

A Study on Dealing with Invisible Stressors by Smart Academicians

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ABSTRACT

Teacher stress is inevitable in the education industry. Stressors causing stress are dynamic in nature. These stressors could be visible or invisible. Visible stressors are directly job-related whereas invisible stressors are known as camouflaged stress that are specifically related to the teacher. Work-related stressors have been exhaustively listed in ample previous research works but the impact of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) world needs an emphasis on the study of teacher stress. Dealing with teacher stress is a tough challenge but is quintessential for well-being of an academician. Earlier studies suggested stress coping strategies that need extra time and sources like, exercise, nutritional diets, sleep patterns, meditation, yoga, time management and alike. This paper aims to study the mind set as a stress-coping strategy. The root cause of stress is mind thus it should be dealt at the mental level. The human mind can be classified into two viz., rational mind and emotional mind. The intensity of emotions decides the level of domination by the emotional mind over the rational mind. Striking the right balance between the two minds paves way for coping stress. The paper concludes that stressors causing stress should be understood, acknowledged and dealt appropriately. Varied emotions behind the stressors that may be either related or unrelated should be sorted and acknowledged rather than putting a facade of bravado. The art to deal stress is to understand the emotional mind and not become a social chameleon deceiving self and others. This study suggests further research on the unidentified stressors causing unidentified stress.

Keywords: Teacher Stress, Camouflaged Stress, University, Stress Management, VUCA world

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching profession demands huge emotional investment by a teacher (Zhang & Zhu, 2008). Teacher stress is Work-related stressors have been exhaustively listed in ample previous research works but the impact of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity

and Ambiguity) world needs an emphasis on the study of teacher stress (Sharma, 2014). There are various elements to consider as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous in the education industry. It's in every aspect right from people, process and procedures. Teacher stress cannot be removed however it can always be reduced. Stress coping strategies differ based on individuals, organization and available resources. Stressors causing stress are dynamic. These stressors could be visible or invisible. Visible stressors are directly job-related whereas invisible stressors termed as camouflaged stress (Inamdar, 2019) are specifically related to the teacher. Dealing with teacher stress is although a challenge but is quintessential for well-being of a teacher. Earlier studies suggested stress coping strategies that need extra time and sources like, exercise, nutritional diets, sleep patterns, meditation, yoga, time management and alike. A glance on these suggestions through the lens of a teacher is cumbersome. These suggestions resolve the stress issue either temporarily or needs extra efforts. This paper aims to study the mindset as a stress-coping strategy. The root cause of stress is mind and so stress should be dealt at the mental level. Stress is often understood in negative context. However, an optimal level of stress is a healthy sign to achieve success (Pestonjee & Pareek, 1987). Stress can be handled by evaluation of the specific stressors affecting an individual (Crum et al., 2017). The human mind can be classified into two viz rational mind and emotional mind (Goleman, 1996). The intensity of emotions decides the level of domination by the emotional mind over the rational mind. Striking the right balance between the two minds paves way for coping stress. Feelings and emotions dominate the emotional mind. The present study reviews earlier research works to determine a coping strategy that would work at root cause. The combination of VUCA world with teaching profession and its challenges with in-built unidentified stress referred as camouflaged stress is the crux of the present study.

2. Literature review

The literature review for the present study is classified into three contexts viz

1. People
2. Process
3. Procedure

The study involves invisible stress among teachers impacted by regular job duties and VUCA world impact. The literature considers the people, process and procedures that are volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous in nature moulding in as camouflaged stress among teachers. Education industry is rich in human resource. Its benefactor and beneficiary both are humans. Thus, complexity is at a very high level. Human nature is enormously complex. The rate of volatility is also high as it gets frequently influenced by environment. A study on teacher burnout revealed perceived superiority makes a teacher feel much better reducing the existing burnout (Brenninkmeijer et al., 2001). Teacher stress is directly correlated to student behaviour and is a concern causing stress as reported by many teachers (McCormick, 1997). In the present scenario the concern of student's behavior is adverse with excessive exposure to social media causing social media fatigue among students (Malik, et al., 2020). Due to pandemic crisis of coronavirus the shift from campus mode to online mode has forced parents to provide students with gadgets and gizmos deviating to excessive social media exposure. Social disparity is one of the reasons for societal

vulnerability during pandemic crisis (Blumenshine et al., 2008). Teachers have to deal with social disparity among students conscientiously to maintain classroom harmony. Globalization brought different cultures and ethnicities under one roof. Classroom diversity is a challenging task for teachers (Collier, 2002; Bucklow & Clark, 2000). Outwardly it can be considered as a regular feature but is a difficult task to deal every day. Extracurricular activities for students create additional work for teachers. These activities are not part of teaching schedule and hence are without compensation to teachers predicting anxiety, stress and depression (Ratanasiripong et al., 2020). Teachers often mask their emotions related to any of the above people related issues to justify their job. Frequent concealment of emotions may lead to burnout (Navarro et al., 2010). Neglected stress is perilous affecting efficiency both at work and life (Selye, 1974). Teachers travel a rough patch when it comes to processes in an organization. Cornu (2003) referred drastic transformation of society, Education and Knowledge due to the paradigm shift of teaching profession from a hierarchical type to network type driven by Information and Communication Technology (ICT). At an early age students are exposed to technology whereas a teacher has to unlearn and learn to keep the pace with the students. A study on use of digital tools by students and teachers disclosed better performance by students from online and distance learning universities (ODL) compared to regular university students (Amin & Mirza, 2020). Commercialization of education flooded the profession with student entertainment packages to attract intakes under the pretext of new teaching and learning methods. Teachers are weighed down with teaching related activities and teaching and learning process focusing on student entertainment rather than achievements (Cooper, 2002). Beyond people and process, procedures play a vital role in adding to camouflaged stress among teachers. Teaching is no more confined to teaching only. Role ambiguity at work leads to stress and burnout among teachers (Srivastava, 2007). Teaching staff is overloaded with teaching and administrative duties. Being a mediator between student and parent and management and parent, teachers are given task of evaluators and administrators. Lamentably teachers are even appraised these performances for which they are least qualified (Rasheed et al., 2011). In conjunction with above a teacher is expected to be adept, technologically shrewd, emotionally stable and always self-motivated. The wave of digitization has raised the benchmark of teaching profession (Kaur et al., 2018). Every human in any profession earns an upward graph, same is for a teacher. A sluggish career forms a stressor for teachers. The constraint of student achievements restricts teachers from further professional development (Soslau, 2016). Professional development in teaching is essential but unworkable without family support (Tall et al., 1997). Professional development demands multitasking seeking extra time and additional investment. To go that extra mile for professional development social support is a prerequisite.

3. Teacher stress and Disguised stress

Exploration of literature manifested various elements of people, process and procedure contributing to camouflaged stress. These elements are volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous at varied levels. The volatility and complexity of student behaviour include an uncertain response and an ambiguous result. Every expected backlash from the student side that may occur or may not but a teacher always has to be prepared for the worst. The uncertain and ambiguous classroom diversity includes a volatile characteristic and uncertain number in every intake for a new academic session. Mental preparation of this diversity either for a new academic

session or an ongoing equally arduous. Digitization and commercialization of education industry carried its advantages and disadvantages that vary from individual to individual depending on the skills they possess and lack. The academic procedures engage teachers less in teaching and more in administrative duties. Anxiety, stress or depression forms a consequence of the inadequacy of professional development. Though physically a teacher would be working, professionally recognized and financially earning despite the feeling of emptiness persists at the back of the head. Every teacher endures specific stress at an individual level that remains camouflaged as its acknowledgement is equivalent to declaring a self failure. The fears to be announced as a failure coerce teachers to suffer the camouflaged stress. This emotion of fear is like a two-sided coin. One side as observed is of

failure and the other side is of success. The other side of success is unveiled only when the failure side is acknowledged. Using the right attitude towards camouflaged stress can turn the tables. A mindset of success seeks solution, growth and achievement. An optimistic approach to difficult situations establishes a solution generating mindset. When there is a mismatch in thinking and doing then there exists a wandering mind. A wandering mind is restless consequently less happy, less content and lacks rational decision making.

4. Discussion

The broad heading of stressors under teacher stress category is sub-headed as camouflaged stress.

Camouflaged stress identified as unidentified stress that rests at the back of the head weakening the rational mind. Camouflaged stress is different for every individual as it is personally characterized. As it is specific to individual the coping strategy would also be specific to the individual under stress. The master key to all types of camouflaged stress is the mindset. The human mind is programmable. Past incidents, accidents or experiences leaves its impression affecting the decision making in present and future (Osho, 2012). This provides a scope for programming positive results in negative situations. The root cause of stress is mind thus it should be dealt at the mental level. The intensity of emotions decides the level of domination by the emotional mind over the rational mind. Striking the right balance between the two minds paves way for coping stress. High emotional intelligence results in lowering the perceived stress (Urquijo et al., 2016; Yin, 2015). Teachers with high emotional intelligence are professionally more satisfied and broaden their self (Perry & Ball 2007). Mindfulness could help teachers in stress mitigation, self-awareness and building healthy relations (Smith-Carrier et al., 2015).

Responding to negative situations with an optimistic understanding result in a happier self (Taylor & Brown, 1989; Taylor & Brown, 1994). The body and mind should traverse in a way to void the effects of stress. The subliminal self speaks through ideas, hunches, intuitions, intimations, impulses and urges. Understanding these emotions with rational justification would bridge the body and mind. This bridge reduces the negative impact of stress and generates positive energy (Murphy, 2013). A stressed teacher cannot surface quality lectures. An empirical study in universities revealed that quality lectures contribute positively to academic achievement and retention of students (Setiawan et al., 2020). It's like a vicious cycle of events wherein mentally sorted teachers prepares quality lectures that in turn enhances student academic achievement which in turn retains student motivating the teacher and boosting to improve more. The vicious cycle would go vice versa with a negative mindset.

Conclusion

Material possessions do not contribute to the happiness of any life. It is the mental peace that accords satisfaction at work and in life. A tendency to use emotional wiles to attract sympathy from others is addictive in nature. This addiction further encourages self-sympathy dragging the individual deep into the stress pit. The other way to avoid camouflaged stress is either to ignore or discredit its existence. But the fact is its existence, to let it grow in an unacknowledged fashion is like allowing a malignancy. The paper concludes that stressors causing stress should be understood, acknowledged and dealt appropriately. Varied emotions behind the stressors that may be either related or unrelated should be sorted and acknowledged rather than putting a facade of bravery. The art to deal with stress is to understand the emotional mind and not become a social chameleon deceiving self and others. This study suggests further research on the unidentified stressors causing camouflaged stress.

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