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Research Paper

Social Support for Managing Occupational Stress Among Tribal Primary Teachers of Meghalaya, India

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ABSTRACT

World Health Organization (2017) defines work related stress as, "a pattern of reactions that occurs when workers are presented with work demands not matched to their knowledge, skills or abilities and which challenge their ability to cope" (p.13). The teaching profession is considered one of the most stressful profession (Beers, 2012). Lack of social support from home, boss or colleagues is one of the factors that causes occupational stress among teachers (Levi, 1988). Exploring ways to reduce their stress and support their occupational demand is therefore key to a more productive and nurturing teaching-learning environment. Using a mixed method research design, this paper explores social support among the tribal hills in Meghalaya and its possible use in managing occupational stress among primary teachers in urban and rural schools in East Khasi Hills District. A probability sampling design, specifically a stratified random sampling was used for the quantitative study and a non-probability sampling also purposive sampling was used for the qualitative study. The Occupational Stress Scale (OSS) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) were used for collecting data. There was a significant relationship between social support and occupational stress with p value of <.0001. Social support was very high among the primary teachers. Using a thematic analysis, social support was identified to be a strong factor for coping with occupational stress among the tribal population. Primary teachers seek social support from colleagues, co-workers and the school administration to cope with occupational stress. Recognizing that social support among co-workers is a strong factor to cope with occupational stress, a support system can be developed at the school levels where teachers can talk to each other about occupational stress and how to cope with it.

Keywords: *Social Support; Occupational Stress; Tribal Primary Teachers*

Occupational Stress
(Kyriacou, 2001)defines occupational stress, "as the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher."

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The US National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (2014) defines job stress, "as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker" (para. 11). World Health Organization (2017) defines work related stress as, "a pattern of reactions that occurs when workers are presented with work demands not matched to their knowledge, skills or abilities and which challenge their ability to cope" (p.13). The International Labour Organization (2016) defines work stress as, "harmful physical and emotional response caused by an imbalance between the perceived demands and the perceived resources and abilities of individuals to cope with those demands" (p.2).

A study on 105 primary school teachers was conducted in Dharwad city and result shows that more than half (55.2-64.8 %) had high level of stress (Holeyannavar & Itagi, 2010). Hasan (2014) found a study which was conducted in primary schools at Uttrakhand that 65% of teachers reported that they were highly stressed. (Demjaha et al., 2015) found these six categories that elementary teachers termed as stressful (a) demands; (b) control; (c) relationships; (d) role; (e) changes; and (f) support. Teachers in this study reported that they do not have control over demands and this is highly stressful for them. They also reported that changes made without their consent is highly stressful as they have to adjust to changes and extra role. In terms of support, lack of resources and funds is reported to be the highest cause of stress among elementary teachers.

Occupational stress effect on teachers

A teacher's job is one that is demanding but yet enjoyable. Furudi (as cited in Friesen, 1988) states that teacher in spite of wanting to teach the body does not allow or adapt to stress, the term is called "adaptation energy", this energy is limited. Prolonged exposure to stressors cannot be tolerated for so long. Exhaustion will take place although the body is pushed through stressors (Furudi, 2007). Furudi (2007) found that there are three reasons why teachers faced exhaustion. First, their work is emotionally demanding; second, they possess special characteristics that allows them to choose human service as a profession; and third, their work is a "client-centered" focus.

According to Dollard et al., (2003) stress effect can be categorized into three: health effects, psychological effects and behavioral effects. Health effects which include the cardiovascular system, respiratory system, immune system, and gastro-intestinal system. Psychological effects include inability to concentrate, work frustration, anxiety, depression, anger, headaches, perspiration and dizziness. Behavioral effects are increase use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, low work turn out, increase sick leave, industrial accidents, and staff turnover.

Social support

Social support as defined by House is "the perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and that one is part of a supportive social network" (Wallnas & Jendle, 2017). Sources of social support can come from many. Walnas and Jendle (2017) found common sources of social support which include family, friends, co-workers and significant others. Social support is widely studied, and it has shown to improved physical and psychological health in people (Wallnas & Jendle, 2017; (Ozbay et al., 2007)). In this study, social support is used as a coping strategy to see the association and role it plays in coping with occupational stress of teachers. Social support has been used widely as a coping mechanism for fighting with stress. Coping strategies like problem

solving, social support, controlling of emotion, and denial are found by Hung (2011) used by Malaysian teachers.

Parent Stress

The word 'Stress' a originated from a Latin word 'Stringere' which means "to draw tight and was commonly used in the seventeenth century which meant hardship, strains, adversity or affliction" (Furudi, 2007). Stress exists because of many issues. In the researcher's observation, it has been found that stress can affect people in all levels. Sanbonmatsu et al., (2014) listed some problems that people are facing in everyday life such as financial and relationship problems. It could also be of personal issues, organization, social system or others. Life has become more challenging and stressful because of a fast-changing world. Life was not so stressful as it is now. For example, organizations have become more demanding in terms of work with rise in globalization and development of technology (Dollard et al., 2003). Dollard et al., (as cited in Dunnette, 1998) goes on to say that workers are required to meet competitive requirements and this leads to work stress and illness.

Prevalence of occupational stress

Occupational stress has increased tremendously over the years. Occupational stress is usually caused by excessive or limited work, "time pressure and deadlines, fatigue from physical strain of work environment, excessive travelling, long hours, having to cope with changes in work" (Jeyaraj, 2009). According to International Labour Organization (2016), occupational stress affects everyone globally, all occupations and all kinds of workers. Occupational stress became a major industrial worry of the 1990s because of globalization especially in industrial and financial structures (Quick et al., 2001). According to research conducted by the UK Government Health and Safety Executive Agency they found that there is a relationship between bad health and stress and 105 million days are wasted each year which amounts to a loss of 1.24 billion pounds (Stefan, 2004). The American Psychological Association found in their annual survey that 65 percent of Americans claim that their cause of high stress is work (Stefan, 2004).

A comparative study in England shows that stress level was the same in 1978 as when it was in 1962 however the study shows that it started to rise in 1982 (Cosgrove, 2000). According to the Northwestern National Life employees rate their jobs as number one stressor (The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, 2014). In many developed countries, 35% to 45% of work leave is because of mental health problems (Shetageri & Gopalakrishnan, 2016). In India, the Economic Times reported by Bhattacharyya and Vijayaraghavan (2016) reports that 46% of workers in firms have some kind of stress and that more than 2500 employees came for counselling who were suffering from suicidal tendency in the last ten years. The Economic Time Wealth as reported by Chakravarty (2016) states that 46% of all employees suffer stress in India. Studies worldwide show the rise of occupational stress. This is a major problem because it has effects that is harmful to the well-being of humans.

Occupational stress effect

Stress can affect us mentally, socially, physically, and emotionally (Stefan, 2004; Jeyaraj, 2009). The American institute of stress found that 90% of health-related issues was because of stress (Stefan, 2004). In order to intervene and cope with stress we must understand the effects of it. In this section I will discuss the effects of occupational stress.

Occupational stress has a parent which is stress. The effects of occupational stress are closely related to the parent stress. Effects of parent stress are rise in blood pressure, fast heartbeat, low blood supply to the skin, interruption of digestion, increase sweat, emission of body sugar into the system to replace energy loss, and low immune system (Kaur, 2011).

Untreated stress can lead to what is called chronic occupational stress. Chronic occupational stress has been linked to cause cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, psychological disorders, workplace injury and suicide, cancer, ulcers, and impaired immune function (The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, 2014). Jeyaraj (2009) also found that occupational stress over a long period leads to degenerative diseases of the heart, kidneys, blood vessels, and other parts of the body. According to Holinka, (2015) chronic stress is related to "chronic fatigue, inability to concentrate, irritability, chronic headaches, disordered eating, coronary disease, depression, and heart disease" (p. 300). Chronic Stress is related to causing physical problems in our body (Casey et al., 2006; (Oman et al., 2008). The following list are some of the physical problems cause by stress. "Allergic skin reactions, chronic constipation, chronic pain, diabetes, dizziness, heart problems, such as angina and cardiac arrhythmias, heartburn, hypertension, infertility, irritable bowel syndrome, menopausal symptoms, such as hot flashes, persistent fatigue, premenstrual syndrome, and insomnia" (Casey, et al., 2006, p. 26). Knowing all the effects of occupational stress, it is important for us to know how to prevent ourselves from it.

Stress coping
A study conducted by (Prasad et al., 2016) in Hyderabad among CBSE affiliated school teachers found that teachers who received social support and then followed with coping strategies experience less stress than others. Studies show that social support play a role in reducing stress and social support has impacted incidents like adolescent pregnancy, first year of graduate school, workers to be terminated from work, and marital disruptions (Heitzmann & Kaplan, 1988).

Studies show that social support from co-workers has shown to increased work satisfaction, work performance and much work involvement (Wallnas & Jendle, 2017). Baqutayan (2011) conducted a study among college students to find the impact of social support on stress and he found that the experimental group proved to cope with academic stress better than the control group. A study was conducted by Yu, et al in 2014 among 1144 hospital nurses in China. This is a cross-sectional study conducted based on a convenience sample aged from 21 to 58 years. They found that social support significantly influences occupational stress among nurses in China (Yu et al.,2014).

METHODOLOGY
This study uses a mixed quantitative and qualitative research design. In order to specifically determine the relationship between the two variables a mixed method is required. A probability sampling design, specifically a stratified random was used for the quantitative study and a non-probability sampling also purposive sampling was used for the qualitative study. The quantitative data was collected from 360 participants, and 29 primary teachers were being interviewed for the qualitative data. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. The Occupational stress scale (OSS) and the Multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) was used for measuring occupational stress and social support. An interview schedule was made for interviewing. Descriptive analysis and correlation analysis using excel was used to determine stress levels, social support levels,

and the relationship between social support and occupational stress. A thematic analysis was used to specifically determine the caused that affects the relationship between occupational stress and social support.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Occupational Stress levels

Table 1. Levels of stress among primary Teachers (N=360)

Levels of stress	Number	Percentage
Low	15	4.17
Moderate	286	79.44
High stress	59	16.39

Note: *Occupational Stress Scores are as follows: 0-15: Low stress; 16- 37: moderate stress; 38- -60: High stress; 61- 75: severely high stress*

The mean occupational stress for primary teachers was 27.85 with standard deviation of 8.79 and the maximum and minimum values were 5 and 1 respectively. 79% of primary teachers reported Moderate stress (n=286).

Male and Female stress levels

Table 2. Comparison between male and female stress levels

Gender	Occupational Stress Levels	Mean (stress levels scores)	Percentage
Male	Moderate	29	15.56
Female	Moderate	27	84.44

Note: *Occupational Stress Scores are as follows: 0-15: Low stress; 16- 37: moderate stress; 38- -60: High stress; 61- 75: severely high stress*

Both male and female primary teachers are experiencing moderate stress levels.

Urban and Rural stress levels

Table 3. Comparison between urban and rural teachers stress levels

Type of school	Occupational Stress Levels	Mean (stress levels scores)	Percentage
Urban	Moderate	27.92	61.94
Rural	Moderate	27.7	38.33

Note: *Occupational Stress Scores are as follows: 0-15: Low stress; 16- 37: moderate stress; 38- -60: High stress; 61- 75: severely high stress*

Both urban and rural primary teachers are experiencing moderate stress levels.

Social Support

Table 4. Social support among primary teachers (n=360)

Social support	Percentage	Total Mean Scores	Significant other mean scores	Family mean scores	Friends mean scores
Low support	1.7	2.3	1.93	1.81	2.07
Moderate support	21.9	4.61	4.32	4.47	4.47
High support	73.6	6.13	6.23	6.41	6.15

Note: Social support scores are as follows: 1-2.9: Low support; 3-5: Moderate support; 5.1-7: High support

There is a high social support among primary teachers with total mean scores of 6.13, specifically 6.23 from significant other, 6.41 from family, and 6.15 from friends. There is high support received from family comparing to others.

Correlation
Table 4.6 The association that social support have on occupational stress.

Df₁	df₂	F	P
359	359	90.28	<.0001

There is a significant relationship between occupational stress and social support. Using the t tests, P value is <.0001.

Thematic Analysis
Using a thematic analysis, the following were identified as causes for occupational stress.

Lack of students parental support
Majority of the teachers responded that the lack of students parental support is major cause for occupational stress. The reason stated was because of the family background thus parents do not have time to visit the school to respond to teachers. One of the teacher responded, *"some of the children are below from their family background what to say directly bad family background but they don't respond they don't obey they were against us always even small kids also they come to school they don't obey they use slang words also that we cannot bear"* (Teacher 8, urban school). Parents do not come to the school when requested reason could be because they are daily labourers and cannot afford to missed a day at work. One of the teacher responded when asked about cause of stress, *"I have to be very frank yes yes parents parents sometimes parents they i don't know okay fine i understand like everybody has to work from nine to five or maybe nine to ten i don't know like this is that but there are sometimes like we need to uh reach out to the parents regarding their students i mean them their kids because we are facing problem with them in some way or the other we need to uh we need to interact with them but there are times they can be uh what to say like they don't want to uh say uh meet us teacher for some reason or something and so like you know this is the thing which really i mean like uh prove a lot of problems for me"* (Teacher 3, urban school).

Teacher's role
Another cause of stress among teachers is uncertainty of the roles given to them. Extra roles and responsibilities are given to them which becomes a cause for occupational stress. A teacher responded, *"uh the extra curriculum extra activities what we have sometimes they just come one after another it's just one after another and then it's very hard to cope up"* (teacher 5, urban school). Workload also is a problem alongside extra roles and responsibilities. *"Here in our school we have a lack of like we are going through lack of teaching professionals so we have to cover up right from the primary level to the secondary level so that's the workload is stressful"* (teacher 7, Urban school) reported a teacher.

Primary students
Teaching primary students was identified as a cause for stress. A teacher responded, *"most of the time I've been hearing this uh from people they said that when you're teaching small ones it's very easy so I really don't understand from where they get this information because*

for me, I find that when I teach especially the young ones, I can feel the stress level going really high" (teacher 3, urban school).

Managing the students can be a difficult job. A teacher responded that "*we don't know like what exactly uh we're going to face each day like sometimes you know like students are very unpredictable or we can say kids they are very unpredictable uh sometimes they might listen to you but there are times they can play they can be uh i don't want to use this word we can say like you're being very difficult okay (okay) so uh somewhere like uh you know like you're facing different stuffs every day"* (teacher 3, urban school). Another teacher responded "*it depends with the children in the classroom when the children respond we feel happy they are not stressing right, if the children do not respond, they are not completing the work they make us stressing a lot"* (teacher 8, urban school).

Lack of Technology and Teacher's Training
Teachers showed concern over lack of technology for teaching and teachers training. A teacher stated that "*With the covid scenario obviously it's so stressful because here we just did what they're saying online classes digital classes right as you see our school is it's it doesn't have the facility or the infrastructure for that right so then the students can't even get the notes"* (teacher 2, urban school).

The teacher also stated that, "if you're not trained enough I think that is one of them it's very difficult to help the children because we are working for the children they should get 100 percent right but how can you give hundred percent when we are not trained" (teacher 2, urban school).

No Stress
Interestingly, one of the teachers responded not having stress. Stress was manageable the teacher responded saying "*at school yes ...yes, we talked with headteacher and my colleagues we manage the stress"* (teacher 10, Urban). Also, through recreation, "*my hobbies planting vegetables in my kitchen garden. Then it helped me not to be from stressful and it gave me some benefit"* (teacher 10, Urban).

Coping strategies
Using a thematic analysis, the following strategies were identified that were used by teachers to cope with stress.

Support from colleagues and supervisors (administrators)
Co-workers and administration play a major role in helping teachers cope with stress. Providing counsel and suggestions when needed. A teachers responded, "*mostly we get help from among our teachers or colleagues and then even the administrators they support" (teacher1, Rural school).* Another teacher responded, *"the friends and the other colleagues sometimes help in giving suggestions what to be done what not to be done"* (teacher 4, urban school). Another one responded, *"one particular teacher I always go to her for my own counselling do we counsel each other all right uh then I just tell her whatever it's just to relief okay and then we come up with solutions"* (teacher 2, urban school).

Support from Family
A teacher responded that family support for occupation stress comes in various ways, *"yes at home we always get support at home like when we are having lots of work to do so the*

family members used to help us in our household work so we can concentrate on our job" teacher 13, rural school.

Family and friends can only be supportive at home with household work but not work-related issues. A teacher said, "*family members of course when they see we are so tired when they see the teachers are tired going home their relatives who are teachers so they will help you in household work*" (Teacher 5, Urban School).

Self-coping
A teacher responded that, "*I don't feel like anybody can help me with this stress problem be it at home because my mom she works so I don't think she should help me, like even my colleagues I find like they have their own work. So, nobody just nobody so for me it's like it's all about myself*" (Teacher 3, Urban school).

Teachers have adopted self-coping as means to cope with occupational stress. The thematic analysis shows that teachers received a lot of support from family, friends, co-workers and supervisor or administrators.

CONCLUSION
From this study, we can understand that tribal primary teachers in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya experience moderate stress levels. A comparison was made on male and female teachers, rural and urban school and teachers responded moderate stress levels and it is concluded that occupational affects teachers at all levels.

The demographic profile such as age, salary range, years of experience, status of employment, and types of schools did not determine any change on stress levels. In all the factors, primary teachers reported moderate stress levels. Support from colleagues and supervisors was also found be used a strategy to cope with occupational stress. Support from family was the strongest among the types of social support being received.

Recommendation
From this study the following recommendations can be made:
- Future research can explore social support and its effect on parent stress.
- Since there are moderate stress levels among primary teachers, a study can look specifically into the support provided by the organization or school administration.
- Secondary teachers may also be part of population to determine if occupational stress differs.

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Conflict of Interest

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