lazarus stress theory has undergone several essential revisions (Lazarus 1991, Lazarus and Folkman 1984). In the latest version (see Lazarus 1991), stress is regarded as a *relational* concept, i.e., stress is not defined as a specific kind of external stimulation nor a specific pattern of physiological, behavioral, or subjective reactions. Instead, stress is viewed as a relationship ('transaction') between individuals and their environment. 'Psychological stress refers to a relationship with the environment that the person appraises as significant for his or her well-being and in which the demands tax or exceed available coping resources'.

Coping Strategies

Research carried out on the development of stress coping mechanisms concerned itself with the idea of control. Coping has been defined "as constant changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person," (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This definition is more process than task-orientated, distinguishing between coping and automatic behavior which limits coping to conditions of psychological stress and focuses on efforts to manage stress regardless of outcome. Coping is not identified with mastery in this definition but includes efforts to minimize, avoid, tolerate or accept stressful conditions.

Dealing with problems or difficulties in a calm and appropriate manner is commonly referred to as coping. How a teacher copes with stress in the school environment affects the impact of stress on their psychological well-being and on physiological response (Griffith, Steptoe, & Cropley, 1999). The psychology of education enables learners rather than supporting teachers in developing their skills, which is expected to be learnt in classroom apprenticeship

(Castle & Buckler, 2009). According to these authors, teacher training lacks developing personal skills and strategies and educators need to challenge themselves, becoming the best they can, continually questioning what they do and how and why they are doing it. Coping behaviors or resources come in the form of physical, psychological, social, or material factors and help teachers overcome job-related stressors and achieve their valued outcomes with students (Blasé, 1982).

Some people, either intentionally or unintentionally, employ negative coping strategies to deal with stress. Negative coping strategies are common responses to stress and feelings of being overwhelmed. Although these strategies can provide temporary stress relief, they can cause more stress in the long run (Crisis Intervention & Suicide Prevention Centre of British Columbia, 2010). Negative coping strategies can include unhealthy behaviors, distractions, violence, and withdrawal. Unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol, excessively over/under eating, and drug abuse are sometimes used to relieve stress. Distractions such as television, computer, and filling up schedules to avoid facing problems are common ways to avoid stress. Violence such as angry outbursts, lashing out, and physical violence often come about if a situation becomes too stressful. Showing signs of withdrawal such as sleeping, procrastinating, withdrawal from family, friends, and activities, and disengagement are ways in which people try to remove stress from their lives (Helpguide, 2010).

Past research generally has been limited to only identifying sources and consequences of stress for teachers. There is a need to further understand why these sources of stress affect teachers and why they choose particular responses to stress. Considering why particular sources of stress affect teachers will allow the educator to suggest positive stress management programs and coping mechanisms that can be made within the organizational structure of schools that will lessen work-related stress. Understanding why teachers respond the way they do to stress can allow for adaptive strategies to be used in order to help teachers address and cope with stress. Understanding why these strategies are used will provide teachers with the opportunity to better understand how to cope with stress and provide the tools and resources for effective stress management programs designed to alleviate stress encountered in Today.

Method

Participants of the Study

The population of the present study consists of teacher educators from Education Degree Colleges in Myanmar. According to Ministry of Education, the latest numbers of teacher educators is about 750 in 2021. Since there are 25 Education Degree Colleges in Myanmar, 10 out of 25 Education Degree Colleges were chosen. random sampling technique and 300 teacher educators were selected as a sample.

Instruments

Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI): The teacher stress inventory (TSI) was originally developed by Fimian (1983) and later revised by Schutz and Long (1988). The central aim of the TSI is to identify what type of situations teachers find stressful by obtaining an overall stress score (Schutz & Long, 1988). The TSI consists of 36 items and are grouped into seven subscales which include: Role ambiguity, Role Stress, Organizational management, Job satisfaction, Life satisfaction, Task stress and Supervisory support (Harlow, 2008). The TSI is rated on a 4-point

likert scale (i.e. 1= strongly disagree, 2= somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, and 4 = strongly agree) (Schutz & Long, 1988).

The Cybernetic Coping Scale (CCS): The CCS was derived from Edwards' cybernetic theory of stress, coping, and well-being (Edwards, 1988, 1992; Edwards & Cooper, 1988). The CCS consists of 14 items and measure five coping behaviors: Changing the situation (active problem-solving to alter the situation to the individual's desires), Accommodation (adjusting personal desires to match the situation), Devaluation (reducing the importance of the perceived discrepancy between the desired and actual states), Avoidance (directing personal attention away from the situation), and finally Symptom reduction (direct attempts to improve perceptions of well-being; Edwards & Baglioni, 2000). The response format developed by Edwards and Baglioni consists of a 4-point scale: 0 = do not use at all through to 3 = use very much.

Instrumentation

The questionnaires used in this study were judged by 13 experts in the field of educational psychology. They gave valuable suggestions regarding the clarity of statements, appropriateness of the language and suitable with the study. According to their suggestions, these questionnaires were edited to avoid ambiguity and repetition of statements.

Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed to teacher educators by the researcher. The researcher directly contacted teacher educators and asked them to complete the questionnaire at their convenience. Teacher educators completed the questionnaire and returned it to the researcher by post.

Results

Descriptive Analysis of Stressful Conditions and Coping Strategies of Teacher Educators Comparison of Teacher Educators' Stressful Conditions

Based on the results, task stress has the highest mean score with 13.94 which was verbally interpreted as often stressed. Also, this is the subscale of stress that mostly affects the teacher educators based on the ranking. It is closely followed by role stress with a mean score of 13.66, interpreted as often stressed. Role ambiguity and Life satisfaction were ranked number 3 and 4, which have mean scores of 13.37 and 12.13 respectively, with a verbal interpretation of sometimes stressed. This infers that these subscales affect the teachers for some of the time. Lastly, job satisfaction, supervisory support and organizational management have mean scores of 11.92, 11.21, and 9.99 respectively, which are interpreted as rarely stressed. The last three subscales were the least experienced of stress by the teacher educators (See Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Stressful Conditions of Teacher Educators

Stressors	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Role Ambiguity	13.37	1.792	3
Role Stress	13.66	2.921	2
Organizational Management	9.99	2.338	7
Job Satisfaction	11.92	2.359	5

Stressors	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Life Satisfaction	12.13	1.872	4
Task Stress	13.94	3.274	1
Supervisory Support	11.21	2.608	6

In Myanmar, education colleges have being upgraded to education degree colleges and new curriculums are implemented under guidance of the Ministry of Education. During this transformation period, teacher educators feel ambiguity concerned with their task, work load and responsibilities of the work.

Comparison of Coping Strategies of Teacher Educators

To know the coping strategies that teacher educators often used when they feel stressed, the following comparison was computed.

Table 2. Mean Comparison of Coping Strategies of Teacher Educators

Coping Strategies	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Change the Situation	300	4.99	1.812	0	9
Accommodation	300	5.79	1.728	0	9
Devaluation	300	5.66	1.875	0	9
Avoidance	300	5.28	2.167	0	9
Symptom Reduction	300	4.17	1.290	0	6

Table 2 reflects the most frequently used coping strategies, categorized according to the Cybernetic Coping Scale model, to address the stressful conditions experienced in Education Degree College. They used Accommodation (Mean = 5.79) and Devaluation (Mean = 5.66) most frequently followed by Avoidance (Mean = 5.28) and Change the situation (Mean = 4.99) and Symptom Reduction (Mean = 4.17) which are reported less frequently.

The above mentioned results can be concluded that teacher educators tried to use engaged ways to cope with stressful situations by adjusting their personal desires to match the situation, reducing the importance of the perceived discrepancy between the desires and actual state and directing attempt to improve perceptions of well-being when they experienced stressful conditions. Sometimes, they use disengaged coping such as avoidance which tend to lead people to ignore direct problem-solving options and direct personal attention away from the situation to alleviate stress (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010).

Descriptive Analysis of Teacher Educators' Stress Levels and Independent Variables Stress Levels of Teacher Educators

To explore the current stress level of teacher educators, the following calculation was computed. The result is described in Table 3.

Table 3. Stress Levels among Teacher Educators

Stress Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Low	138	46
Moderate	90	30
High	72	24
Total	300	100

Comparison of Stress of Teacher Educators by Gender

Independent sample *t* test was used to compare the result of teacher educators' stress between male and female groups and to test whether one group experienced higher or lower stress than another group.

Table 4. The Independent Sample *t*- test Results of Stress Values and Gender

Variable	Gender	Number	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Stress Value	Male	36	94.19	8.522	2.709**	.007
	Female	264	90.20	8.268		

Note: ** Mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 4 depicts the results of the *t*-test with respect to stress levels based on the gender of respondents. The results indicate that there is statistically significant difference, $t = 2.709$; $p < 0.01$, in the stress levels of teacher's educators based on their gender, with male teachers experiencing significantly higher levels of stress (Mean = 94.19, SD = 8.522) compared to female teachers (Mean = 90.20, SD = 8.268). In Myanmar society, male persons take leader role for almost family. As male teacher educators, they have responsibilities not only for their families but also for teaching profession. However, for female teacher educators can find easily ways of coping to face stressful conditions according to their female nature. This may cause male teacher educators feel more stressed than their counterparts.

Comparison of Teacher Educators' Stress by Marital Status

Looking across the marital status, the mean score of married teacher educators on total stress value is the highest and divorced ones is the second highest than single and widow teacher educators. To make the confirmation of the significant difference of total stress value by marital status, ANOVA result was calculated. The results are mentioned in Table 5.

Table 5. ANOVA Results of Stress Values and Marital Status

Variable	Marital Status	N	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Stress Value	Single	184	90.33	8.442	12.007***	.000
	Married	107	96.72	10.250		
	Divorced	2	95.50	4.950		
	Widow	7	87.29	7.064		

Note: *** Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

As the results, there is significant difference between stress value by marriage status groups. Marital status is related to the reporting of stress with those who were married and divorced having a higher stress than those were single and widow.

To obtain more detailed information, post-hoc test was executed by Tukey HSD method. Regarding the total stress value, the mean score of married teacher educators is significantly higher than that of single and widow ones (see Table 6). This may be the different cultural norms. Myanmar society norms deal with marriage status is not flexible enough to reach the international standard of gender equity.

Table 6. Post-Hoc Analysis of Stress Values and Marital Status

Variable	(I) Marital Status	(J) Marital Status	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Stress Value	Married	Single	6.394***	.000
		Widow	9.434*	.041

Note: * Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

***Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

Comparison of Teacher Educators’ Stress by Designation

To find out whether there were any differences on total stress value by designation, ANOVA analysis was used. Table 7 showed that the mean scores of tutor and lecturer are higher than assistant lecturer, associate professor and professor and there is significant difference between designation groups in total stress value.

Table 7. ANOVA Results of Stress Values and Designation

Variable	Designation	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Stress Value	Tutor	19	93.42	7.221	4.457**	.002
	Assistant Lecturer	124	88.90	9.026		
	Lecturer	102	93.04	8.218		
	Associate Professor	44	89.41	5.508		
	Professor	11	89.27	8.615		

Note: ** Mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

For detailed information, post-hoc test was executed by Tukey HSD method. Regarding the total stress value, the mean score of lecturer is significantly higher than that of assistant lecturer (see Table 8). The findings are possible due to limited involvement in decision making that reduced their responsibilities and enhanced their point of exhaustion.

Table 8. Post-Hoc Analysis of Stress Values and Designation

Variable	(I) Designation	(J) Designation	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Stress Value	Lecturer	Assistant Lecturer	4.144*	.002

Note: * Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Comparison of Teacher Educators' Stress by Academic Qualification

In analyzing stress of teacher educators by academic qualification, postgraduate teacher educators feel higher level of stress than graduate educators. To explore whether there were any differences on total stress value by academic qualification, ANOVA analysis was conducted.

Table 9. Stress Levels of Teacher Educators by Academic Qualification

Variable	Academic Qualification	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Stress Value	Graduate	142	91.34	8.239	128.95***	.000
	Master	151	104.84	6.015		
	PhD	7	93.57	9.519		

Note: *** Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

Table 9 indicated that there is a significant difference between stress values by academic qualification. Post-hoc test was used by Tukey HSD method to obtain specific information. The mean score of teacher educators who have master degree is significantly higher than teacher educators who have graduate and PhD degree. This may be the reason of teacher educators who have master degree are able to do more responsibilities in academic areas deal with the new curriculum in Education Degree Colleges. PhD holders have to do also the same responsibilities but the quantity of PhD is too small in every EDC.

Table 10. Post-Hoc Analysis of Total Stress Values and Academic Qualification

Variable	(I) Academic Qualification	(J) Academic Qualification	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Stress Value	Master	Graduate	13.503***	.000
		PhD	11.270***	.000

*** The mean difference is significant at 0.001 level.

Comparison of Teacher Educators' Stress by Teaching Experience

In analyzing teacher educators' stress by teaching experience, the majority of teacher educators who had been involved in teaching for between 11-15 years and 16-20 years felt high level of stress. There is a significant difference between stress values by teaching experience.

Table 11. Stress Levels of Teacher Educators by Teaching Experience

Variable	Teaching Experience	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Stress Value	1-5 yrs	12	88.67	9.5	43.027***	.000
	6-10 yrs	51	88.39	8.1		
	11-15 yrs	67	102.39	7.261		
	16-20 yrs	61	106.75	3.957		
	21-25 yrs	19	87.42	5.015		

Variable	Teaching Experience	N	Mean	SD	F	p
	26-30 yrs	28	92.07	10.396		
	31-35 yrs	41	91.12	9.250		
	Above 35 yrs	21	92.14	5.033		

***The mean difference is significant at 0.001 level.

To obtain more detailed information, post-hoc test was executed by Tukey HSD method. Regarding the total stress value, the mean scores of teacher educators who had been involved in teaching for between 11-15 years and 16-20 years are significantly higher than other groups of teaching experience (see Table 12). This can be explained, as the more experience teacher educators increase, the more they become saturated or exhausted and tired and worn out. This may make them feel less successful and incompetent to cope with the challenging demands of their jobs. Also, they might not be confident enough in teaching/dealing with disruptive pupils as they probably are inexperienced in their profession comparison to their senior colleagues and they take facilitators role in their departments.

Table 12. Post-Hoc Analysis of Stress Values and Teaching Experience

Variable	(I) Teaching Experience	(J) Teaching Experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	P
Stress Value	11-15 yrs	1-5 yrs	13.721 ^{***}	.000
		6-10 yrs	13.996 ^{***}	.000
		16-20 yrs	-4.366 [*]	.021
		21-25 yrs	14.967 ^{***}	.000
		26-30 yrs	10.317 ^{***}	.000
		31-35 yrs	11.266 ^{***}	.000
		Above 35 yrs	10.245 ^{***}	.000
	16-20 yrs	1-5 yrs	18.087 ^{***}	.000
		6-10 yrs	18.362 ^{***}	.000
		11-15 yrs	4.366 [*]	.021
		21-25 yrs	19.333 ^{***}	.000
		26-30 yrs	14.683 ^{***}	.000
		31-35 yrs	15.632 ^{***}	.000
		Above 35 yrs	14.611 ^{***}	.000

Note: * Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

*** Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

Discussion

For many years, stress has been recognized as a concern among professionals employed in human service occupations and is of increasing concern for those in the teaching profession. Teaching in today's schools involves both high pressure and serious responsibilities; factors often beyond the control of the individual. Teachers experience frequent exhaustion, serious health conditions and are expected to have shorter life expectancy due to stress. Sustained monitoring of health and well-being by teachers and active professional support for teachers in today's schools is needed in order for quality teaching and learning to be upheld in a world that is ever changing and ever challenging for teachers and the schools and families they serve.

The changing system and the corresponding changes occurring within organizations in Education Colleges necessitates continuing research on the causes and consequences of stress and coping strategies that they used. Knowledge of these common stress characteristics and coping strategies can assist school systems and administrators in developing interventions to alleviate teacher stress.

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