

Research Paper

A Study on Occupational Stress and Job Satisfaction among Special Educators in Palwal District

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ABSTRACT

Special educators often face emotional and professional challenges while working with children with intellectual, developmental, and behavioural difficulties. The present study examined occupational stress and job satisfaction among special educators in government and private institutions in Palwal district, Haryana. A descriptive correlational research design was used with a sample of 40 special educators. Data were collected using the Occupational Stress Index (OSI) and Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS). Statistical techniques such as Pearson's correlation, t-test, and ANOVA were applied. The findings revealed moderate to high occupational stress and moderate job satisfaction among special educators. A significant negative relationship was found between stress and job satisfaction, indicating that higher stress was associated with lower satisfaction. Educators in private institutions reported higher stress and lower job satisfaction compared to government school educators. Experienced teachers showed lower stress levels. The study emphasizes the need for supportive work environments and institutional support to improve the well-being of special educators.

Keywords: *Occupational Stress, Job Satisfaction, Special Educators, Teaching Experience*

Teaching is often viewed as a meaningful and respected profession, but it is also associated with considerable emotional and psychological demands. Teachers are expected to manage classrooms, prepare lessons, complete administrative tasks, guide students, and communicate effectively with parents and school authorities. These responsibilities can become stressful, particularly when resources and institutional support are limited (Kyriacou, 2001).

The demands become even greater in the field of special education. Special educators work with children who may have intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, learning disabilities, behavioural concerns, hearing impairments, or multiple disabilities. Such students require individualized attention, patience, emotional understanding, and specialized teaching methods. As a result, special educators often experience greater emotional involvement and professional pressure than general educators (Billingsley, 2004).

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Apart from classroom teaching, special educators are responsible for preparing individualized education plans (IEPs), conducting assessments, maintaining progress records, and coordinating with parents, therapists, and school administrators. These responsibilities can become overwhelming, especially when institutions lack adequate staff support, teaching materials, or professional resources (Fore et al., 2002). Continuous exposure to emotionally demanding situations may lead to fatigue, stress, and burnout over time (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Occupational stress refers to the physical and psychological strain experienced when workplace demands exceed an individual's ability to cope effectively (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In educational settings, stress may arise due to workload pressure, role ambiguity, student behavioural problems, lack of administrative support, and limited decision-making opportunities (Travers & Cooper, 1996). Karasek's (1979) Job Demand–Control Model explains that stress increases when employees face high demands with low control over their work. Similarly, Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources Theory suggests that stress occurs when individuals feel that important resources such as time, energy, support, or emotional stability are being threatened or lost.

Research has shown that special educators are particularly vulnerable to occupational stress because of the emotionally intensive nature of their work. Kokkinos (2007) reported that teachers dealing with behavioural and emotional difficulties among students experienced higher stress levels compared to other educators. Antoniou et al. (2013) also observed that prolonged occupational stress among teachers may lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and burnout. Such conditions not only affect teachers personally but may also reduce classroom effectiveness and professional commitment.

Job satisfaction is another important factor related to teachers' mental well-being and professional performance. Spector (1997) defined job satisfaction as an individual's overall attitude and emotional response toward their job and work environment. Teachers who experience job satisfaction are generally more motivated, productive, and emotionally committed to their profession. In contrast, dissatisfaction may contribute to frustration, absenteeism, burnout, and intention to leave the profession (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Studies have consistently reported a negative relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction among educators. Higher stress levels are often associated with lower professional satisfaction, emotional fatigue, and reduced motivation (Singh & Mishra, 2018). In special education settings, this relationship becomes especially important because teacher well-being directly influences the quality of support provided to children with special needs. Hastings and Brown (2002) found that excessive stress among special educators can affect classroom management, emotional responsiveness, and student outcomes.

In India, awareness regarding inclusive education and disability rights has increased significantly in recent years. Government policies and educational reforms have encouraged the inclusion of children with special needs into mainstream and special educational settings. Consequently, the demand for qualified special educators has also increased. Despite this growth, many educators continue to face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained staff, heavy workload, and lack of institutional support (Sharma, 2016). Kaur and Kumar (2015) further reported that limited professional recognition and

insufficient teaching resources contribute significantly to stress among special educators in India.

Palwal district in Haryana has experienced rapid growth in educational institutions, including inclusive and special schools. With the increasing number of children requiring specialized educational support, the responsibilities of special educators have also expanded. However, limited research has focused specifically on the occupational well-being and job satisfaction of special educators in this region. Many educators in Palwal appear to experience challenges related to workload, emotional strain, and administrative responsibilities.

Understanding occupational stress and job satisfaction among special educators is important because teacher well-being directly affects educational quality, student development, and professional retention. Therefore, the present study attempts to examine the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction among special educators in Palwal district while also exploring the influence of teaching experience and institutional type.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teaching has long been recognized as one of the professions most vulnerable to occupational stress (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). Workload, time pressure, classroom management, and administrative responsibilities are commonly identified as major stressors among teachers. In special education, these stressors become more complex because educators work with children who require continuous support, individualized instruction, and behavioural management.

Sharma (2016) found that behavioural difficulties among students and lack of institutional support were major contributors to stress among special educators in India. Gupta and Patel (2020) also observed that heavy documentation work, role overload, and insufficient teaching resources negatively affect teachers' psychological well-being.

Antoniou et al. (2013) reported that prolonged occupational stress among teachers often results in emotional exhaustion, burnout, and reduced professional commitment. Maslach and Jackson (1981) explained burnout as a condition involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment caused by chronic workplace stress.

Travers and Cooper (1996) identified workload pressure, lack of administrative support, and limited professional autonomy as significant causes of teacher stress. Their findings suggested that occupational stress negatively affects teachers' morale, motivation, and classroom effectiveness.

Research by Boe, Bobbitt, and Cook (1997) revealed that many special educators leave the profession due to excessive paperwork, unclear job roles, and inadequate support systems. Similarly, Fore, Martin, and Bender (2002) reported that teachers who received greater administrative support experienced lower burnout and higher job satisfaction.

Kokkinos (2007) found that educators dealing with students who had behavioural and emotional difficulties experienced significantly higher stress compared to general educators. Klassen and Chiu (2010) further highlighted that teacher self-efficacy, institutional climate,

and workplace relationships play an important role in determining stress management and job satisfaction.

In the Indian context, Kaur and Kumar (2015) reported that inadequate infrastructure, lack of teaching aids, and low societal recognition contribute significantly to occupational stress among special educators. Singh and Mishra (2018) found that teachers with higher job satisfaction demonstrated greater motivation, emotional stability, and classroom effectiveness.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) observed that emotional exhaustion among teachers is strongly associated with low job satisfaction and intention to leave the profession. These findings indicate that occupational stress not only affects teachers' mental health but may also influence teacher retention and educational quality.

Two important theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for understanding occupational stress in educational settings. Karasek's (1979) Job Demand–Control Model suggests that stress increases when employees experience high job demands along with limited control over their work. Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources Theory explains that stress occurs when individuals perceive a threat to their emotional, social, or professional resources.

Although many studies have examined occupational stress and job satisfaction among teachers, limited research has focused specifically on special educators in Palwal district. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by exploring the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction within the local educational context.

Objectives

1. To assess the level of occupational stress among special educators in the Palwal district.
2. To determine their overall level of job satisfaction.
3. To analyze the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction.
4. To examine the influence of demographic factors such as teaching experience and institutional type.

Hypotheses

1. Occupational stress and job satisfaction are significantly and negatively correlated.
2. Special educators in government and private institutions differ significantly in their levels of stress and job satisfaction.
3. Demographic variables such as years of experience significantly influence stress and satisfaction levels.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive–correlational research design was used to examine the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction.

Sample

The sample comprised 40 special educators employed in government and private special schools in Palwal. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across institutional types and experience levels.

Tools

- **Occupational Stress Index (OSI)** by Srivastava and Singh (1984), measuring stress across dimensions such as role overload and emotional exhaustion.
- **Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS)** by Spector (1985), assessing satisfaction related to pay, working conditions, supervision, and recognition.

Procedure

Permission was obtained from school authorities prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality. The questionnaires were administered in person and collected after completion.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation coefficient, independent-samples t-tests, and One-Way ANOVA.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Participants ranged in age from 25 to 50 years, including 28 females and 12 males, with teaching experience spanning 2 to 20 years.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Level
Occupational Stress	40	72.35	9.28	Moderate-High
Job Satisfaction	40	64.42	10.17	Moderate

Results indicate that special educators experience moderate to high levels of occupational stress and moderate levels of job satisfaction.

Correlation Analysis

A significant negative correlation was found between occupational stress and job satisfaction, $r = -.63$, $p < .01$, indicating that higher stress levels are associated with lower job satisfaction.

Comparison by Institution Type

Variable	Government Mean	Private Mean	t	p	Interpretation
Occupational Stress	68.85	75.90	2.12	.04	Significant
Job Satisfaction	68.30	60.55	2.41	.02	Significant

Educators in private institutions reported significantly higher stress and lower job satisfaction compared to their counterparts in government schools.

Comparison by Teaching Experience

A One-Way ANOVA revealed significant differences in occupational stress across experience groups, $F(2, 37) = 4.22$, $p = .02$. Post hoc analysis showed that educators with less than five years of experience reported the highest stress levels, while those with more than ten years reported lower stress.

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight a strong inverse relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction among special educators in Palwal. High stress levels may stem from heavy workloads, behavioural challenges, and extensive administrative responsibilities. These results align with previous studies highlighting stress as a major contributor to burnout and emotional strain in teaching professions (Billingsley, 2004; Hastings & Brown, 2002).

Institutional type significantly influenced stress and satisfaction. Government school educators exhibited lower stress levels, likely due to stable employment structures and better access to resources. Teaching experience also emerged as an important factor, with seasoned educators demonstrating better coping skills and reduced stress.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that occupational stress greatly affects the job satisfaction of special educators. When stress levels increase, teachers may feel emotionally exhausted, less motivated, and less satisfied with their work. Since special educators regularly handle behavioural challenges, individualized teaching responsibilities, paperwork, and parent coordination, the pressure of managing multiple responsibilities can impact both their personal well-being and professional performance.

The findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive and understanding work environment for special educators. Proper guidance from school authorities, availability of teaching resources, mental health support, and opportunities for professional growth can help teachers manage stress more effectively. Recognition of their efforts and a positive workplace atmosphere can also improve their confidence, motivation, and job satisfaction. Supporting the well-being of special educators is important not only for the teachers themselves but also for improving the quality of education and care provided to children with special needs.

Limitations

- The sample size was relatively small, limiting generalizability.
- The study focused only on one district.
- Self-report instruments may be subject to bias.
- The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal interpretations.

Future Directions

- Larger-scale and longitudinal studies may provide deeper insights into the evolving relationship between stress and satisfaction.
- Comparative studies across states or between general and special educators may broaden understanding.
- Intervention-based research could explore the effectiveness of stress-reduction programs for educators.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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