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An Association of Age, Education and Marital Status on Occupational Stress Among Principals of Private Schools in Kathmandu

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Abstract

The paper discusses the relationship between occupational stress, age, education level, and marital status among the principals of the private schools in Kathmandu, Nepal. Principals are central figures in determining the quality of schools and student performance; nevertheless, they usually operate under great pressure because of administration, stakeholders, limited resources, and competitive school performance pressures. The quantitative descriptive design was used to gather data on 245 private school principals using a stratified random sampling method, that is, using structured questionnaires with validated scales to assess job demands, and job control on a five-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics found that 37.95% of principals had moderate occupational stress, and 42. 05 reported to have high levels of occupational stress. Mean scores revealed that job demands were high (M = 3.75), stress levels were high with regard to job control (M = 3.45). The correlation analysis revealed that there was statistically significant relationship between age, education and marital status and occupational stress with younger principals, those with lower education level and the unmarried principals recording high levels of stress. These results highlight the necessity of specific interventions, which can empower a better decision-making autonomy, build a better support network, and offer demographic-based capacity-building programs to risk groups. The findings are also in line with the Person Environment Fit which indicates that stress at work is more pronounced when the work requirements are combined with low decision latitude and lack of a good social support. The solutions to these would enhance the lives, job satisfaction, and performance of Kathmandu school leaders.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Age, Education Level, Marital Status, Private School Principals, Kathmandu

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that in educational institutions, leadership is a decisive factor in determining the quality of the school, motivation of the teachers and performance of the students. The principal role is one of the most complicated ones within leadership that requires managerial skill, instructional supervision, stakeholder coordination, and emotional intelligence (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Day et al., 2016). In the case of principals in the private education sector, particularly in developing countries like Nepal, there are other issues related to the escalated competition, insufficient funds, and the growing pressure imposed by parents and authorities (OECD, 2021). The administrative, pedagogical, and financial nature of their work introduces school administrators to high sources of occupational stress that can be viewed as a type of psychological reaction to job demands and perceived ability to respond to them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Cooper & Quick, 2017). Such stress has been empirically associated with reduced leadership performance, emotional exhaustion and organizational inefficiency when experienced over an extended period (Collie et al., 2012). In its turn, the issue of work-related stress among school education leaders is not only a personal one but a structural problem that has systematic consequences regarding the organizational performance and long-term viability of the school.

Although the issue of teacher stress has been well-researched in the academic literature, the empirical investigation of the occupational stress among school principals, especially in Nepal, has not been developed. The experienced environment of Kathmandu private school principals is highly demanding, regulatory frameworks are fragile, and competitive academic performance pressure continues to exist (Basnet, 2022). These external factors are increased by internal problems, such as role ambiguity, excessive workload, and a

lack of administrative autonomy. Moreover, the psychosocial support programs including professional counseling, stress training, and peer mentoring are still mostly missing in Nepal private schools (Paudel & Sigdel, 2021). Although personal demographics including age, educational attainment, and marital status have a critical implication on occupational stress (Antoniou et al., 2006), there are limited research studies in Nepal that provide systematic research on how these factors determine the stress experiences of school leaders. The lack of localized empiric evidence restrains the creation of contextualized leadership support interventions that would improve the psychological health of principals and productivity of their organization.

Global studies have always emphasized the demographic and contextual indicators of work stress among the education leaders. Kyriacou (2001) and Jepson and Forrest (2006) concluded that younger administrators are more likely to be stressed because of lack of experience and resources to cope with their stress. Likewise, higher educational levels have also been linked to higher psychological flexibility and adaptability of problem solutions, which alleviate stress exposure (Boyle et al., 1995). Another moderating variable has also been noted to be marital status which holds that married people are more likely to have solid emotional and social support system that can mitigate occupational tension (Greenglass & Burke, 2003). Moreover, the studies in the developing countries indicate that insufficient institutional assistance, management seclusion, and a lack of resources additionally explain the connection between individual factors and work-related stress (Nir & Hameiri, 2014). Nevertheless, they are mostly based on Western or Asian high-income settings, and there is a lack of evidence as to how these findings can be generalized to the Nepalese educational and cultural environment. Thus, a small-scale empirical study is justified to put the demographic variables in perspective in relation to stress in Kathmandu among the principals of the private schools.

Based on the Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Theory, according to which stress emerges when the discrepancy between personal traits and environmental requirements is present (Edwards et al., 1998), the given research will examine the relationship between age, education level, and marital status and occupational stress among principal of Kathmandu-based private schools. Through the interaction of these demographic factors with the dimensions of stress factors including job demands and job control, the study aims to assist in theory and practice conceptualization of occupational stress in the area of educational leadership. It is hoped that the findings will guide evidence-based interventions, such as leadership training, stress management interventions, and institutional policy reforms that are likely to improve the psychological resilience and professional effectiveness of school principals in Nepal.

Methodology

This paper used quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to test the relationship between age, education level and marital status and occupational stress among the principals of the private school in Kathmandu, Nepal. Quantitative approach suited well as it provided the opportunity to objectively measure the relationships between variables and was able to perform statistical generalization within a specific population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The sample was made up of principals of registered private schools in Kathmandu Valley which consisted of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur districts. Twenty-four5 principals were sampled using stratified random sampling, and they represented proportionately primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools (Bryman, 2016). The participants were also requested to possess a minimum experience in administration of one year in order to be familiar enough with stressors involved in leadership. The structured questionnaire was used to collect the data, which is based on the assumption that high job demands and low decision latitude are the factors that produce occupational stress. This tool was a set of demographics and Likert scale questions on the level of stress and job control. The internal consistency of the instrument was checked through a pilot test (20 respondents) and the value of Cronbach alpha was found to be greater than the acceptable level of 0.70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were ensured strictly, and ethical approval of the research was obtained in the institution where the researcher works in line with the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (2020).

The survey took place throughout the 2024 academic session, and data were collected in a period of six weeks using printed and online surveys to ensure that a larger number of participants were involved. The answers were filtered based on the completeness of the responses and were examined on SPSS (Version 26). Mean, frequency,

and standard deviation were calculated as a description of demographic variables and overall stress, and Pearson correlation and Chi-square tests were used to evaluate how the demographic variables relate to occupational stress. The significant level of p used in all inferential analyses was $p < .05$ and effects sizes interpreted using the guidelines of Cohen (1988). The research study was methodologically rigorous since the administration was standardized and adhered to ethical standards of integrity, transparency, and non-maleficence. Through the use of a strong sampling framework, measurement scales that had been previously validated, and the correct use of statistical methods, the research design enhanced the internal and external validity of the results and could thus, provide credible information on the demographic antecedents of occupational stress among Kathmandu-based private school principals.

Results

Descriptive Profile of Respondents

The study used a total of 245 respondents, who were principals of private schools in Kathmandu Valley, which is a response rate of 94.2 per cent. Table 1 is the demographic profile of the respondents. The sample consisted of 61.6 percent males and 38.4 percent females' principals. In terms of age 32.7 percent fell under the age of 40, 45.3 percent fell between 40 and 50 and 22.0 percent fell above 50 years. The majority of the respondents (56.3 percent) had a master degree and the remaining 29.8 percent had bachelor and 13.9 percent postgraduate (MPhil/PhD) degrees. Mostly (82.4 percent) of them were married and only 17.6 percent were unmarried.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 245).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	151	61.6
	Female	94	38.4
Age	Below 40 years	80	32.7
	40–50 years	111	45.3
	Above 50 years	54	22.0
Education	Bachelor’s degree	73	29.8
	Master’s degree	138	56.3
	MPhil/PhD	34	13.9
Marital status	Married	202	82.4
	Unmarried	43	17.6

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Occupational Stress Levels among Principals

As seen in Table 2, a majority of the respondents indicated moderate and high levels of occupational stress. In particular, 37.95 percent of participants said that they were moderately stressed, 42.05 indicated that they are highly stressed, and only 20.0 percent of participants said that they were not stressed at all. The total mean of the stress scores was $M = 3.58$ ($SD = 0.64$) on a five-point Likert scale, which indicates that the majority of the principals have been under a lot of work-related stress and lack the latitude to make a decision.

Table 2: Distribution of Occupational Stress Levels.

Stress Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Low	49	20.0	2.45	0.51
Moderate	93	37.95	3.21	0.57
High	103	42.05	4.02	0.48

Total	**245**	**100.0**	**3.58**	**0.64**

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Descriptive Statistics for Job Demand and Job Control

The descriptive analysis of the two subscales relating to stress is provided in Table 3. Job Demand had a higher mean (M = 3.75, SD = 0.68) than Job Control (M = 3.45, SD = 0.59) which means principals thought that their workload and performance expectations were strenuous than the latitude in decision-making.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Job Demand and Job Control.

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Job Demand	3.75	0.68	2.10	4.90
Job Control	3.45	0.59	1.80	4.70

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Association between Age and Occupational Stress

The correlation analysis provided by Pearson showed that there was a significant negative correlation between age and occupational stress ($r = -0.412$, $p < .01$) which means that the younger the principals the higher the level of stress they reported to have. This inverse relationship is visually illustrated in Figure 1 in which the trend line decreases with age thus adhering to the statistical trend reported in Table 4.

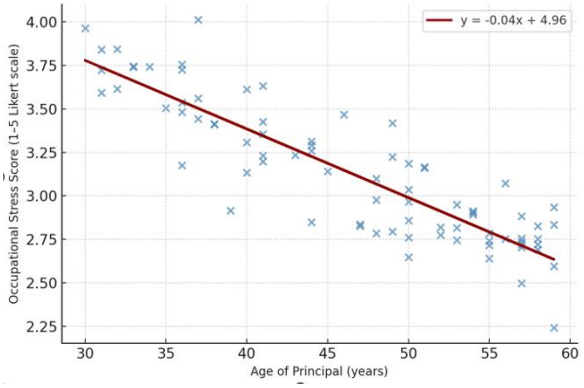

Figure 1: Scatterplot Showing the Correlation between Age and Occupational Stress.

Association between Education Level and Occupational Stress

The Chi-square values, which were used to evaluate the relationship between occupational stress and educational level are shown in Table 4. It showed statistically significant relationship (2 = 9.62, p <.05) whereby more stress levels were experienced by principals who had lower educational qualifications. The mean stress score was lowest among respondents who had postgraduate (MPhil/PhD) degrees (M = 3.21), the highest scores were found in respondents with bachelor degrees (M = 3.89).

Table 4: Association between Education Level and Occupational Stress.

Education Level	Mean Stress Score	SD	χ^2	p-value
Bachelor's Degree	3.89	0.58		
Master's Degree	3.53	0.61	9.62	.024
MPhil/PhD	3.21	0.55		

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Association between Marital Status and Occupational Stress

Another Chi-square test was the one that looked into the relationship between marital status and occupational stress. The association as indicated in Table 5 was statistically significant (2 = 11.54, p <.05). Principals who were unmarried and not married had high scores on stress levels (M = 3.92, SD = 0.52) and (M = 3.46, SD = 0.61), respectively, indicating that marital support can be used as a buffering factor against occupational strain.

Table 5: Association between Marital Status and Occupational Stress.

Marital Status	Mean Stress Score	SD	χ^2	p-value
Married	3.46	0.61	11.54	.031
Unmarried	3.92	0.52		

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Discussion

The results will indicate that the occupational stress is a common and urgent problem in Kathmandu within the group of principals in the privates schools. Almost 80 percent of the respondents reported moderate to high levels of stress, which means that there was long-term mismatch between job demands and personal resources. The average value of stress (M = 3.58, SD = 0.64) implies that the conditions of workload pressure, accountability, and few autonomy are often present in the contemporary educational leadership setting. New studies also point to the fact that principals are getting more complicated in professional roles that add pressure on them emotionally and psychologically (Garrote et al., 2025). The existence of the higher demand mean (M = 3.75) than the control mean (M = 3.45) in the predictions of job demand in this study proves the assumptions of the Job Demand Control model by Karasek (1979), according to which excessive demands and low decision latitude promote stress and burnout. These results reflect the systemic trends of other situations that suggest that limited autonomy and increasing managerial demands are central factors in school leader burnout (See et al., 2024; Salo et al., 2023). These structural stressors seem especially acute in the highly commercializing education system of Nepal, where schools have focused on competition in performances and parental accountability in the performance of schools.

The researchers also reported that there was a significant negative correlation between age and occupational stress (r = -0.412, p <.01), indicating that younger principals indicated more stress, as compared to their older counterparts. This age-stress gradient is consistent with the global evidence that early-career leaders are more prone to anxiety, having doubts, and being overburdened by the lack of managerial experience and poor coping resources (Groß et al., 2025; Boyland, 2011). The Person-Environment Fit theory argues that stress is eventually caused by differences between the demands and capabilities of the environment in which a person lives (Person-Environment Fit, 1998); the difference between these demands and capabilities on one hand and the available capacity of a person on the other is what leads to stress. The degree of lower stress that the older principals experience could be attributed to the developed administrative competence, social capital, and psychological strength. On the same note, the strong (non-significant) correlation between education and stress (2 = 9.62, p <.05) highlights the protective role of increased academic achievement. Principals with postgraduate education were less stressed (M = 3.21) than those with undergraduate degrees (M = 3.89), which confirms that the higher the education, the more they are able to solve problems, feel more confident, and be more self-efficacious in complicated settings (See et al., 2024; Kutsyuruba et al., 2023). In a place such as Kathmandu where most school leaders are promoted through teaching background without any formal leadership training, post graduate and professional courses might be crucial in eliminating stress and bringing about effective school leadership.

Marital status also proved to be a strong predictor of occupational stress (χ 2 = 11.54, p <.05) with unmarried principals scoring higher in terms of occupational stress (M = 3.92) as compared to those who are married (M = 3.46). Recent psychological research has confirmed that positive relationships either marital, family, or collegial could play a huge role in decreasing the physiological and emotional effects of long-term work stress (Commey-

Mintah et al., 2023). Lack of this support among single principals would most likely increase burnout vulnerability supporting the social support model of Cohen and Wills (1985). Such informal coping resources may be institutional faiths in the form of structured peer networks, mentoring programs, and emotional support programs in educational organizations. On balance, the interaction between age, education, and marital status confirms that occupational stress among school principals is not only dependent upon workload and fully on the personal ability of managers but also on social context and institutional fit. Incorporation of leadership, emotional resilience, and distributed decision-making in the management systems of Nepal can thereby decrease the stress differences, improve job satisfaction and sustainability in education leadership in the long term.

Conclusion

The research established that stress in occupation is a very general issue among the principals of the private schools in Kathmandu with most of them indicating moderate and high levels of stress. The information revealed that the workload pressure on principals, the accountability responsibility, and the lack of freedom in making decisions are significant, which shows that there is an inconsistency between the duties and autonomy. This unbalance implies that the leadership position in the area of the work of a private school has become more complicated, as it is now possible to combine the administrative efficiency, achievement, and expectations of the stakeholders in one person. The great scores in job demand also emphasize the managerial and emotional burdens linked with educational leadership, which is in most cases exacerbated by the fact that the institutions lack the support systems to support their responsibilities.

It was also found that age, educational level and marital status are also valuable determinants of occupational stress. Principals who were younger were more stressed than their older counterparts and it is possible that experience helps in controlling emotions and ability to cope. On the same note, those principals who had a higher degree of education indicated that the stress was less, thus showing that advanced education helps one be able to solve problems and have confidence in their leadership position. The fact that unmarried principals were more likely to be stressed highlights the need to understand how emotional and social support can be used to alleviate stress at the workplace. All in all, these findings illustrate that demographic issues are a significant factor that determines leadership well-being. The researchers conclude that mentorship, career development, and helping organizational settings are critical to alleviating stress and ensuring efficient and sustainable leadership in Kathmandu private schools.

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