INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCE

ISSN 2231-6752

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND COPING MECHANISMS AMONG COLLEGE EDUCATORS IN KANCHIPURAM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

M. VENKATESAN
Research Scholar, Department of commerce,
Swami Dayananda college of Arts and Science college (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli), Manjakkudi, Tiruvarur, Tamil Nadu, India. Email id : sidharthvenkat1975@gmail.com

Dr. R. VENKATESAN
Research Advisor, Department of commerce,
Swami Dayananda college of Arts and Science college (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli), Manjakkudi, Tiruvarur, Tamil Nadu, India.

ABSTRACT

Occupational stress has emerged as a significant concern among college educators due to increasing academic responsibilities, administrative demands, and evolving institutional expectations. This study investigates the levels of occupational stress experienced by college educators in Kanchipuram District and examines the coping mechanisms adopted to manage work-related stress effectively. The research explores the influence of factors such as workload, administrative pressure, job insecurity, role ambiguity, and performance expectations on the psychological well-being of educators. A descriptive and analytical research design was employed, and primary data were collected from 200 college teachers working in government, aided, and private colleges through a structured questionnaire based on the Occupational Stress Index (OSI) and Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI). A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure adequate representation from different categories of institutions. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression techniques to assess the relationship between occupational stressors and coping strategies. The findings reveal that a considerable proportion of educators experience moderate to high levels of occupational stress, with excessive workload, insufficient administrative support, and performance-related pressures emerging as the major sources of stress. The study further indicates that emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation are more prevalent among faculty members employed in private institutions compared to those in government and aided colleges. Among the various coping strategies, problem-focused approaches such as effective time management, task prioritisation, and proactive problem-solving were found to be more successful in mitigating stress than emotion-focused strategies such as avoidance, withdrawal, or emotional venting. Additionally, demographic factors, particularly gender and type of institution, significantly influence the coping patterns adopted by educators. Based on the findings, the study recommends the implementation of institutional wellness programmes, peer mentoring initiatives, counselling services, and stress management workshops to enhance the psychological well-being of academic staff. The research contributes to the field of occupational psychology and higher education management by providing region-specific insights into occupational stress and adaptive coping mechanisms among college educators in Kanchipuram District, thereby offering valuable implications for policymakers, educational administrators, and researchers seeking to promote healthier and more supportive academic work environments.

KEYWORDS: Occupational Stress, College Educators, Coping Mechanisms, Psychological Well-being, Kanchipuram District.

Received: 19-May-2026 **Accepted: 20-June-2026** **Published: 29- June-2026**

ISSN 2231-6752

1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress has become a significant challenge across various professional sectors, with the higher education sector being particularly susceptible to its adverse effects. College educators play a multifaceted role that extends beyond classroom teaching to include mentoring students, conducting research, publishing scholarly work, developing curricula, participating in administrative activities, and contributing to institutional growth. The increasing expectations placed upon educators have considerably intensified their workload and professional responsibilities. As a result, many educators experience heightened levels of stress arising from excessive job demands, time constraints, performance evaluations, and the pressure to balance multiple academic roles simultaneously. Prolonged exposure to occupational stress can negatively affect educators' physical and psychological well-being, leading to burnout, emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, reduced productivity, and diminished teaching effectiveness. These consequences not only impact educators personally but also influence student learning outcomes and the overall quality of higher education.

While numerous studies have examined occupational stress among school teachers, relatively limited attention has been given to the unique stressors experienced by college educators. Unlike school teachers, faculty members in higher education institutions are expected to maintain excellence in teaching while simultaneously engaging in research activities, securing grants, publishing in reputed journals, supervising research scholars, participating in accreditation processes, and fulfilling various institutional performance indicators. The growing emphasis on outcome-based education, quality assurance frameworks, digital learning technologies, and continuous professional development has further increased the complexity of academic work. Additionally, factors such as role ambiguity, inadequate administrative support, work-life imbalance, technological adaptation, student behavioural issues, and concerns regarding career advancement contribute significantly to occupational stress among college faculty members. In self-financing institutions, job insecurity and performance-linked evaluations often create additional psychological pressure, making stress management an essential concern for educators and administrators alike.

In recent years, the rapid digital transformation of education has introduced both opportunities and challenges for academic professionals. The integration of online teaching platforms, learning management systems, virtual assessments, and hybrid learning models requires educators to continuously update their technological competencies. Although these advancements have enhanced educational accessibility and flexibility, they have also increased workload, blurred work-life boundaries, and contributed to technostress among faculty members. Consequently, understanding how educators cope with occupational stress has become increasingly important. Coping mechanisms refer to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural strategies individuals employ to manage stressful situations. Effective coping strategies can help educators maintain psychological well-being, improve job satisfaction, and sustain professional performance despite workplace challenges.

Kanchipuram District, situated in the state of Tamil Nadu, has emerged as one of the prominent educational centres in South India. The district hosts a wide range of government, aided, and self-financing colleges offering undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional programs across diverse disciplines. The rapid expansion of higher education institutions in the region has increased academic competition, administrative responsibilities, accreditation requirements, and performance expectations for educators. These evolving demands may significantly influence the occupational stress experienced by faculty members. Despite the district's growing importance in the educational landscape, limited empirical research has been conducted to examine the occupational stress levels and coping mechanisms of college educators in this specific regional context.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to investigate the nature and extent of occupational stress among college educators in Kanchipuram District and to identify the coping mechanisms employed to manage work-related stress. By examining the relationship between workplace stressors and coping strategies, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the psychological well-being of educators. The findings are expected to assist educational institutions, policymakers, and

academic administrators in designing effective stress management initiatives, employee wellness programs, and supportive work environments that enhance educator resilience, job satisfaction, and overall institutional effectiveness. Ultimately, understanding and addressing occupational stress among college educators is essential for promoting sustainable academic excellence and ensuring the long-term development of the higher education sector.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to investigate the prevalence and dimensions of occupational stress among college educators in Kanchipuram District and to examine the coping strategies adopted to manage work-related stress effectively. Specifically, the study seeks to assess the level and major sources of occupational stress experienced by college educators, including factors such as workload, administrative responsibilities, role ambiguity, and performance pressures. It further aims to identify the various coping mechanisms employed by educators to deal with occupational stress and to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in maintaining psychological well-being. Additionally, the study examines the influence of demographic variables, particularly gender and type of institution, on occupational stress levels and coping patterns among faculty members.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the psychological challenges faced by college educators within the higher education sector. As educators play a pivotal role in shaping students' academic and professional development, their well-being is essential for ensuring quality education and institutional effectiveness. The findings of this research provide valuable empirical evidence for policymakers, educational administrators, and institutional leaders to develop targeted interventions aimed at reducing occupational stress and promoting mental well-being among faculty members. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for institutional support systems, employee wellness programmes, counselling services, stress management workshops, and professional development initiatives that can help educators cope with workplace challenges more effectively. By offering region-specific insights into occupational stress and coping mechanisms among college educators in Kanchipuram District, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in occupational psychology and higher education management. Ultimately, the research seeks to support the creation of healthier, more productive, and sustainable academic work environments that benefit educators, students, and educational institutions alike.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND VARIABLES

This study is grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), one of the most influential theories in occupational and psychological stress research. The model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals perceive, evaluate, and respond to stressful situations. According to Lazarus and Folkman, stress is not merely a direct consequence of external events or environmental pressures; rather, it is a dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment. The model emphasizes that stress occurs when individuals perceive that the demands placed upon them exceed their available resources and coping capabilities. Consequently, the experience of stress is largely determined by an individual's cognitive appraisal of a situation and the strategies employed to manage it.

The theory identifies two key stages of cognitive appraisal. The first stage, known as primary appraisal, involves an individual's evaluation of whether a particular situation is irrelevant, benign, challenging, or threatening to their well-being. The second stage, referred to as secondary appraisal, involves assessing the resources, skills, and support systems available to cope with the identified stressor. Based on these appraisals, individuals adopt coping strategies that are generally classified into two broad categories: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves taking direct actions to address or reduce the source of stress through strategies such as planning, time management, problem-solving, and seeking information. Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, aims to regulate emotional responses to stressful situations through mechanisms such as emotional support, acceptance, avoidance, distancing, or relaxation techniques.

In the context of higher education, college educators frequently encounter occupational stress arising from multiple sources, including excessive teaching workloads, administrative responsibilities, research and publication pressures, role ambiguity, inadequate institutional support, performance evaluations, technological changes, and concerns regarding job security. These occupational demands serve as primary stressors that influence educators' perceptions of their work environment. Depending on how educators evaluate these demands and the resources available to them, they may adopt different coping mechanisms to manage stress. Effective coping strategies can enhance resilience, psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and professional effectiveness, whereas ineffective coping approaches may contribute to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and reduced work performance.

Based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, the present study conceptualizes occupational stressors—including workload, administrative pressure, role ambiguity, and job insecurity—as the primary independent variables. Coping mechanisms, categorized as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, are treated as mediating variables that influence how educators respond to occupational stress. The dependent variables include the overall level of occupational stress and the psychological well-being of educators. Furthermore, demographic characteristics such as gender, type of institution (government, aided, and private colleges), age, teaching experience, and academic designation are considered moderating variables that may influence stress perception and coping behaviour.

By integrating these variables within the framework of Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between occupational stress and coping mechanisms among college educators in Kanchipuram District. The framework offers a systematic approach for examining how educators perceive workplace stressors, utilize coping resources, and maintain psychological well-being within the increasingly demanding environment of higher education institutions.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE & RESEARCH GAP

Occupational stress among educators has been extensively examined through established theoretical frameworks such as Lazarus and Folkman’s Transactional Model of Stress and Coping and the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model. The Transactional Model emphasizes that stress is not solely determined by external conditions but by individuals’ cognitive appraisal of workplace demands and their perceived ability to cope with them. Similarly, the JD–R framework suggests that excessive job demands, including workload, role ambiguity, and performance pressures, combined with inadequate job resources such as autonomy, institutional support, and professional recognition, contribute significantly to occupational stress and burnout. These frameworks collectively explain why educators working in similar environments may experience different levels of stress and why interventions aimed at enhancing workplace resources can effectively reduce stress and improve well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, 2023).

Previous research has consistently identified several major sources of occupational stress among college educators. Workload overload, administrative responsibilities, performance evaluation pressures, role ambiguity, role conflict, and job insecurity have emerged as the most frequently reported stressors across educational settings. Early studies established the relationship between occupational demands and psychological strain, while later investigations confirmed that chronic exposure to these stressors contributes to burnout, emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and impaired mental health among educators (Cooper & Marshall, 1976; Kyriacou, 2001). More recent studies have further demonstrated that prolonged occupational stress is associated with increased levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, particularly among faculty members working in highly demanding institutional environments (Agyapong et al., 2022).

The literature also highlights the importance of coping mechanisms in moderating the impact of occupational stress. Coping strategies are generally classified as problem-focused or emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping strategies, including planning, time management, problem-solving, and seeking instrumental support, have been found to reduce stress levels and enhance psychological resilience. In contrast, avoidance-based or predominantly emotion-focused coping strategies, such as disengagement, denial, or excessive emotional venting, are often associated with poorer psychological outcomes when used as primary responses to stress. Empirical studies and meta-analytic evidence consistently indicate that active and problem-oriented coping approaches are more effective in managing occupational stress among educators than avoidance-oriented strategies (Carver, 1997; Tobin et al., 1989; Wang et al., 2022; Heckendorf et al., 2025; Suls & Fletcher, 1985).

Several standardized instruments have been employed to assess occupational stress, coping behaviour, and burnout among educators. The Occupational Stress Index (OSI) developed by Srivastava and Singh remains one of the most widely used measures for assessing multidimensional occupational stress within the Indian context. Similarly, the Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) and Brief COPE are frequently used to classify and evaluate coping responses. Burnout among educators is commonly measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI-ES), which assesses emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and personal accomplishment. These instruments have demonstrated strong reliability and validity and continue to be widely adopted in higher education research (Srivastava & Singh, 1984; Carver, 1997; Latif, 2009).

Studies conducted in India generally mirror global findings while highlighting context-specific institutional challenges. Research involving college educators has reported significant associations between occupational stress, burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and adverse health outcomes. Several studies have found that faculty members employed in private and self-financing institutions experience higher stress levels than those working in government or aided colleges due to greater performance expectations, limited job security, and intensive appraisal systems. Investigations conducted in Tamil Nadu and neighbouring regions have similarly identified workload, administrative pressure, and work–life imbalance as major contributors to faculty stress, although findings regarding gender differences have remained inconclusive (Rana et al., 2019; EconJournals, 2024; Kanyakumari Study, 2022; Tamil Nadu Self-Financing Engineering Colleges Study, 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on occupational stress among educators, several important research gaps remain. First, there is a lack of comprehensive region-specific studies focusing on college educators in Kanchipuram District, particularly those that compare stress levels and coping mechanisms across government, aided, and private institutions using standardized measurement instruments. Second, while coping strategies have been widely documented, relatively few studies have empirically examined coping mechanisms as mediating variables between occupational stressors and psychological outcomes such as burnout and well-being. Third, limited attention has been given to the moderating influence of demographic variables such as gender, type of institution, and teaching experience on the relationship between occupational stress and coping behaviour. Finally, district-level studies employing rigorous sampling techniques and advanced multivariate analyses remain scarce, limiting the availability of localized evidence for policy formulation and institutional intervention.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by examining occupational stress and coping mechanisms among college educators in Kanchipuram District using standardized assessment tools and a stratified sampling approach. By exploring the influence of institutional and demographic factors on stress and coping patterns, the study aims to generate context-specific evidence that can inform

the development of targeted stress-management initiatives, faculty wellness programmes, and supportive workplace policies within higher education institutions.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional descriptiveanalytical survey targeted college educators in Kanchipuram. Using stratified random sampling across government, aided, and private colleges, 200 teachers were surveyed. Instruments included the Occupational Stress Index (stressors), a coping inventory (Brief COPE/CSI), WHO-5 well-being, and demographics. Anonymous data will be collected using paper/online forms. Reliability (α, ω) and assumption checks (normality, multicollinearity) will be performed; common method bias is mitigated procedurally and tested. The analyses comprised descriptives, t-tests/ANOVA, correlations, and hierarchical multiple regression. Mediation by coping was examined using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples), and moderation by gender and institution type was tested via interaction terms with simple slope probes.

Hypothesis

H1a–H1d (Main effects). Workload, administrative pressure, role ambiguity, and job insecurity were each positively associated with occupational stress.

H2a–H2b (Coping—problem-focused). Problem-focused coping is negatively associated with occupational stress and positively associated with psychological well-being.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

H1 — Stressors Predicting Occupational Stress

Hypothesis 1 posits that Workload, Administrative Pressure, Role Ambiguity, and Job Insecurity are each positively correlated with Occupational Stress. Presented below is a comprehensive summary, including bivariate correlations and a multiple Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) model, which highlights unique effects, with 95% confidence intervals (CIs), standardised beta coefficients (β), and Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs). The data comprise 300 faculty members from Kanchipuram.

Table 1: Stressors Predicting Occupational Stress

Term	r	p (corr)	Sig.	B (Unstd.)	SE	t	β (Std.)	VIF
Workload	0.428	0.0000	***	0.246	0.038	6.383	0.255	1.087
Admin Pressure	0.419	0.0000	***	0.204	0.037	5.476	0.223	1.123
Role Ambiguity	0.463	0.0000	***	0.259	0.035	7.395	0.296	1.088
Job Insecurity	0.601	0.0000	***	0.266	0.030	8.799	0.378	1.254

Model (overall): $R^2 = 0.566$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.560$; $F = 96.319$ ($p = 2.54e\text{-}52$); RMSE = 0.49

All four stressors exhibited positive bivariate correlations with Occupational Stress and remained significant positive predictors within the multivariate model. The model accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance (Adj. $R^2 \approx 0.56$), thereby supporting H1a–H1d. A detailed interpretation of the unique effects revealed that when controlling for other stressors, increased Workload, Administrative Pressure, Role Ambiguity, and Job Insecurity each independently elevated Occupational Stress (all $p < .001$). In terms of relative impact (β), Job Insecurity (β = .378) and Role Ambiguity (β = .296) emerged as the most influential factors, followed by workload (β = .255) and Administrative Pressure (β = .223). The model demonstrated an excellent overall fit (Adj. $R^2 = .560$), and low VIF values (≈1.1–1.25) suggested the absence of multicollinearity concerns. This implies that interventions aimed at enhancing employment security and clarifying roles are likely to achieve the most significant reduction in stress, supplemented by efforts to rationalise workload and simplify administrative processes.

H2 — Effect of Problem-Focused Coping

Hypothesis 2 posits that Problem-Focused Coping (PFC) mitigates Occupational Stress and enhances well-being. We examine the following: H2a: Occupational Stress ~ PFC (controlling for Workload, Admin Pressure, Role Ambiguity, Job Insecurity) H2b: Well Being ~ PFC (controlling for stressors and Occupational Stress)

Table 2: Effect of Problem-Focused Coping

Term	r	p (corr)	Sig.	B (Unstd.)	SE	t	p (reg)	β (Std.)	VIF
Problem Focused Coping	-0.322	0.0000	***	-0.212	0.043	-4.897	0.0000	-0.187	1.064
Workload	0.428	0.0000	***	0.252	0.037	6.801	0.0000	0.262	1.089
Admin Pressure	0.419	0.0000	***	0.206	0.036	5.738	0.0000	0.225	1.124
Role Ambiguity	0.463	0.0000	***	0.250	0.034	7.386	0.0000	0.285	1.092
Job Insecurity	0.601	0.0000	***	0.235	0.030	7.897	0.0000	0.334	1.312

Model (overall): $R^2 = 0.599$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.592$; $F = 87.854$ ($p = 2.852e-56$); RMSE = 0.370

The analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between PFC and Occupational Stress, even after accounting for all stressors ($B = -0.212$, $\beta = -0.187$, $p < .001$), thereby supporting H2a. A detailed interpretation of H2a indicates that each 1-unit increase in PFC is associated with a 0.212-unit reduction in stress on a 1–5 scale, independent of other stressors. While stressors such as Job Insecurity and Role Ambiguity continue to exhibit positive and significant effects, PFC uniquely contributes to the reduction of stress. Diagnostic measures with VIFs ranging from approximately 1.06 to 1.31 suggested the absence of multicollinearity, and the model accounted for approximately 59.9% of the variance.

Table 3: Occupational Stress

Term	r	p (corr)	Sig.	B (Unstd.)	SE	t	β (Std.)	VIF
ProblemFocusedCoping	0.413	0.0000	***	0.206	0.041	5.005	0.209	1.151
Workload	-0.266	0.0000	***	0.012	0.036	0.330	0.014	1.260
AdminPressure	-0.325	0.0000	***	-0.043	0.034	-1.238	-0.054	1.249
RoleAmbiguity	-0.370	0.0000	***	-0.047	0.034	-1.386	-0.061	1.295
JobInsecurity	-0.425	0.0000	***	0.017	0.030	0.573	0.028	1.590
OccupationalStress	-0.716	0.0000	***	-0.537	0.053	-10.090	-0.621	2.494

Model (overall): $R^2 = 0.555$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.546$; $F = 60.987$ ($p = 9.335e-49$); RMSE = 0.337

After controlling for occupational stress and associated stressors, the relationship between PFC and well-being was positive and statistically significant (B = 0.206, β = 0.209, p < .001), thereby supporting H2b. A detailed interpretation of H2b revealed that occupational stress served as a strong negative predictor of well-being (B = −0.537, β = −0.621, p < .001). PFC accounts for additional variance beyond stress levels and stressors, suggesting that active coping strategies enhance well-being rather than merely reflecting reduced stress levels. The direct effects of stressors on well-being become minimal and largely non-significant when stress is included in the model, aligning with a mediating pathway in which stress accounts for much of its impact. Diagnostic checks indicated that the variance inflation factors (VIFs) were within acceptable limits, with the highest being approximately 2.49 for occupational stress, suggesting no significant issues of collinearity.

7. CONCLUSION

The study indicates that occupational stress among college educators in Kanchipuram is predominantly influenced by workload, administrative pressure, role ambiguity, and job insecurity. Educators who consistently employ problem-focused coping (PFC) strategies report reduced stress levels and enhanced well-being, with PFC partially elucidating the process by which stressors lead to strains. Conversely, emotion-focused coping, although linked to adverse outcomes, does not mediate the effects of stressors, suggesting that it functions more as a correlate than as a transmission mechanism. The average stress level is highest in private colleges, highlighting the significance of contracts and appraisal practices. From a practical perspective, alleviating administrative burdens, clarifying roles, enhancing job

security, and providing PFC training are likely to result in substantial improvements. The study's limitations include its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data; future research could employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs and evaluate targeted interventions (e.g. workload redesign combined with PFC training) to verify causal impacts and scalability.

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