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**RESEARCH PAPER**

## **Environmental Factors Causing Stress in Primary School Teachers in Pakistan: Effects and Coping strategies**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Primary school teachers often experience high levels of work-related stress. In the teaching profession, stress arises from undesirable events associated with the job, which negatively affect teachers' physical health and emotional well-being. Excessive stress impacts not only teachers' performance but also compromises their mental health, leading to outcomes such as anxiety, frustration, or depression. This qualitative study aims to explore the causes of stress, examine its effects, and document the coping strategies employed by teachers. Nine primary school teachers from grades III, IV, and V, working in an elite private school in Karachi, participated in the study. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews, focusing on identifying stressors, understanding the impact of stress, and revealing the coping mechanisms used by the teachers. The findings highlight that environmental stressor such as excessive workload, unfavourable organizational policies, student behavioural issues, limited resources, and lack of support from parents and school leadership as key contributors to stress. Additionally, the study reveals that teachers often struggle with adopting effective coping mechanisms, resulting in behavioural and psychological challenges. This research underscores the need for supportive school environments and institutional strategies to mitigate stress and promote the well-being and professional development of teachers.*

**Keywords:** Adverse Effects, Coping Mechanisms, Disruptive Behaviour, Elite Private School, Excessive Workload, Teacher Stress

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## Introduction

In recent years, occupational stress among teachers has become a global concern (Chan et al., 2010; Chaudhry & Niazi, 2017). In today's competitive, fast-paced world, teaching is increasingly regarded as a high-stress profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Many countries report elevated stress levels among teachers, with significant consequences for physical and mental well-being (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Teachers now face not only instructional responsibilities but also additional tasks such as managing student behavior, addressing emotional needs, and conducting extracurricular activities (Jahan, 2017). The working environment in educational institutions is often a major source of stress (Quraishi et al., 2018).

Kyriacou (2001) explains stress as an emotional state characterized by frustration, uneasiness, and exhaustion caused by environmental and work pressures. Similarly, Leka et al. (2004), referencing the World Health Organization (WHO), describe occupational stress as the individual's reaction when work demands exceed abilities. A certain degree of stress can enhance performance in routine tasks, but excessive stress leads to negative outcomes (Qi et al., 2017). Stressors in teaching include classroom overcrowding, administrative pressures, and lack of adequate support (Hastings & Bham, 2003). Moreover, the lack of administrative support is recognized as a key stress factor, especially in the USA (Hydon et al., 2018).

In the Pakistani context, teachers often face overwork, limited social recognition, low salaries, and security issues (Chughtai & Perveen, 2013). A study by Quraishi et al. (2018) found that university faculty experience similar stress factors, such as innovation pressures, workload, and environmental concerns. Private school teachers, though better compensated, face significant challenges, including workload stress and rising living costs (Ali et al., 2013). This widespread stress makes it essential to explore the causes and impact of these stressors to develop effective support strategies.

This research focuses on analyzing the work-related stressors affecting teachers, particularly those working in primary education. The study examines the causes and effects of stress while documenting the coping mechanisms teachers employ to manage these challenges. The primary objective is to provide insights into the resilience strategies used by teachers to handle occupational stress effectively.

The key research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the environmental causes of stress for primary school teachers in Pakistan?
2. How does excessive stress affect teachers' performance and well-being?

### 3. What strategies do teachers use to cope with stressors in their work environment?

Given the interwoven nature of stress and the working environment, it is crucial to identify key environmental stressors and examine effective coping strategies (Quraishi et al., 2018). This research aims to enhance understanding of teachers' professional experiences by highlighting the factors impacting productivity and emotional well-being. Through its findings, the study seeks to offer insights into improving working environments and promoting teacher well-being, ultimately benefiting educational outcomes.

#### **Literature Review**

In recent years, occupational stress, particularly among teachers, has garnered global attention as it seriously affects teachers' health, their students, and the overall learning environment in schools (Jain et al., 2015). Occupational stress arises from the high expectations of workplaces that exceed employees' abilities, resulting in distress (Leka et al., 2004). Teachers' stress is defined as unpleasant experiences within a working environment that cause tension, anxiety, depression, and negative emotions (Kyriacou, 2001). However, Hargrove et al. (2016) suggest that a certain amount of positive stress can enhance a person's abilities and performance, whereas negative stress should be avoided as it adversely impacts both the individual and the organization.

Teachers' stress stems from both internal and external factors. Internal factors include excessive workload, challenging interpersonal relationships with colleagues, parents, and supervisors, unfavorable physical environments, lack of rewards, and limited social support. External stressors include societal pressures, media scrutiny, and political interference (Shabbir et al., 2015). Similarly, Sprenger (2011) categorizes stress factors into individual characteristics, such as gender, age, personality, and adaptability (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998), and environmental factors, including resource constraints, workload, disruptive student behavior, overcrowded classrooms, and pressures from administrators (Hastings & Bham, 2003). Effective stress management at the organizational level contributes to teachers' emotional stability, leading to improved performance (Gunawan, 2018).

#### **International Empirical Studies**

A qualitative study by Shernoff et al. (2011) explored school teachers' perceptions of the sources and impact of stress and the resources needed to address these stressors in the United States. The study identified significant stressors, including lack of resources, heavy workload, inefficient administration, behavioral issues among students, and accountability policies. Teachers reported that these stressors affected their health and personal relationships, and they emphasized the importance of human and material resources to alleviate work-related

stress.

Howard and Johnson (2004) conducted a qualitative study in Australia, investigating how a group of teachers managed stress by demonstrating greater resilience compared to their peers. The study highlighted several sources of stress, including discipline management, poor working conditions, unmotivated students, time constraints, workload, and a lack of administrative support. The teachers reported using strategies such as depersonalizing stressful events, seeking help from colleagues, viewing stress as a challenge, and celebrating personal achievements to cope with stress.

In Zimbabwe, Ncube and Tshabalala (2013) examined work stress among 200 teachers and found that most teachers reported stress from work overload, inadequate salaries, school mismanagement, lack of resources, and large class sizes. Additional stressors included an unsupportive social climate, pressures from senior colleagues, anxiety about evaluations, low social status, lack of parental support, and job insecurity.

Chan et al. (2010) studied primary and secondary school teachers in Hong Kong, identifying internal stressors such as workload, time pressures, and disruptive student behavior, along with external factors like school reviews, educational reforms, and pursuing further education. Teachers reported coping strategies such as sleeping, relaxing, socializing, and watching television, with sports or exercise being the least utilized activity.

Jahan (2017) explored occupational stress levels and their effects on upper primary school teachers in India. A sample of 200 teachers from government schools in the Bhopal District revealed higher stress levels among urban teachers compared to their rural counterparts. The major causes of stress included workload, interpersonal conflicts, and overwhelming work demands.

### **Pakistani Empirical Studies**

Haseeb and Sattar (2018) conducted qualitative research in Lahore to explore the causes of occupational stress among university teachers. The study identified key stressors, including excessive workload, long working hours, lack of professional development, role conflict, disruptive student behavior, unsupportive administration, and inadequate resources. The authors recommended providing teachers with training and opportunities to minimize stress.

Quraishi et al. (2018) conducted a similar study, identifying job stressors and coping strategies among university teachers in Pakistan. Negative factors such as workload, environmental pressures, demands for innovation, and a lack of appreciation, autonomy, and supportive environments were reported as major stressors. Teachers employed strategies like better planning, reducing competition, acceptance, seeking

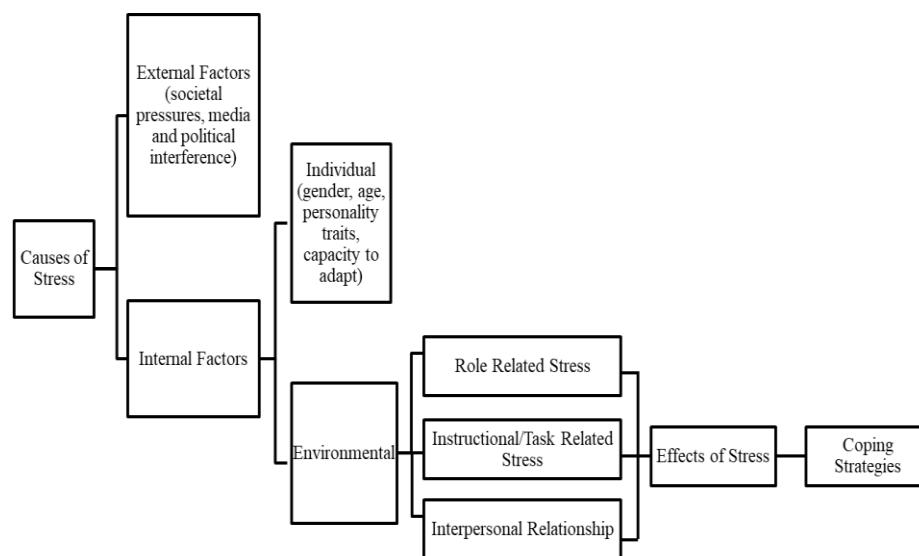
social support, and venting emotions to manage stress effectively.

Hussain et al. (2019) examined stress levels and coping strategies among public and private school teachers in Punjab. The findings revealed that more than 60% of teachers experienced high or very high levels of stress, with female teachers reporting higher stress levels than their male counterparts. Common coping strategies included turning to religion, planning, and positive reinterpretation. The study noted that as stress levels increased, teachers actively sought solutions, focused on emotional well-being, and prioritized problem-solving over avoidance or social support strategies.

These studies emphasize the critical need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address occupational stress among teachers. Providing adequate resources, professional development opportunities, and a supportive working environment can enhance teachers' well-being and improve educational outcomes.

The literature review on teachers' stress indicates that the effective coping strategies can be derived from identification of causes of stress and study of teacher responses/ strategies. Based on the literature review a conceptual framework was developed to guide the methodology of the study.

### Conceptual Framework



### Methodology

For this study, a qualitative method was employed to explore the causes of work-related stress among primary school teachers, examine its effects, and understand the coping strategies used by them. Qualitative research involves an inductive approach, allowing researchers to explore meanings

and insights within a specific context (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Levitt et al., 2017). It provides the opportunity to examine phenomena in natural settings by analyzing participants' real experiences (Creswell, 2014). The current research adopted a phenomenological approach to understand the subjective perceptions of participants (Diaz, 2015).

### **Setting**

This study was conducted at a private school in Karachi. Compared to public sector schools, private schools generally offer high-quality education, often with purpose-built campuses and modern facilities (Andrabi et al., 2002). Teachers were interviewed in a face to face meeting in the school setting.

### **Participants**

A purposive sampling strategy was applied to select participants for this study. Ponto (2015) notes that purposive sampling involves carefully choosing individuals based on specific characteristics to represent the targeted population effectively. Nine female primary school teachers, three from each grades III, IV, and V were selected. Teachers at this level are often more vulnerable to occupational stress, which affects their performance (Ali et al., 2013). Participants' identities were kept anonymous using codes (e.g., TCHR 1) to protect their privacy.

### **Data Collection Tool**

Individual semi-structured interviews were employed to explore the extent of teachers' stress and associated impacts. According to Bryman (2012), semi-structured interviews use a flexible interview guide, allowing the interviewer to explore topics more deeply. The interview guide was developed based on key parameters identified through the literature review. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes and was conducted in face-to-face meeting according to the participants' availability. All sessions were recorded with the teachers' consent.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed to organize and interpret qualitative data. Thematic analysis identifies themes by examining patterns within the data (Saldana, 2013). The researcher followed two cycles of coding, as suggested by Saldana (2013). The first cycle involved three phases: transcribing interviews, pre-coding by underlining significant fragments, and categorizing codable moments. While in the final analysis phase, the researcher used an etic perspective, aligning findings with pre-existing frameworks from the literature (Olive, 2014).

### **Findings**

After the detailed data analysis, the findings for each research question, including the themes generated have been provided separately, with excerpts from participant interviews for support.

## Environmental Causes of Stress

The participant teachers expressed different views while responding to interview questions related to the factors contributing to their stress. Major themes that emerged from the participant teachers' interview include excessive workload, unfavourable organization policies, students' disruptive behaviour, unavailability of resources and lack of support from parents and heads. These aspects are discussed below in detail:

### *Excessive Workload*

The analysis of derived in-vivo codes suggests that the foremost source of stress as a teacher of primary classes in elite private schools is their high workload. Majority of the teachers believe that their workload is excessive. TCHR 2 shared that:

*“There is a lot of workload here. At the time of hiring, we are only briefed about the core tasks, but we are not told about the extra activities we are required to undertake. For example, beside subject teacher I am a class teacher also for which I have to do lot of other jobs.”*

TCHR 4 with 3 years of teaching experience is of the view that: *“The workload for one person is immense... If you cannot justify with the workload you are told to leave.”*

Beside the core task of teaching, additional tasks and activities is another area which many respondents find difficult to manage. When a teacher is assigned variety of tasks, it adds to her workload and therefore she cannot give her best to everything. TCHR4 expressed, *‘Multi-tasking is 24/7. When they say you have a free class, you are not actually free. You are doing something and then these tasks pop up.’* At another occasion, TCHR 8 said, *“It is stressful as we have to conduct security drills and evacuate children when they are threatened... There is always uncertainty about security situation.”*

Respondents also shared that they struggle to manage their time due to excessive workload, time-compressed deadlines and last-minute tasks. As a result teachers at times have to rush through some important tasks. In TCHR 2 words, *“You are doing something and then suddenly these urgent tasks pop-up for which you have to stay back at the eleventh hour.”* Additionally TCHR 7 shared her views as, *“There are deadlines that need to be met at any cost which are not timely announced. So very limited time is given to complete the task which causes anxiety.”* She further believed and shared:

*“In teaching there is lot of uncertainty as situations are constantly changing and you need to adjust yourself accordingly. So you cannot focus on planned ‘things to do’ most of the times so you are lacking behind despite you complete your tasks on time.”*

Due to the excessive workload, most of the respondents take their work unfinished school work back home which adversely effects their work-

family life balance. TCHR1 teaching English language said that: *“I take 7 to 8 copies home every day since I have to read students’ creative work more deeply.”*

Moreover, TCHR 2 expressed that:

*“Sometimes our family life is effected when the workload is excessive... when there are lot of activities and we cannot finish our school tasks then we have to take it back home also... almost twice a week we have to take the work to home.”*

In order to finish the work and associated school tasks, respondents stay back in the school occasionally beyond their normal working hours which adds to their stresses. TCHR 1 shared that: *“Once a month there is such activity which requires late sitting and hence effects our family life... at times it becomes difficult for us to stay back compulsorily as we have some other commitments.”*

The number of students in a primary class in elite private schools varies from 25 to 30 which few respondents find difficult to manage. In this regard, TCHR 7 had this to say:

*“We are following these international standards of educational strategies that have 15 to 20 children maximum in the class and that too with an assistant usually. Here we are dealing with 27 students, conducting activities and transition between activities all by ourselves. It turns out to be fruitful many times but then again it does cause anxiety.”*

Similarly, TCHR 3 teacher finds it difficult to check student copies related to creative writing. She said, *“It is difficult to oversee separate work of 25 students. Since I am teaching 3 sections, so I receive 75 copies which is a lot to check.”* Therefore, high strength of students add to the workload of teachers.

### ***Unfavourable Organization Policies***

School policies received a mix response from the respondents. Respondents were generally dissatisfied with school policies like leave policy and overall organizational culture. In the words of TCHR 1, *“If you apply for a day leave before or after weekend, they count it as three days leave (including two days of weekend).”*

Similarly, TCHR 5 highlighted that long leaves are not given except the scheduled school breaks. While pointing out organizational culture, few respondents feel that there is no appreciation for teachers. As TCHR 6 said:

*“... there is culture of finding faults in teachers, a fear of being reprimanded; there is punishment either verbal or written and they show you consequences, if you are late, they deduct your salary but if you stay back late there is no compensation for that. At least adjust it for the late minutes that I have used. I think that makes up for it.”*



Respondents also expressed that teachers are underpaid than other professions with comparable workload. One of the respondents had been taking tuitions in the evenings and weekends to meet her expenses. She shared, *“Because my salary was not enough, I was doing tuitions for a year. I used to go directly to the tuitions after school.”*

A new teacher joining a private school is generally asked about her salary expectations and then negotiated accordingly. TCHR 9 was of the opinion that:

*“In the beginning we are unaware of the pay scales around and when we are asked we just give an idea of what we are expecting... but when we get into the system we realize how much workload is there.”*

Respondents highlighted that as per school policy, they are not provided with any helper or assistant during activities with students of primary classes or when performing multiple tasks at a time. TCHR 1 pointed out that: *“We have to perform multiple tasks at a time and conduct activities along with our classes. During such time we don’t have any helper and it causes problems.”*

Similarly, TCHR 4 while highlighting need of a helper when dealing with high strength of students said that:

*“We are following those international standards of educational strategies that have 15 to 20 children maximum in the class and that too with an assistant usually. Here we are dealing with 27 students, conducting activities and transition between activities all by our self.”*

When faced with disruptive behaviour from students, respondents believe that they have little authority to punish students because of zero tolerance policy of school towards punishment. As TCHR 3 said:

*“We are unable to change children’s disruptive behaviour because of zero tolerance policy. You cannot punish them; of course you don’t punish them physically but you can’t even make them stand up in the corner. If you can’t say them anything, how can you change their behaviour? We can just take them to head’s office after which they only behave for one day and the next day they are same.”*

### ***Students’ Disruptive Behaviour***

Students’ disruptive behaviour was highlighted by all research participants as a prime source of stress in classrooms. Respondents feel that they have to deal with misbehaviour of few students in classrooms which causes them stress. TCHR 3 complains that: *“Few students with behaviour issues cause stress... issues like student behaviour must be addressed though we can only counsel them. There should be some consequences for them for bad behaviour.”*

TCHR 2 shared that the entire classroom environment is disturbed because of behaviour issues which causes stress to teachers as she has to

address such issues.

Few respondents informed that they have to deal with frequent interruptions by the students during classroom instructions. TCHR 5 finds it frustrating when a student calls out during instructions without raising his/ her hand or pass irrelevant comment. Similarly, TCHR 1 experiences interruptions in her classroom instructions when certain students leave their seats and approach her without permission. Respondents generally attribute such interruptions or impolite behaviours from students to societal problems.

Respondents have to frequently deal with stressful situations when students do not follow their instructions properly. TCHR 1 remarked that:

*“It gets stressful when students don’t listen and you are unable to teach. They behave as if you don’t exist... obviously you go there with a lesson plan to teach but you come out without teaching because the students do not settle down.”*

TCHR 4 also raised fingers on upbringing of children by parents. She said that: *“When it comes to behaviour, parents are most influential factor in a child’s life.”*

In the same vain, TCHR 5 remarked: *“When students do not listen to you and they talk on top of you, it is the most stressful event in the classroom. They keep on interrupting you.”*

### ***Unavailability of Resources***

Unavailability of resources sometimes becomes hindrance in smooth flow of lesson plans. Teachers have to plan their lessons according to the availability of the computer lab and IT aids, as limited number of resources are shared amongst grade 3, 4 and 5 in primary section. Even the staffroom facilities required by teachers are scarce and all teachers are required to share one computer.

Teachers reported limited availability of IT sources such as computers and multimedia in support of their lessons and associated work. If multimedia is to be used in classes as AV aids, it needs to be booked well in advance to ensure its availability. According to TCHR 8, *“It gets stressful when teaching resources are limited and not readily available when required as these have to be shared amongst many teachers.”*

Even TCHR 6 added to it saying that the curriculum they need to follow requires IT integration in lesson plans but it is not readily available in classrooms. She exclaimed:

*“We don’t have a PC to show relevant pictures or videos in the class, though they demand this in lesson plan. We sometimes use a multimedia which is only one for Grades 3, 4 and 5. It needs to be booked in advance for which you need to coordinate availability with other teachers and sometime swap classes according to the availability.”*

Few teachers complain about lack of facilities for the teachers in the staffroom. They need to carry their own water bottles from home and only one computer is available in staffroom to be shared amongst the teachers which points towards inadequacy of resources. TCHR 5 remarked: *“Basic necessities like water and tea are not conveniently available in staff room. Canteen is at a distance so we generally avoid going there.”*

Other teachers reported the staffroom not being spacious and less stowage space available. TCHR 4 reported: *“The area of staffroom is not sufficient for the number of teachers using it. There are not enough chairs and there is only one computer for all the teachers of grades 3, 4 and 5.”*

Couple of teachers raised their concerns about less space in classrooms, whereas the rest of the teachers had no complaints regarding the size of the classrooms. TCHR 3 remarked: *“Class size is generally alright, but it could be little spacious as sometimes in group settings you can’t easily move around.”*

TCHR 5 believes that classroom size is not according to the strength of the students and said, *“Classroom are spacious, but strength of students is on the higher side.”*

### ***Lack of Support from Parents and Heads***

The interviews reflect few aspects of teachers’ relations with their heads and parents which add to their stresses. On the other hand, respondents are mostly content with teamwork and relationships with their colleagues.

Respondents highlighted two different patterns of parental behaviour toward their child education. A large group is concerned about their child’s studies while the others are those who do not follow up. As TCHR 2 remarked that: *“...it becomes difficult for us when we are giving notes in the diaries and we don’t get any response from the parents. They are not creating fuss but they are following up either.”*

Such parental behaviour actually reflects on the children as well. In such situations, teachers struggle to influence positive changes in students and hence feel frustrated. In an effort to improve parent-teacher communication, a WhatsApp group for each class was introduced in the school on trial basis. The groups had to be closed down due to improper behaviour of some parents. As TCHR 1 explained that:

*“...Parents used to abuse the facility texting teachers at any time at night as well as using inappropriate language with them. Even parents used to fight with each other on the group. So, it was getting stressful for the teachers.”*

Furthermore, satisfaction of parents receives an extra ordinary importance in private school systems because of financial aspects. Being a commercial entity, parents are treated as customers which are to be taken care of. TCHR 7 said that: *“Private education field has actually turned education into business.”*

In this context, parents sometime behave irrationally which is frustrating to teachers. Respondents are generally content with their relations with Head Teachers. However, they believe that Head Teachers are at times pressurized and helpless when they have to implement the policies and accomplish the tasks assigned from superior school management. This pressure flows down in the chain and adds to the anxiety of teachers. Another factor related to heads is favouritism among subordinate teachers. TCHR 8 remarked that: *"Some teachers are eased while others are loaded with work disproportionately."*

When a Head is excessively occupied, she does not find enough time to attend all teachers under her. TCHR 1 said that, *"I feel I need more support from my supervisor than what she is unable to give me due to her busy schedule."* Teachers even mentioned the absence of any acknowledgement and appreciation from their heads for the good work. TCHR 4 said, *"There is no appreciation. It's a culture of finding faults in teachers."*

### **Effects of Excessive Stress on Teachers**

Findings from the interviews and the analysis of data point towards behavioural and physiological effects of stress in teachers. One of the most significant effects of stress is the quality of teaching. TCHR 2 responded that, *"Obviously, if there are so many things going on in our mind, we can't concentrate on teaching."* At times, teachers lose focus on their core task and associated planned activities. Teachers are often required to adjust due to last minute changes or requirements. TCHR 4 shared her views as, *"You cannot focus on planned things-to-do most of the times, so you are lacking behind despite you complete your tasks on time."* TCHR 3 also feels the same and shared, *"We tend to forget things which we are supposed to tell to our students... sometimes I even dream about it too."*

Few respondents point towards disturbances in their family and social life because of excessive stress at school. TCHR 2 shared that sometimes she gets so frustrated at school that her mood is off when she goes back home. She ultimately vents out frustration at home. In the words of TCHR8 who is unmarried: *"My social life is very limited due to school and I don't see my relatives much."*

Few respondents feel that sometimes when their mood is off, they take frustration to their homes as well. They feel irritated if things don't go according to their plans. TCHR 1 remarked that: *"I start over thinking and over planning which never helps me out."* TCHR 5 said that: *"When I am stressed out I lose my patience very easily and children are immediate subjects to suffer from it."* Whereas, TCHR1 said that she starts biting her nails.

When dealing with adverse situations, teachers have to endure mental stresses which show up in the form of headaches. Teachers also tend to

feel tired and restless. One of the respondents feels that when she is stressed it is reflected on her face. TCHR 2 felt and expressed, *“When you become a teacher, you need to develop strong nerves to handle issues.”* Another teacher with same view point, TCHR 4 expressed this as, *“I have developed this headache issue due to never ending tasks I have in my mind. There is no peace of my mind with so much burden.”*

### **Coping Strategies Employed by Teachers**

Analysis of data acquired from interviews of respondent teachers indicated that they mostly adapt to the stressors, talk to family and friends as well as engage in leisure activities. A few participants shared the opinion that the prevalent system demands them to follow and adapt to the situation while a few respondents believe that they can selectively address few stressors depending on their source. TCHR 3 quoted an example that: *“..Like if weak students are not catching up despite our efforts, we do inform parents about it but other factors such as classroom strength and students’ behaviour are beyond our control.”*

Dealing with student’s behaviour issues require lot of patience and perseverance. In an attempt to build high-trust relationship with students as suggested by teaching manuals, teachers find no quick fix solutions and often feel even more frustrated than before. According to TCHR 1,

*“I speak to them nicely and ignore their interruptions instead of scolding them all the time. These types of strategies take a lot of patience and time. I guess I rush out for my expectations for good result. At the end of the same session when I try to be nicer to the students and trying to cope up with that source, I end up with the same situation causing stress. I have this ‘give up’ attitude at times of stress.”*

Notwithstanding, teachers feel a dire need to address behaviour issues of students. Yet they feel that in the absence of any consequences for students, teachers have only option of counselling them which does not have lasting effects. Venting out to family members or spouse is the most preferred way of coping or preventing stresses by teachers. TCHR 4 said, *“I go home and talk to my family members about all that happens in school.”*

However, teachers generally refrain discussing about their stresses with their colleagues except common issues like student behaviour as they find it of little help. Leisure activities particularly shopping is another favourite pastime of teachers to relax. Other common methods cited by teachers to freshen up are sleeping, watching movies and even cooking.

### **Discussion**

The key dimensions of the findings from qualitative data have been discussed under the following headings:

#### ***Extensive Role Demands as Source of Stress for School Teachers***

The role demands stressors of a primary school teacher identified in the findings of the current study are excessive workload, additional tasks/activities, added procedural work and unfavourable school policies. As a result, teachers struggle to complete their assigned roles and tasks during working hours, and thus often take school work back home or occasionally stay back late in the school. Teachers further struggle to manage classrooms with a strength of up to 30 students as against international practice of 15 to 20 students. Transition to online classes during ongoing covid-19 pandemic has added another dimension to the role-related stress in teachers. In a similar study conducted by Jahan (2007) in India, major causes of stress reported were work overload and over whelming working demands. Likewise, Shernoff et. al. (2011) in a qualitative research conducted in US found that the most significant sources of stress interalia included extreme workload and accountability policies. Similarly, Quraishi et. al. (2018) identified the perceived job stressors among Pakistani universities teachers and highlighted few negative factors like work overload, environmental pressures, demands for proving oneself and innovation as well as absence of positive factors such as appreciation, autonomy, comfortable environment, unconditional support and feedback. Hence the findings of the current study largely conform to the literature reviewed.

#### ***Instructional Issues Faced by the Teachers Adds to Their Work Stress***

Teachers' interviews unearthed numerous instructional issues faced by them including students' disruptive behaviour, unavailability of resources and lack of support from parents and heads which results in rise of work stress. Improper behaviour, frequent interruptions and non-adherence to instructions by students are few of the behavioural issues cited by the teachers. Further, teachers have to negotiate with limited availability of IT resources, scarce staff room facilities and inadequate space in classrooms which adds to their instructional problems. To further complicate the issues, teachers do not find requisite support from parents and heads. Howard and Johnson (2004) in a study conducted in Australia highlighted various reasons for teachers stress like discipline management, poor working conditions, teaching students with low motivation and unsupportive administration. Findings of the current study are further confirmed by Haseeb and Sattar (2018) in qualitative research in Lahore, Pakistan who also identified inappropriate behaviour from students, unsupportive university administration and lack of resources as few of the major causes of job stress among university teachers.

#### ***Adverse Effects of Stress on Teachers' Performance and Wellbeing***

Findings of the current study revealed that the stress had adverse behavioural and physiological effects on teachers. It not only compromises their teaching performance but also negatively impacts teachers' personal lives as they struggle to maintain work-family life balance. Additionally, stress triggers physical symptoms in teachers such

as tiredness and headache. According to Gunawan (2018), excessive stress not only hampers the achievement of goals both at personal and organizational level but also triggers emotional instability in the teachers which results in poor performance. Likewise, Shernoff et. al. (2011) found out that teachers' work related stress significantly impacted their health and personal relationships at home. Hence, the adverse effects of stress in teachers is a source of common concern for all.

### ***Teachers Struggle to Deal with Stress***

Analysis of the data collected through teachers' interviews as explained earlier shows that teachers feel that they can do only little to address their work stressors and therefore must embrace their stressors. They usually talk to their family and friends to vent out their feelings as well as engage in leisure activities such as shopping, movies and even cooking in an attempt to mitigate negative effects of stress. While a study conducted by Quraishi et. al. (2018) supports the findings of the current study, contrarily another study conducted in Punjab province of Pakistan by Hussain et. al. (2019) found that as the level of stress increased, teachers tend to actively solve the problem and also focus to improve their emotions than avoidance and social-support approaches. This study therefore endorses that acceptance, seeking social support and venting out emotions are mostly used by teachers as strategies for coping stress. Nevertheless, neither the teachers reported activities such as sports or exercises to cope with stress as found in the study by Chan et. al. (2010) nor they turn to religion as cited by Hussain et. al. (2019). In general, the study found that teachers struggle in their stress management for which no formal workshop or in-service training is afforded to them.

### **Conclusion**

Work-related stress of teachers is a matter of global concern. In this regard, the main objectives of the present study were to study the causes of stress to primary school teachers, the effects of excessive stress on teachers and document teachers' practices to deal with work related stresses. The findings showed that extensive role-demands and instructional issues faced by teachers contribute significantly towards their excessive work stress which has negative correlation with teaching performance and personal wellbeing. These findings are generally in line with existing literature. However, contrary to the findings of study conducted in Punjab province by Hussain et. al. (2019) the current study established that the primary school teachers in elite private schools in Pakistan neither tend to actively address the source of stress nor make efforts to improve their emotions. Instead, they mostly embrace their stressors and seek social-support approaches to manage their stress. The current study therefore underscores the need to educate teachers on various stress management strategies to ensure quality of teaching and personal wellbeing of teachers.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, following is recommended:

1. Extensive role-demands of school teachers including excessive workload, additional tasks/ activities, procedural work and school policies need to be reviewed. Proposed measures shall focus on having a joint framework of teaching and learning involving school management and teachers. A shared vision and plan will give the driving force and avenue for school management and teachers to communicate their objectives and concerns.
2. Disruptive behaviour of students causes teachers' stress and effects the quality of their teaching. There should be some consequences for such behaviours in the school policy to avoid such deliberate disturbances (Khasinah, 2017; Raza, 2014).
3. Teachers mostly struggle in effective management of classes with a strength of 25 to 30 students which induces excessive stress. Classroom strength be kept less in Primary schools (Koc & Celik, 2015; Thng, 2017).
4. Unavailability of resources such IT equipment and basic staff room facilities contribute significantly towards teachers stress. For the successful flow of lessons, scarcity of resources especially relating to technological integration need to be worked out. The basic necessities like drinking water shall be provided with better working space in staffrooms (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015; Okongo et al., 2015).
5. Teachers feel that they do not receive desired support from their heads and school administration. A system of incentives and appreciation be promoted for healthy and motivational environment.
6. Knowledge and application of stress management techniques by teachers were generally found wanting. Professional workshops of teachers focusing on stress management consistent with teachers' needs be given due focus (Austin et al., 2005; Clipa, 2017).

### **Declarations**

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