

DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF SELF-AWARENESS OF STRESS SCALE (SSS) FOR TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The goal of this research was to develop a reliable and valid self-report measure of self-awareness of stress among university teachers (N=250) aged 25-58 years (M= 30.80, SD= 5.98).

Design: To answer the research question, a mixed-method research design was employed. A purposive sampling strategy was used in this study to gather the data.

Place & Duration of Study: The data were gathered over a span of two years from teachers of private and semi-government sector higher education institutions in Pakistan (Lahore and Multan).

Subjects and Methods: To assist in determining the psychometric properties of the scale, the Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS) was administered along with a demographic proforma to the sample of 250 teachers.

Results: Factor analysis, internal consistency, inter-factor correlations, and validity of the scale were computed. The alpha reliability of the scale and its factors ranged from .89 to .97. The inter-factor correlations of all scales and the concurrent validity coefficients were statistically significant at $p < .01$. Three factors were generated: Interpersonal Challenges, Personal Malfunctioning, and Work Inefficiency.

Conclusion: The Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS) emerged as a psychometrically sound indigenous measure. Limitations and recommendations for future research are discussed, and the findings carry implications for educational practice and policy development.

Keywords: Teachers, Stress Awareness, Interpersonal Challenges, Functioning, Work Efficacy, Distress, Psychometric Properties, Scale Development, Scale Validation

INTRODUCTION

Occupation exerts a significant and durable effect on life. Professional work may create different types of stress, and this stress may disturb not only the individual's work but the entire occupational environment as well. When acute stress continues to affect an employee, it can transform into debilitating chronic stress that impairs physical,

psychological, and social health. Stress also affects job performance, as it causes difficulties in decision-making, concentration, communication, and interpersonal relations; job performance is therefore inversely related to stress. Worldwide, stress and burnout remain persistent problems among teachers and are recognized risk factors for anxiety, depression, and poor physical and mental

well-being (Agyapong et al., 2022). The level of stress among university faculty also varies across different teaching positions.

Stress, in specific terms, is the reaction to any threat, stimulus, or change in everyday life, which makes it a fundamental part of daily human experience. Occupational stress is the individual's response to work demands and employer pressures that do not match the needs, abilities, and resources of the employee. Stress is delineated into three types based on its duration and level of impact: acute, episodic acute, and chronic stress.

Acute stress occurs in response to events of the recent past and to the pressures, demands, or challenges of the near future. Eustress refers to the positive stress response, characterized by optimal levels of stimulation; it is produced by demanding but achievable, enjoyable, or worthwhile tasks (for example, competing as an athlete or delivering a speech). Distress, in contrast, is the negative stress response, often involving negative affect and physiological reactivity; it occurs when someone feels overwhelmed by demands, losses, or threats. Episodic acute stress is acute stress that occurs in repeated episodes. Such periodic stress can arise from work overload among employees, when employees are unable to complete multiple tasks simultaneously, which can lead to negative consequences in the workplace. Chronic stress is stress that persists over an extended period of time and is the most damaging and unpleasant of all types of stress.

Individual awareness or perception of stress differs from person to person, and so does its impact on mental health. If stress is not dealt with, it may develop into chronic stress, which contributes to other physical and mental disorders such as heart disease, infections, and anxiety disorders. Although stress can produce physical, mental, and emotional effects on employees, it is well documented that physical and psychological reactions to stress typically appear together, particularly when stressors are harmful and the stress is intense. Furthermore, all forms of stress reactions give rise to further physical and psychological reactions, which ultimately lead to chronic stress. The physical reactions are particularly pronounced when a person flees from

danger and experiences changes in physical parameters such as rapid breathing, increased heart rate, and sweating; this is referred to as the fight-or-flight response. The psychological reactions include changes in emotions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Stress does not only affect the content of our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors; it also affects our performance and decision-making.

Teaching has been documented as a challenging and demanding occupation, both physically and mentally, as teachers, specifically at the university level, invest considerable energy in their roles professionally and personally, both in front of and away from students. In fact, teaching is ranked among the most stressful occupations; a recent systematic review with meta-analysis reported notable levels of anxiety, depression, and stress among teachers, with stress levels found to be higher among university teachers than among school teachers (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Occupational stress among teachers is related to several factors, such as planning lessons, planning activities, developing curricula, and establishing co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. In addition to the academic side of teaching, teachers are also heavily engaged in maintaining discipline, keeping records, performing assigned administrative tasks, and counseling and motivating students. Consequently, occupational stress can affect the quality of teachers' daily lives; such situations generate stress in teachers, which in turn can undermine their performance and commitment to work.

The teaching profession is often characterized by stress, which is directly shaped by the organizational culture of the institutions in which teachers work. Organizational culture refers to the culture of the educational institution and the workplace, which incorporates job ambiguity, excessive workload, and excessive monitoring. Stressors in teachers can arise from the general living and working environment as well as from individual attributes or characteristics; however, the majority of stressors stem from factors related to the working environment, such as a cumbersome workload, the institution's overall organizational environment, limited access to

appropriate resources that could have a positive impact, absence of professional autonomy, and lack of support from parents and/or administration.

Environmental factors can also include stressors such as ambient noise, class size, the risk of violence at school, and administrative pressure from senior management. In addition to work-related and environmental factors, individual attributes can contribute to stress or predispose individuals to it. Attributes such as age and gender, stress appraisal, hierarchical level, social network, and coping abilities can also influence individual stress. Individual stressors can further relate to one's career aspirations, such as opportunities for promotion, success or failure in work projects, competition among coworkers, multiple roles (especially for female teachers), and perfectionism.

Individuals exhibit differences in stress reactivity and in responding to stress. The stress response, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), depends on stressors, individual characteristics, and vulnerability to stress. The impacts of stress, however, can differ across the helping professions, including teaching. Teachers play a crucial role as stakeholders in imparting knowledge to students and developing their learning. Cross-cultural studies show both similarities and variations in stress and its impacts across different cultures. In the Pakistani context, university teachers have been reported to experience considerable occupational stress arising from workload, institutional demands, and limited resources (Quraishi et al., 2018). The current literature, however, does not appear to address self-awareness of stress in university teachers.

The present study focuses on awareness of stress among university teachers in Pakistan and highlights the differing levels of impact that stress has on them. The aim was to develop an indigenous scale of self-awareness of stress in order to capture phenomenological knowledge, understanding, prevalence, indication and manifestation, and the reported degree of stress. In addition, this study opens up further areas of research and highlights the importance of self-

awareness of stress in teachers.

Method

Phase I: Item Generation

In this stage, the SSS was developed through exploration of the phenomenology. Phenomenological open-ended interviews were conducted with individuals from the main population. The prompt question was, "How do you believe, what is the effect of stress in your daily life." Individuals provided different responses, which were recorded.

In this phase, items were developed for the Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS). The verbatim accounts of the interviewees were later converted into statements. A total of 30 individuals, including female and male teachers, participated in the phenomenological process for the SSS.

Phase II: Expert validation

In this phase, validation was sought for the previously obtained statements, and expert raters with more than five years of experience validated the statements. The raters were provided with the operational definition of the study variable and the phenomenological question of the research variable. The raters responded to every statement, rating each one numerically on a Likert scale from 0-3 based on its relevance to the phenomenology under investigation. After the analysis, the researchers rejected any statements whose ratings fell below a specified percentage.

In this phase, the statements evaluated by the researcher and raters were used for the expert validation. To evaluate the statements, experts of both genders, including lecturers and assistant professors, were selected to engage in the subsequent pilot study.

Phase III: Pilot study

A pilot study was carried out to evaluate the user-friendliness of both scales. In this stage of the process, expert validation was completed along with the possible final statements. For this purpose, a group consisting of a male, a female, a lecturer, and an assistant professor from semi-government and private sector universities constituted the pilot study group, and 10% of the

main population was selected to represent the main sample. After the pilot study, it was determined that no subsequent changes were required, as the pilot participants were able to report their responses conveniently and the statements were clear and comprehensible.

Phase IV: Main Study

The main study was conducted for the assessment and validation of the psychometric properties of the SSS.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire: The demographic questionnaire was used to obtain participants' basic information relevant to the research purpose, such as age, gender, marital status, number of children, qualification, designation, subject of teaching, department, and university.

Depression anxiety stress scale (DASS-21): The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) possesses sound psychometric properties: the depression sub-scale showed a high correlation (0.849) and the stress sub-scale showed a correlation coefficient of .75, both statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The Cronbach alpha values for the anxiety, stress, and depression sub-scales of the DASS were 0.94, 0.85 and 0.87, respectively.¹⁰

Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS): The Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS) was developed by the researchers to assess the self-awareness of stress that university teachers experience in their daily lives. It is a self-report measure with a 3-point rating scale comprising 37 items that reflect the main influences of stress on teachers. The Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS) comprises three factors: the first factor, "Interpersonal Challenges," contains 20 items; the second factor, "Personal Malfunctioning," contains 10 items;

and the third factor, "Work Inefficacy," contains 7 items.

Procedure

To begin with, an approval letter was obtained from the department chairperson and submitted to the universities. After the completion of this process, the sample was selected. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, the rationale of the study was briefly explained to them, and the data were then collected. Each participant took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The data were collected from private and semi-government sector universities, keeping in view the participants' availability. A final sample of 250 participants was selected from university teachers of Lahore and Multan. Finally, the data were analyzed using SPSS to obtain the results, which are followed by the discussion and recommendations.

Ethical consideration

The following ethical considerations were observed in the study. The confidentiality and privacy of the participants were respected by the researcher, who also monitored the participants' comfort level. Participants had the right to take part in the study of their own free will, without feeling any pressure to be involved, and they were told that if they felt uncomfortable or stressed they could withdraw from the study at any time. After the participants had completed the questionnaire, they were debriefed regarding any emotional arousal or stress they might have felt while responding to it.

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis

This section presents the results of the factor analysis for the developed indigenous scale, the Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS). The Eigen values for the three finalized factors, the inter-factor correlations, and the internal consistency are also reported.

Table 1
Factor Structure and Eigen Values of 37 Items of Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS) with Varimax Rotation (N=250)

Sr. No	Item No.	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III
1	41	.80	.04	.30
2	31	.80	.14	.34
3	32	.80	.19	.26
4	30	.78	.26	.26
5	29	.74	.30	.28
6	38	.72	.02	.45
7	26	.72	.06	.45
8	37	.71	.23	.28
9	33	.71	.45	.00
10	39	.69	.25	.26
11	25	.68	.25	.31
12	27	.67	.35	.27
13	34	.66	.32	.05
14	36	.65	.32	.25
15	22	.62	.29	.29
16	28	.61	.42	.25
17	24	.61	.54	.04
18	40	.56	.27	.19
19	23	.55	.24	.33
20	10	.51	.28	.51
21	15	.13	.81	.06
22	4	.15	.78	.19
23	14	.28	.78	.09
24	1	.03	.66	.26
25	5	.18	.66	.36
26	2	.25	.64	.19
27	3	.33	.63	.16
28	16	.29	.59	.27
29	13	.29	.53	.29
30	12	.37	.53	.40
31	7	.39	.30	.71
32	8	.21	.28	.70
33	6	.30	.43	.64
34	17	.51	.27	.55
35	18	.51	.19	.54
36	20	.38	.24	.53
37	11	.43	.24	.51
Eigen Values		18.62	2.90	1.40
% Variance		50.33	7.84	3.77
Cumulative %		50.33	58.17	61.94

Note. Items with .50 or above loading are boldfaced.

As indicated in Table 1, the criterion for retaining items in the final structure of the scale was a loading of .50 or above (Hair et al., 1998); items loading below .50 were rejected. Consequently, 6-, 5-, 4- and 3-factor solutions were attempted in

order to achieve the best-fitting structure; only the 3-factor model produced the best fit with a clear factor structure. The retained factors explained 61.94% of the variance, and each factor had a minimum of 7 items and a maximum of 20 items.

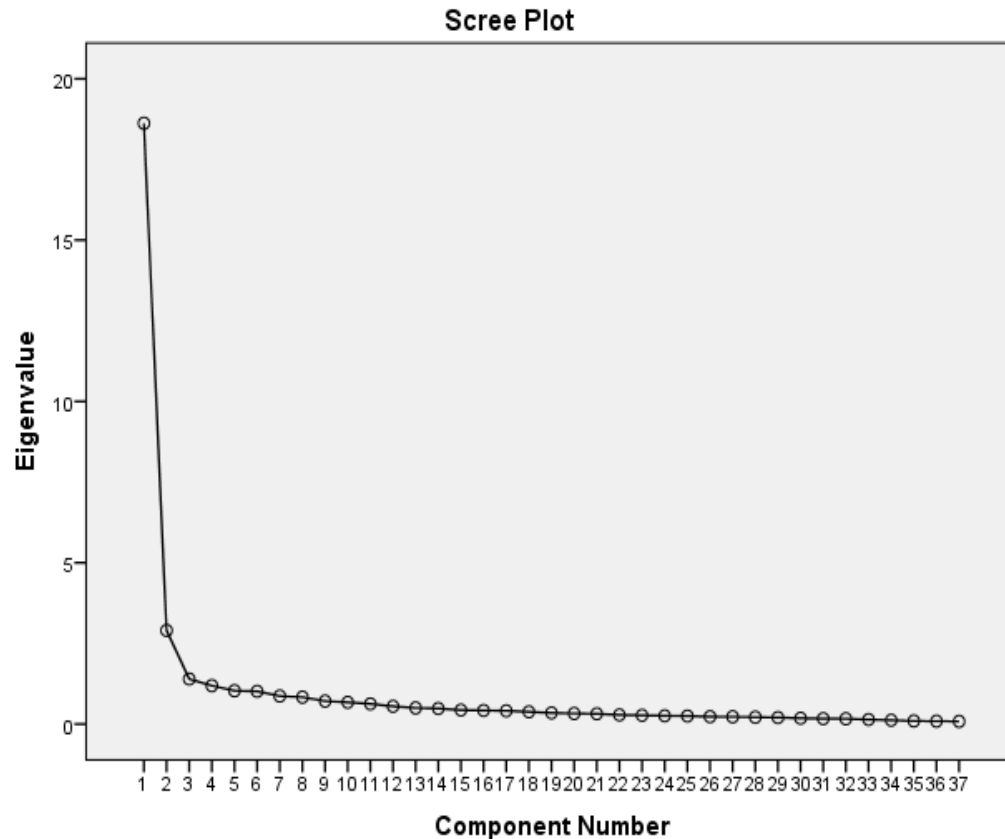


Figure 1. Scree Plot

Figure 1 displays the scree plot. The steepness of the curve indicated that the development of three factors would be appropriate. As a result, these factors were cross-loaded to organize the trends or groups categorically, and after the factors were developed, further analysis was carried out. The three-factor solution was retained for further examination.

To develop the final factors from the scale items, the extraction method was employed. A scree plot was generated based on the components of the scale. The scree plot suggested 6 large or significant components and 3 moderate or slightly significant components. The researchers began analyzing the results by developing 6 factors and working backwards. The 6-factor solution contained

numerous dubious items and was therefore rejected. The 6-, 5- and 4-factor solutions were likewise discarded on account of their dubious items. Finally, three factors were developed on the basis of the fewest dubious items. In addition, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) was .95, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(666) = 8014.72, p < .001$).

Factor descriptions: Each factor was labeled by the researcher according to the shared themes and the suitability of its items.

Factor 1: Interpersonal challenges: This first factor contains 20 items. A high score on this factor indicates that an individual is experiencing difficulties with other people. Items included "I become harsh with students," "I cannot give

positive praise to students," "I feel difficulty during communication," "I feel lack of patience," "I behave aggressively," "relations with colleagues suffer," etc.

Factor 2: Personal Malfunctioning. This second factor contains 10 items. A high score on this factor indicates that an individual is experiencing difficulties with personal tasks and feels confused and disoriented. Items included "I feel tired/exhausted," "I feel burden on my nerves," "my overall performance is affected," "I feel sad/down," "I feel de-motivated for my daily activities," "I cannot well manage household responsibilities," etc.

Factor 3: Work Inefficacy. This third factor contains 7 items. A high score on this factor indicates that an individual feels inefficient and

struggles to deal with work matters. Items included "I cannot well prepare class lectures," "I cannot manage time properly," "I lose hope for promotion," "I cannot fulfill work schedule," etc.

Psychometric Properties: Reliability of Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS)

Cronbach Alpha Reliability

The psychometric characteristics of the SSS were based on the means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha values, potential and actual ranges, and skewness values calculated through reliability and descriptive analyses (see Table 2), as well as the inter-factor correlations, which demonstrated the relationships among the Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS) factors (see Table 3).

Table 2 Psychometric Properties of Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS, N= 250)

Factor	n	M (SD)	α	Range		Skew
				Potential	Actual	
1. IC	20	27.54 (18.41)	.96	0.0-4.0	0.0-3.7	.49
2. PM	10	15.42 (7.72)	.91	0.0-4.0	0.2-3.9	.70
3. WE	7	8.91 (6.15)	.89	0.0-4.0	0.0-3.7	.70
4. SSS T	37	51.87 (29.61)	.97	0.0-4.0	0.1-3.6	.53

Note. n = no. of items. α = Cronbach's alpha. IC = interpersonal challenges; PM = personal malfunctioning; WI = work inefficacy; SSS = Self-Awareness of Stress Scale.

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, Cronbach alpha values, and potential and actual response ranges along with skewness values. The results indicate that the Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .89 to .97, indicating high internal

consistency of the Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS) and its factors. In addition, the Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS) demonstrated skewness values ranging from .49 to .70.

Table 3 Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores on Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS) and its Subscales (N=250)

Factor	1	2	3	4
1. IC	—	.67**	.81**	.96**
2. PM		—	.69**	.82**
3. WI			—	.89**
4. SSS T				—
M	27.54	15.42	8.91	51.87
SD	18.40	7.71	6.15	29.60

Note. IC = interpersonal challenges; PM = personal malfunctioning; WI = work inefficacy; SSS = Self-awareness of Stress Scale: ** $p < .01$.

As depicted in Table 3, the strength of association between the factors and the total SSS score was examined using Pearson product-moment correlation. The results showed that all factors of the Self-Awareness of Stress Scale had significant positive correlations with one another ($p < .01$). In addition, the total SSS score correlated significantly and positively with its factors, namely interpersonal challenges ($r = .96, p < .01$), personal malfunctioning ($r = .82, p < .01$), and work inefficacy ($r = .89, p < .01$).

Validation: Convergent Validity of Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS)

To assess the convergent validity of the Self-Awareness of Stress Scale, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) was administered and compared with the newly developed Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS).

Table 4 Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach Alphas of Self-Awareness of Stress Scale (SSS), Factors, and DASS-21 (N=100)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. IC	—	.84**	.85**	.98**	.51**	.46**	.44**	.52**
2. PM		—	.77**	.91**	.50**	.54**	.49**	.56**
3. WI			—	.90**	.45**	.45**	.38**	.47**
4. SSS T				—	.53**	.50**	.46**	.55**
5. D					—	.69**	.73**	.91**
6. A						—	.81**	.91**
7. S							—	.92**
8. DASS T								—
M	22.49	15.15	7.51	45.15	5.83	5.27	6.00	17.10
SD	16.34	7.81	5.61	28.21	4.99	3.99	3.89	11.72
A	.96	.91	.86	.97	.61	.81	.81	.89

Note. IC = interpersonal challenges; PM = personal malfunctioning; WI = work inefficacy; SSS T = total of Self-Awareness of Stress Scale; D = depression; A = anxiety; S = stress; DASS T = total of Depression Anxiety Stress Scale.

** $p < .01$.

Table 4 presents the inter-correlations, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach alpha values for the SSS, its factors, and the DASS-21. The data indicate that each scale possesses high reliability and that the scales correlate positively and significantly with one another. Additionally, the DASS-21 and its factors have significant positive correlations with the Self-Awareness of Stress Scale and its factors, supporting the convergent validity of the newly developed measure.

Discussion

The present study examined the development and validation of a measure of self-awareness of stress among teachers working in private and semi-government universities. An extraction method was utilized to develop the final factor structure of

the scale items, and a scree plot was constructed from the factors of the scale. The scree plot suggested 6 significant factors and 3 somewhat significant factors; the 4-, 5- and 6-factor solutions were discarded on the basis of dubious items, and a total of three factors were ultimately retained on the basis of the smallest number of dubious items. Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) was found to be .95, and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was found to be significant ($\chi^2 (666) = 8014.72, p < .001$).

Stress has become increasingly widespread in the present day. Its negative impacts can disturb our lives mentally, physically, and socially, and if we are not aware of these negative impacts, we cannot manage them and they will interfere with our daily lives. Teachers are an integral part of a country's

growth, and without them the routine of social life and collective well-being is disrupted; the prevalence and correlates of stress among teachers therefore constitute a significant public health concern (Agyapong et al., 2022). Previous research has examined factors contributing to stress among teachers, including studies specifically conducted in Pakistan (Quraishi et al., 2018); however, there have not been enough studies examining self-awareness of stress as a psychological variable among teachers in particular, and the present study specifically addresses this context. Riolli and Savicki (2003) have stated, and Raedeke and Smith (2004) support this idea, that employees' characteristic personality traits have the predisposition to moderate the impact of stressful situations encountered by employees; that is, personality traits can either protect against or exacerbate negative outcomes. Relationship variables have more generally been considered important to the onset of stress, and the consideration of these variables is generally associated with the perception of environmental stress.

The first factor of the SSS was Interpersonal Challenges, which consists of 20 items. A high score on this factor suggests that a person is experiencing difficulty when dealing with other people. Items in this factor included 'I become harsh with students,' 'I cannot give positive feedback to students,' 'I feel difficulty during a communication,' 'I feel lack of patience,' 'I behave aggressively,' and 'relations with colleagues being affected,' etc. The present study thus reports the predictors of interpersonal challenges amongst teachers. According to research, stress occurs when an individual perceives a disparity between the challenges that he or she typically faces and the available resources that he or she has to meet those challenges. When a person is confronted with a situation that demands some potential from that person, a significant level of stress is experienced when the person is uncertain about his or her capability to meet the demands of the situation, or when the person believes there is an opportunity to do their best yet is uncertain whether that potential can be realized. This can result in burnout, which is one's physical, emotional, or

mental exhaustion accompanied by a decrease in motivation, decreased performance, and a negative attitude toward oneself and others. Burnout occurs when an individual has been performing at a high level and stress and pressure take their toll, particularly through extreme and prolonged physical or mental exertion or excessive workload. The balance or imbalance is not between actual demand and capability, but between one's appraisal of the challenge and one's capacity to meet it. This finding is consistent with prior studies in which neuroticism was a significant positive predictor of interpersonal challenges in teachers.

The second factor of the SSS was Personal Malfunctioning, which contains 10 items. A high score on this factor means that a person shows confused and disoriented performance in personal tasks. The items included "I feel tired/exhausted," "I feel burden on my nerves," "my overall performance is affected," "I feel sad/down," "I feel de-motivated for my daily activities," "I cannot well manage household responsibilities," et cetera. When a teacher suffers from a high level of stress, the results of that suffering are disappointment, aggression in behavior, anxiety, avoidance of work, poor work performance, and absenteeism. If the work environment is poor, work itself becomes a stress factor and outcomes deteriorate; eventually, the teacher may wish to exit the field. Stress is also connected to impaired individual functioning at work. Various aspects of working life have been associated with stress, and there is a direct relationship between stress and degraded functioning in a worker. Aspects of work that can be involved in stress include work overload and role-related factors, for example deficiency of power, role conflict, and role ambiguity.

The third component of the SSS was Work Inefficacy, which consisted of 7 items. A high score on this component indicates that a person feels ineffective and has trouble managing work-related activities. The items were 'I cannot prepare class lectures well', 'I cannot manage my time adequately', 'I have lost hope of getting promoted', 'I cannot stay on schedule for work related activities', etc. Stress relates to impairment in individual functioning at work, and the inefficient

functioning of individuals traces back to stress in the tasks completed at work. Negative consequences may include reduced efficiency at work, diminished capacity to perform better, decreased initiative and desire to work, increased rigidity of thought, decreased loyalty to the organization and colleagues, and lack of responsibility. Teacher stress mostly presents negative consequences for both individuals and the quality of education. Possible outcomes of teacher stress are lower teacher self-efficacy, lower dedication, lower job satisfaction, higher burnout, and an increased turnover rate (Madigan and Kim, 2021).

Limitations and Recommendations

Although the present study yielded important findings, it was limited by the small number of cities sampled within Pakistan. The study examined a sample of institutions from the private sector (two universities) and the semi-government sector (one university). For future studies, the inclusion of associate professors and professors from the government sector, along with larger and more geographically diverse samples, would be beneficial.

Conclusion

The present study makes an important contribution by developing a measure of the self-awareness of stress in teachers. In this study, three factors were identified: Factor 1, Interpersonal Challenges; Factor 2, Personal Malfunctioning; and Factor 3, Work Inefficacy. The SSS could also be used with individuals in other occupations and professions and would be valuable in determining self-awareness of stress as well as stress more broadly.

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