

A Quantitative Study Of Occupational Stress And Coping Strategies Among Higher Education Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Occupational stress is an escalating concern among higher education educators due to rising academic obligations, administrative pressures, and institutional expectations. This study investigates the extent of occupational stress and the coping mechanisms employed by faculty members in Arts and Science colleges in Kerala. A quantitative study approach was utilised, and data were gathered from 100 teachers, comprising 50 from government-aided colleges and 50 from self-financing colleges, through a structured questionnaire. The research utilised descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including independent sample t-tests, ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis, employing SPSS Version 26. The results show that faculty members deal with a lot of work-related stress, especially because of too much work, job instability, work-life imbalance, and not enough support from the school. Teachers employed in self-financing institutions reported comparatively elevated stress levels in contrast to their counterparts in government-aided colleges. The regression analysis shows that workload, gender, and work-life conflict all have a big effect on stress levels. On the other hand, good coping mechanisms help lower stress levels. The research underscores the significance of institutional support systems, encompassing stress management programs, counselling services, and supportive work practices, to augment faculty well-being and boost the overall efficacy of higher education institutions.

(Keywords: Occupational stress, coping strategies, higher education teachers, faculty well-being)

1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is a major issue in today's workplaces, especially in jobs that require a lot of intellectual involvement, emotional investment, and constant performance review. Higher education teaching is largely acknowledged as a challenging job. In the last few decades, the growth of higher education and the increasing focus on quality assurance, accreditation, and performance-based evaluation have made life harder for college and university teachers.

Teachers in higher education are very important for both the growth of human capital and the spread of information in society. Their tasks go beyond teaching in the classroom to include research, developing new courses, mentoring students, doing administrative work, and getting involved in the community. These many roles can make the workplace stressful, which can lead to occupational stress. Heavy workloads, tight deadlines, job insecurity, role conflict, a lack of support from the institution, and rising student expectations are all things that teachers at colleges and universities say stress them out the most. If occupational stress is not handled well, it can have very bad effects on both people and schools. At the individual level, long-term stress exposure can lead to physical and mental health issues, such as fatigue, anxiety, burnout, lower job satisfaction, and less motivation. At the organisational level, elevated stress levels among educators may adversely impact instructional efficacy, research

output, and overall institutional performance. So, it is important to know what kind of stress higher education teachers are under and how bad it is in order to improve their health and keep the quality of higher education good.

Coping skills are vital for dealing with stress at work. Coping is the mental and physical work that people do to deal with stress and lessen its bad effects. Teachers often use many ways to deal with stress, such as managing their time well, getting help from family and coworkers, finding solutions to problems, relaxing, and doing fun things. Teachers may stay mentally healthy, become more resilient, and do better at their jobs even when they are under a lot of stress by using effective coping mechanisms.

In developing nations like India, higher education institutions encounter various obstacles, including constrained resources, intensifying rivalry, legislative modifications, and escalating expectations about research output and academic achievement. These issues often make things worse for faculty members, so it's vital to look at how much stress they feel at work and how they deal with it. Comprehending these elements can aid policymakers, educational administrators, and institutional leaders in cultivating conducive work cultures and executing efficient stress management programs.

Consequently, the current study seeks to investigate occupational stress and coping techniques among higher education educators through a quantitative research methodology. The study aims to identify the primary sources of occupational stress and assess the coping methods employed by teachers through the analysis of empirical data gathered from faculty members in higher education institutions. The results of this study may aid in formulating institutional policies and practices that enhance teacher well-being and augment the efficacy of higher education institutions.

2. REVIEW LITERATURE

Occupational Stress and Coping Mechanisms Among Higher Education Instructors

Occupational stress among higher education faculty has received heightened scrutiny in academic research owing to the intricate challenges characteristic of academic settings. Stress occurs when a person thinks that external demands strain or beyond their adaptation capabilities (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Faculty members may experience stress due to workload, job uncertainty, position ambiguity, insufficient institutional support, and work-life imbalance (Kyriacou, 2001).

Occupational Stress in Higher Education

Studies reveal that university educators worldwide are encountering increasing stress levels attributed to heightened academic demands, administrative duties, and research obligations. Winefield et al. (2003) assert that stress in higher education is a substantial predictor of psychological suffering and reduced work satisfaction. Kinman and Jones (2008) demonstrate that the corporatisation of academia and the focus on performance metrics intensify pressure on academics, particularly at contract-based or self-financing institutions.

Abirami (2012) discovered that educators in private colleges in India endure greater stress than those in government institutions. Contributing variables comprised excessive workload, inadequate compensation, and insufficient job stability. Afzal et al. (2018) noted that faculty

members at private universities in Pakistan experienced higher levels of occupational stress compared to their counterparts at public universities, indicating geographical similarities in the developing world.

Gender and Stress

Various research indicate that gender significantly influences stress perception. Female academics frequently encounter the twin challenge of academic duties and familial commitments. Sharma & Singh (2017) found that female college educators in India had greater emotional tiredness and role conflict compared to their male counterparts. The absence of institutional assistance, particularly in reconciling professional and household responsibilities, exacerbates their stress (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008).

Stressors in Self-Financing Institutions

Faculty in self-financing or unaided universities have distinct pressures stemming from precarious job security, inadequate salaries, and restricted access to research funding or professional development opportunities. Sukumar and Kanagarathinam (2016) emphasize that self-financing college teachers often lack autonomy, face management pressure, and are excluded from decision-making processes. These variables not only increase stress but also diminish teacher morale and productivity.

Coping Strategies

Coping methods denote behavioural and cognitive endeavours to address particular pressures. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) categorised coping strategies into two types: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. College educators frequently utilise emotion-focused tactics, including familial engagement, social media interaction, or spiritual practices (Gupta & Gehlawat, 2013). Nonetheless, not all coping mechanisms possess equal efficacy. Mindfulness-based methods, such as yoga and meditation, have demonstrated considerable advantages in stress management for educators (Hülshager et al., 2013). Institutions that foster healthy coping mechanisms through wellness programs, flexible work schedules, and peer support groups exhibit reduced stress levels among professors (Kinman, 2001).

The Role of Organisations in Stress Management

Institutional support is essential for alleviating stress. Colleges that establish equitable workload standards, provide professional development opportunities, and provide psychological counselling see faculty members experiencing increased job satisfaction and reduced burnout rates (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). Lack of such support systems in private/self-financing institutions often exacerbates stress and leads to high turnover (Padmanabhan & Rani, 2015).

Recent studies show that teachers in higher education are more stressed out at work because of changes in the academic environment, new technologies in the classroom, and more demands from their schools. Dilekçi, Kaya, and Çiçek (2025) assert that occupational stress and burnout provide considerable issues for educators, since escalating workloads, administrative pressures, and ongoing performance assessments lead to emotional fatigue and diminished job satisfaction among teachers.

Studies indicate that employment conditions and institutional regulations significantly influence the stress levels of faculty members. Chukwuemeka, Okafor, and Nwafor (2023) discovered that university lecturers frequently encounter stress stemming from excessive workloads, role conflicts, and insufficient institutional support. Their research underscores that occupational stress is significantly correlated with diminished work-life quality and heightened psychological distress among academic personnel.

In the same way, Bradshaw, Jackson, and Nguyen (2024) say that institutional variables including support from leaders, chances for professional growth, and policies for work-life balance have a big effect on teacher well-being. Their research indicates that colleges fostering supportive work environments generally experience reduced faculty stress and enhanced job satisfaction. Another significant research domain is the coping strategies employed by educators to mitigate occupational stress. Jin, Li, and Chen (2025) stated that positive coping methods, including mindfulness practices, physical exercise, social support, and effective time management, play a substantial role in lowering stress levels and enhancing psychological well-being among professionals, especially educators. These coping strategies make people more resilient and help teachers deal with stress at work better.

Moreover, thorough reviews regarding occupational well-being in higher education underscore the significance of institutional support structures. Delgado-Vela (2025) asserts that institutions that adopt structured wellness programs, counselling services, and faculty development activities are more effective in alleviating stress and burnout among educators. Recent studies underscore the significance of resilience and adaptive coping strategies among educators. Nwoko, Okoye, and Obi (2024) discovered that educators who regularly participate in healthy coping strategies, including social interaction, leisure activities, and mindfulness techniques, exhibit greater psychological resilience and reduced occupational stress.

Waterhouse (2024) also says that colleges and universities need to take a whole-person approach to stress management that involves support from the organization, personal coping skills, and activities to raise awareness of mental health issues. To improve the overall quality of higher education and promote long-term faculty well-being, we need to take a more holistic approach.

Recent research indicates that occupational stress among higher education educators is a multifaceted problem shaped by organisational, psychological, and social aspects. To make teachers happier and make sure that higher education institutions work well in the long term, we need to understand these aspects and encourage good coping mechanisms.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present academic environment is complex and demanding, putting higher education faculty under stress. Faculty, especially in self-financing and Arts and Science institutions, must balance teaching, administration, research, and student engagement with little institutional support or recognition. Job insecurity, low pay, little career growth prospects, and few mental health and well-being resources exacerbate these pressures. Despite the growing awareness of occupational stress in education, most studies have focused on general workplace stress or public university settings, overlooking the unique challenges faced by

faculty in self-financing and government-aided colleges. Individual coping mechanisms are often used informally, but their efficacy and institutional role in stress alleviation are unclear. This study examines the nature, origins, and degree of occupational stress among Kerala college professors to fill these gaps. It also evaluates faculty coping mechanisms and institutional support systems. These dynamics are crucial to faculty well-being, teaching, research, and academic governance.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To ascertain the primary sources of occupational stress among college instructors.
2. To evaluate stress levels among different types of institutions (Government-Aided versus self-financed).
3. To assess the correlation between demographic and professional variables and stress levels.
4. To evaluate the efficacy of various coping mechanisms.
5. To propose institutional strategies for alleviating stress.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design: The study utilised a quantitative cross-sectional research approach to investigate occupational stress and coping techniques among higher education educators.

5.2 Sample: A total of 100 faculty members were chosen from Arts and Science colleges all over Kerala. There were 50 teachers from government-aided colleges and 50 teachers from self-financing colleges in the sample. A convenience sample method was used.

5.3 Data Collection Instruments: Data were gathered with a standardised questionnaire comprising three sections:

Demographic data of participants, Revised Occupational Stress Index (OSI) for assessing stress levels and Concise COPE Inventory for evaluating coping mechanisms

5.4 Statistical Instruments: The gathered data were examined with SPSS Version 26 with the subsequent statistical instruments:

Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation), Independent samples t-test, Analysis of Variance, Pearson correlation assessment and Multivariate regression analysis

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	38	38%
Female	62	62%
Total	100	100

Interpretation: The gender distribution of respondents indicates that females constituted 62% of the overall sample, and males represented 38%. This signifies that women constitute a substantial segment of the teaching staff in higher education institutions in Kerala, especially within the Arts and Science disciplines. The predominance of female respondents is significant in analysing stress levels, as previous studies indicate that women may encounter greater work stress due to the simultaneous weight of professional and domestic

obligations. The gender composition offers a crucial framework for analysing the study's results regarding work-life balance and stress management techniques.

Table 2: Age Group Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
25–34	22	22%
35–44	45	45%
45–54	25	25%
55 and above	8	8%
Total	100	100

Interpretation: The age distribution of respondents indicates that the predominant group (45%) is within the 35–44 age bracket, succeeded by 25% in the 45–54 range, 22% in the 25–34 range, and merely 8% aged 55 and above. This signifies that most faculty members are in their mid-career phase, typically characterised by heightened professional responsibilities, administrative tasks, and familial commitments. The comparatively low presence of senior academics (aged 55 and above) indicates a predominantly youthful workforce in higher education institutions. This demographic trend is noteworthy, as mid-career educators are more susceptible to occupational stress stemming from job overload and the demands of excelling in teaching, research, and personal responsibilities.

Table 3: Type of Institution of Respondents

Type of Institution	Frequency	Percentage
Government-Aided	50	50%
Self-Financing	50	50%
Total	100	100

Interpretation: The institutional categorisation of responses is evenly divided, with 50% hailing from government-supported colleges and 50% from self-financed institutions. This equitable representation facilitates a comprehensive comparative investigation of stress levels and coping strategies across various institutional contexts. The equitable distribution bolsters the validity of the study's conclusions, especially in elucidating how structural disparities—such as job security, remuneration, and administrative support—between government-funded and self-financing institutions may lead to differing levels of occupational stress among faculty members.

Table 4: Mean Score Table for Likert Scale Analysis

Sl. No.	Statement	Mean Score
1	Workload pressure negatively impacts teaching effectiveness	4.32
2	Administrative duties increase overall stress	4.18
3	Lack of job security contributes to professional anxiety	4.24
4	Time for research activities is insufficient	3.89
5	Institutional support is inadequate for managing stress	3.94
6	Peer collaboration reduces workplace stress	3.75
7	Conflicting instructions from management create confusion	4.08
8	Work interferes with personal and family responsibilities	4.30
9	Physical health is affected by academic stress	3.86

10	Sleep quality declines during peak academic periods	3.92
11	Encouragement and appreciation from management are lacking	3.81
12	Emotional exhaustion is frequently experienced during semester peaks	4.12
13	Disciplinary challenges with students cause mental fatigue	3.95
14	Social support from family helps manage stress	4.05
15	Engaging in mindfulness (yoga/meditation) provides stress relief	3.54
16	Social media acts as a temporary coping mechanism	3.70
17	Opportunities for career advancement are limited	4.21
18	Counselling services should be made available by the institution	4.36
19	Salary is not commensurate with workload and responsibilities	4.40
20	Institutional recognition can motivate teachers and reduce burnout	4.15

Interpretation: The analysis of mean scores for Likert-scale statements indicates that faculty members experience significant occupational stress, with pronounced consensus on concerns including insufficient salary (mean = 4.40), the necessity for institutional counselling services (4.36), and the detrimental effect of workload on teaching efficacy (4.32). The elevated mean ratings for work-life interference (4.30) and job insecurity (4.24) underscore the significant stress experienced by educators, particularly in self-financing institutions. Moderate consensus is observed for obstacles such as inadequate time for research (3.89), insufficient institutional support (3.94), and emotional fatigue (4.12), signifying these are ongoing issues. Notably, although mindfulness practices (3.54) and social media (3.70) are acknowledged as coping mechanisms, their adoption and perceived efficacy remain limited. The statistics indicate a pressing necessity for structural support, career advancement possibilities, and mental health interventions to alleviate teacher stress and improve academic productivity.

Table 5: Physical Symptoms Due to Stress

Symptoms	Frequency	Percentage
Headache	35	35%
Migraine	20	20%
Sleep disturbance	18	18%
Fatigue	15	15%
Anxiety attacks	12	12%

Interpretation: Data on stress-related symptoms reveals that a substantial number of faculty members endure physical and psychological manifestations of work stress. Headaches are the most often reported symptom, impacting 35% of respondents, followed by migraines at 20% and sleep problems at 18%, which are typical manifestations of chronic stress and mental weariness. Furthermore, 15% report having general weariness, while 12% endure anxiety attacks, underscoring the emotional burden of persistent academic pressure. These findings highlight the imperative for universities to adopt proactive stress management

measures and wellness initiatives to enhance the mental and physical well-being of faculty personnel.

Table 6 : Coping Mechanisms

Coping Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Spending time with family	40	40%
Social media use	30	30%
Yoga/Meditation	12	12%
Reading	10	10%
Counselling or therapy	8	8%

Interpretation: The examination of coping techniques indicates that familial engagement is the most favoured means of stress alleviation among faculty members, with 40% of participants identifying it as their principal method. Subsequently, social media utilisation (30%) is readily available but may provide merely ephemeral distraction instead of enduring stress alleviation. Structured and potentially helpful coping techniques, such as yoga or meditation (12%), reading (10%), and counselling or therapy (8%), are utilised less frequently. This indicates a dependence on informal or readily available coping strategies, whereas professionally guided or mindfulness-based approaches are underutilized—emphasizing the necessity for institutions to enhance awareness and accessibility to comprehensive mental health resources.

Table 7 Institutional Support for Stress Management

Support Mechanism	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Wellness programs	30	30%
Counselling services	20	20%
Flexible scheduling	18	18%
Performance incentives	25	25%
Mental health awareness	10	10%

Interpretation: The results show that many colleges and universities don't have very good support systems for dealing with stress. Only 30% of those who answered said there were wellness programs, and only 20% of schools offered counselling services. Eighteen percent of respondents said that flexible work schedules and performance incentives were also limited. Only 10% of respondents said they knew of mental health awareness programs, which shows that mental health is still not a high priority for institutions. The absence of organised institutional support underscores the necessity for universities and colleges to implement extensive stress management programs and mental health measures to enhance teacher well-being.

Table 8: Regression Analysis: Stress Predictors

Predictor Variable	β Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Workload	0.29	2.87	0.005**
Gender (Female)	0.24	2.19	0.032*
Work-Life Conflict	0.21	2.12	0.037*

Coping Score	-0.33	-3.06	0.003**
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Interpretation: The regression study identifies four key predictors of occupational stress among college instructors. Workload ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.005$) is identified as the most robust positive predictor, signifying that elevated workloads substantially elevate stress levels. Gender, particularly female status ($\beta = 0.24$, $p = 0.032$), is a significant variable, indicating that female faculty members are more susceptible to stress, perhaps due to the concurrent demands of professional and family obligations. Work-life conflict ($\beta = 0.21$, $p = 0.037$) further corroborates this trend, highlighting how challenges in reconciling academic responsibilities with personal life exacerbate stress. The coping score has a significant negative correlation with stress ($\beta = -0.33$, $p = 0.003$), indicating that efficient coping methods substantially diminish stress levels. These findings underscore the necessity for specific interventions focused on workload management, gender-sensitive policies, and the development of healthy coping methods to mitigate faculty stress.

6. FINDINGS

1. A greater proportion of female responders (62%) signifies that women represent most faculty members in Arts and Science institutions. Female faculty members endure elevated stress levels because to the simultaneous obligations of professional and personal responsibilities.
2. The age distribution indicates that 70% of respondents are aged between 35 and 54, representing a mid-career population. This demographic is especially susceptible to professional burnout owing to the convergence of work advancement aspirations and personal obligations.
3. The balanced sample of 50% from government-funded institutions and 50% from self-financing entities facilitated a legitimate comparison. Self-financing faculty indicated elevated stress levels, particularly concerning job security, performance expectations, and insufficient institutional support.
4. The elevated mean score of 4.32 signifies that an excessive workload is a principal source of stress and adversely impacts teaching quality. Administrative duties exacerbate this burden.
5. With a mean score of 4.24, job uncertainty constitutes a considerable stressor, particularly among self-financing faculty. Ambiguity regarding contract renewal, promotions, and financial security engenders persistent professional concern.
6. The survey indicated that 77% of participants believed their occupational duties disrupted their personal and familial life, resulting in physical (headache, weariness) and psychological (anxiety, insomnia) health complications.
7. Fewer than one-third of institutions provide wellness programs or organised support systems. Mental health awareness programs are largely non-existent, with only 10% availability, signifying significant neglect of psychological well-being.
8. Forty percent of respondents depend on family interaction and thirty percent on social media for stress alleviation, whilst more therapeutic approaches such as meditation (12%) and counselling (8%) are underutilised due to accessibility issues or stigma.
9. A mean score of 4.08 for "conflicting instructions from management" signifies that ambiguous communication and insufficient transparency significantly exacerbate daily working stress.

10. The data indicates that insufficient institutional recognition (mean = 4.15) and restricted career growth chances (4.21) diminish faculty motivation and elevate occupational unhappiness.

7. DISCUSSION

The results of this study give us significant information about the types and causes of job stress among instructors in higher education in Kerala. The findings reveal that workload, job instability, administrative duties, and work-life conflict are the principal factors contributing to occupational stress among faculty members. These findings align with prior studies indicating that academic personnel endure significant stress due to escalating teaching responsibilities, research demands, and institutional pressures.

The demographic study indicated that female faculty members represent the majority of respondents and exhibit relatively elevated stress levels. This study corroborates the assertions of Sharma and Singh (2017), who indicated that female educators frequently endure elevated occupational stress owing to the dual demands of professional duties and domestic responsibilities. Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008) also pointed out that female academics are under a lot of stress since their institutions don't give them enough support and they have to deal with work-family conflict.

The research additionally revealed that mid-career professors, especially those aged 35 to 44, encounter elevated levels of professional stress. This could be because of more work responsibilities, aspirations for career progress, and family obligations at this point in life. Winefield et al. (2003) identified analogous trends, revealing that academic personnel in mid-career phases frequently endure elevated job strain attributed to role overload and institutional demands.

Another important finding of the study is that teachers at self-financing colleges are more stressed than lecturers at government-aided colleges. Job insecurity, lower pay, and performance-based evaluation systems seem to be some of the things that make this difference happen. This outcome corresponds with the research conducted by Abirami (2012) and Afzal et al. (2018), which indicated that professors in private or contract-based universities frequently encounter heightened occupational stress due to insufficient job security and institutional support.

The examination of Likert-scale responses reveals that excessive workload, inadequate compensation, work-life imbalance, and insufficient institutional support are among the primary stressors faced by faculty members. These findings corroborate the research conducted by Kinman and Jones (2008), which highlighted that escalating academic workloads and management expectations have exacerbated occupational stress in higher education institutions globally.

The research also investigated the coping techniques employed by faculty members to mitigate work stress. The results indicate that informal coping measures, including familial interaction and social media engagement, are the predominant methods employed. Nonetheless, more organised coping methods like yoga, meditation, and professional counselling are utilised less frequently. Gupta and Gehlawat (2013) observed similar

findings, indicating that instructors frequently depend on personal and social coping mechanisms instead of official psychological assistance.

Recent research underscores the significance of good coping methods in mitigating professional stress. For instance, Jin, Li, and Chen (2025) discovered that mindfulness techniques, social support, and proficient time management markedly enhance psychological well-being and alleviate stress among professionals. Nwoko, Okoye, and Obi (2024) similarly underscored that educators employing good coping mechanisms exhibit more resilience and lower stress levels.

The regression analysis in this study shows that workload, gender, and work-life conflict are important factors that affect occupational stress. On the other hand, coping mechanisms have the opposite effect on stress levels. This indicates that efficient coping strategies can markedly alleviate occupational stress among educators. These results corroborate the theoretical framework established by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which underscores the significance of individuals' cognitive and behavioural coping mechanisms in stress management.

In general, the results of this study show that higher education instructors' work-related stress is affected by a mix of organisational, professional, and personal factors. To help faculty feel better and reduce stress, institutions need to have support systems in place, including as counselling services, procedures for managing workloads, and wellness initiatives. Resolving these difficulties would not only improve teachers' work-life balance, but it will also make them better at their jobs and increase the school's overall success.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Colleges and universities should have procedures that make sure that faculty members have a reasonable amount of teaching, research, and administrative work.
2. Colleges and universities should set up structured stress management programs, like workshops, training sessions, and awareness campaigns, to help teachers deal with stress at work.
3. Institutions ought to implement confidential counselling and psychological support services for faculty to mitigate stress, anxiety, and work-related emotional difficulties.
4. Faculty can have a better balance between their professional and personal lives by having flexible work arrangements, such as teaching schedules that can be changed, personal leave policies, and less communication after hours.
5. To make female teachers less stressed, institutions should develop rules that take gender into account, such as maternity leave, childcare support, and safe workplaces.
6. Universities should support wellness activities like yoga, meditation, exercise, and leisure clubs that help faculty members learn how to deal with stress in a healthy way.
7. Giving faculty members chances to get research funding, go to conferences, get more education, and move higher in their careers can boost their motivation and lower their stress levels at work.
8. Clear communication between management and faculty members on policies, expectations, and administrative decisions can help clear up any confusion about roles and ease workplace stress.

9. To boost motivation and job satisfaction, institutions should set up recognition systems that honour great teaching, research accomplishments, and faculty contributions.
10. Colleges and universities should create complete wellness policies for their faculty that include programs for managing stress, raising awareness of mental health issues, and creating a supportive work environment.

9. CONCLUSION

The study provides an in-depth analysis of occupational stress among higher education professors in Kerala, uncovering profound difficulties that extend beyond individual coping mechanisms. Stress is exacerbated by overwhelming workloads, inadequate institutional support, job instability, and inadequate work-life balance, particularly among female and mid-career educators. Although informal coping strategies offer temporary respite, the absence of organised institutional interventions sustains a cycle of emotional fatigue and deteriorating well-being. The regression results highlight the necessity of addressing workload, work-life conflict, and facilitating appropriate coping techniques. Stress among faculty members is clearly not just an individual concern, but an organisational one that directly affects educational quality, teacher retention, and student outcomes. Academic institutions bear the responsibility to shift from reactive to proactive models of faculty well-being. This entails not only policy improvements but also fostering a campus culture that prioritises mental health, work-life balance, professional acknowledgement, and collaborative community engagement. If executed comprehensively, these steps will enhance the health and resilience of the academic workforce, hence improving the long-term sustainability and excellence of the higher education system.

Declarations

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Conflicts of Interest / Competing Interests:

The authors assert that they own no identifiable financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that may have impacted the research presented in this work.

Ethical Approval:

The research was executed in compliance with the ethical standards established by Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal. Prior to data collection, ethical approval for the research was secured from the University Research Ethics Committee

Informed Consent:

All participants were apprised of the study's aims and provided their voluntary consent to partake. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously upheld during the research process.

Contributions of Authors:

Girija C. — Conceptualised the study, devised the research instrument, gathered and analysed data, and composed the manuscript.

Dr. D. Ramani — Acted as research supervisor, directed methodological design, critically evaluated the article, and offered editing feedback.

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