

A comparative study of stress amongst teachers of the western division in Fiji

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ABSTRACT

Stress is an unavoidable aspect of modern life and can have serious effects on one's health and performance. There is an absence of empirical research and literature regarding stress amongst teachers in Fiji. As such, there is an important need for basic research on teacher stress to be carried out in Fiji. The aim of this study was to investigate stress amongst school teachers. Fifty one teachers from the western division of Fiji were selected for this study. The Teacher Work Stress Inventory of G. J. Boyle et al. was used to measure teacher stress. Data was analysed using the IBM SPSS 21. Percentages, means, standard deviations, and t-test were used to describe the data. On the basis of data analysis, the study revealed that female, married, urban, i-Taukei, and secondary school teachers have more stress than their counter parts. It was also noted that all teachers at some point or the other experience different levels of stress, weather moderate, mild or extreme.

Keywords: *Stress, Gender, Ethnicity, Dependants and School Teachers.*

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a common phenomenon and much has been written about its nature, effects and management. It has been constantly associated with facilitating professions, including teaching. Teaching has traditionally been considered to be one of the most stressful occupations (Kyriacou, 2000). Teacher stress can be defined as experiences in teachers of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness, resulting from some aspect of their work (Kyriacou 2001). Stress has been further defined as the sum of the physical, mental and emotional strains or tensions in a person. People under large amounts of stress can become tired, sick, and unable to concentrate or think clearly. Sometimes, they even suffer mental breakdowns.

Two types of stress can eventually affect teachers; task-based stress and role based stress. Task based stress such as dealing with distracting students, refers to problems that are associated with a variety of specific tasks that teachers must perform in their teaching role. Role based stress, such as an absence of sufficient resources to execute effectively, refers to how teachers' expectations of their role fit in with the actual work-related responsibilities needed to fulfill their role (Pettegrew & Wolf, 1982). Stress within teaching is driven by the organizational factors related to the way in which teachers are expected to work (Hepburn & Brown, 2001). Organizational factors that contribute to teacher stress can include unreasonable directed time budgets, excessive paperwork, unrealistic deadlines, and intimidating inspection regimes (Hepburn & Brown, 2001). Teachers face various stressors comprising student behaviour complications (Forlin, 1997), poor student behaviour (Friedman, 1995), discipline and handling difficult students (Onafowora, 2004), dealing with uncompromising behaviour of parents (Howard & Johnson, 2004), compact workload (Nagel & Brown, 2003), multiple roles and responsibilities (Hockley & Hemmings, 2001), being evaluated by others (Kyriacou, 2001), role conflict (Pearlin, 1989), attending after school and evening meetings (Romano & Wahlstrom, 2000), inadequate resources (Chaplain, 1995), lack of incentive (Burke & Greenglass, 1993), and high external expectations (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000).

A teacher who does not have a conflict between personal values and those of educational authorities, has a high ambition to succeed professionally, and is not easily upset or excited; tends to experience the least amount of stress (Bachkirova, 2005). Teachers need to identify how much stress they are experiencing and how it is affecting their teaching before they can learn and incorporate positive coping strategies. It is imperative that teachers learn that stress can be diminished with simple strategies which could then lead to a healthier and more fulfilling career.

The research intended to identify level of stress in school teachers, on the basis of their gender, marital status, ethnicity, discipline, location, experience and number of dependants. There is an absence of empirical research and literature regarding stress of school teachers in Fiji. As such, there is an important need for basic research on teacher stress to be carried out in Fiji-where the local circumstances can be taken into account in the design of the study.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The sample size for this study was affected due to a lack of consistency in the return rate of participants' signed consent and questionnaire. For the present study fifty one in-service teachers were randomly selected. The average age of the participants was 29.09 year and the SD 5.38 years. The demographic information is as follows;

TABLE 1: *Demographic Information of In-service Teachers*

| Items | | Number of Participants | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------------------|----------------|
| In-service Teachers | Western | 51 | 100 |
| | Male | 23 | 45.09 |
| Gender | Female | 28 | 54.90 |
| | Single | 18 | 35.29 |
| Marital Status | Married | 33 | 64.70 |
| | Fijian | 42 | 82.35 |
| Ethnicity | I-Taukei | 9 | 17.64 |
| | Primary | 42 | 82.35 |
| Discipline | Secondary | 9 | 17.35 |
| | Rural | 30 | 58.83 |
| Location | Urban | 21 | 41.17 |
| | Low | 31 | 60.78 |
| Experience | Medium | 16 | 31.38 |
| | High | 4 | 07.84 |
| | Few | 18 | 35.30 |
| No. of Dependants | Some | 23 | 45.10 |
| | More | 10 | 19.60 |

DESIGN

This study adopted a quantitative approach to investigate stress levels amongst school teachers in Fiji. Stress was selected as an independent variable. The dependents variables were gender, marital status, ethnicity, discipline, location, experience and number of dependants in the family.

INSTRUMENT

The Teacher Stress Inventory (Boyle et al., 1995) was used to measure teacher stress: The

questionnaire items asked participants to rate the level of stress they experienced in carrying out different teaching tasks. Each item of the inventory had five possible answers, which typically were: No Stress, Mild Stress, Moderate Stress, Much Stress and Extreme Stress. To obtain a conventional score, the Likert-type scale ranging from no stress (0) to extreme stress (4) was used. The inventory consisted of twenty six items.

PROCEDURE

All the teachers participating in this study were part of the in-service programme offered by the Fiji National University (FNU). They attended classes on Saturdays at Lautoka campus. During these classes, the questionnaires were distributed to the participants. Instructions were delivered beforehand to mark their response. All fifty one teachers voluntarily participated in this study.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 21. Percentage, means, standard deviation, and t-test were used to describe the data. The significance level was set at .05 levels.

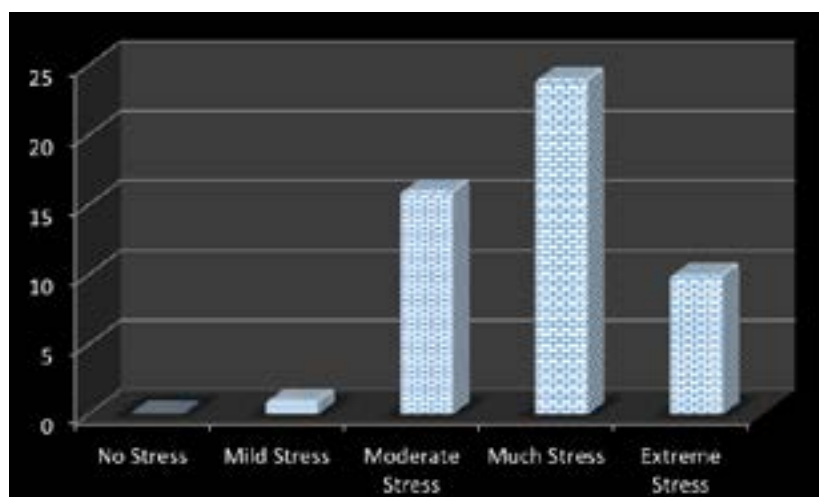
RESULTS

The data were computed and tabulated in the following manner

The levels of stress amongst school teachers

| Sr. No. | Categories of stress | No. of Teachers |
|---------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | No Stress | 0 |
| 2 | Mild Stress | 1 |
| 3 | Moderate Stress | 16 |
| 4 | Much Stress | 24 |
| 5 | Extreme Stress | 10 |

Level of Stress



The graph shows the responses among a group of in-service teachers about stress. According to the graph, none of the fifty-one teacher had stress, only one teacher had mild stress, sixteen teachers had moderate stress, most of the teachers had much stress, whereas only ten teachers had extreme stress.

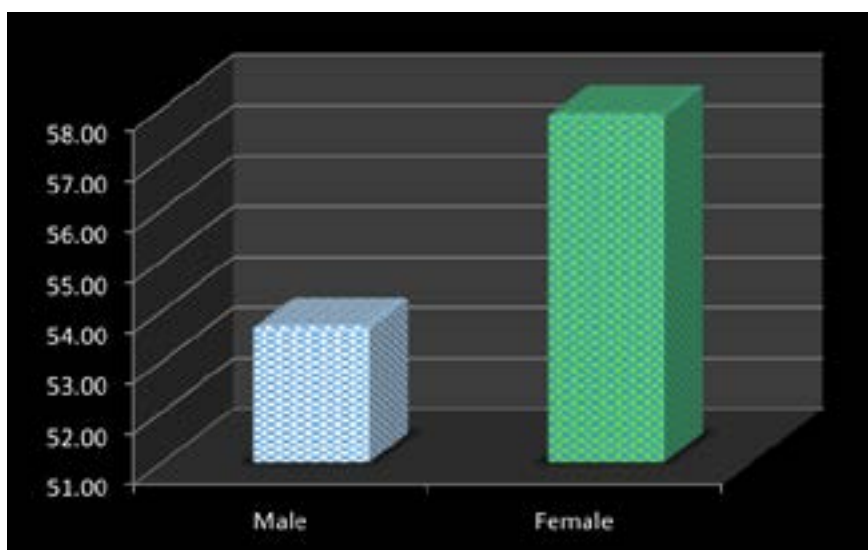
GENDER

| | Mean | SD | df | t-test |
|--------|-------|-------|----|--------|
| Male | 53.70 | 14.92 | 49 | 0.35 |
| Female | 57.89 | 17.04 | | |

**Significant level at .05 levels*

In order to compare the level of stress between the male and female teachers, the mean and standard deviation were separately calculated. The findings showed that there was no significant difference between the male and female teachers. However, the mean score of female teachers was higher than that of male teachers.

Level of Stress Based on Gender



The graph shows the responses for the level of stress of male and female teachers. In comparison, female teachers showed higher stress levels than the male teachers.

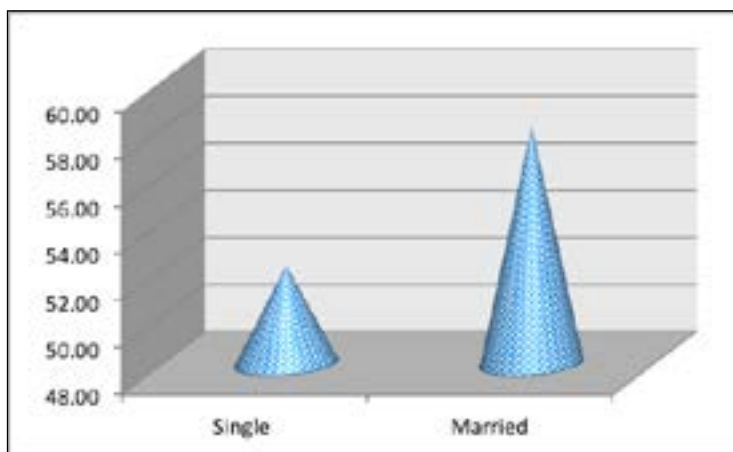
MARITAL STATUS

| | Mean | SD | Df | t-test |
|---------|-------|-------|----|--------|
| Single | 52.17 | 17.60 | 49 | 0.24 |
| Married | 58.09 | 15.08 | | |

**Significant level at .05 levels*

In order to compare the level of stress between single and married teachers, the mean and standard deviation were separately calculated. The findings showed that there was no significant difference between single and married teachers. However, the mean score of married teachers was higher than that of the single teachers.

Level of Stress Based on Marital Status



The graph shows the responses for the level of stress of the single and married teachers. Comparatively, married teachers have higher stress levels than the single teachers.

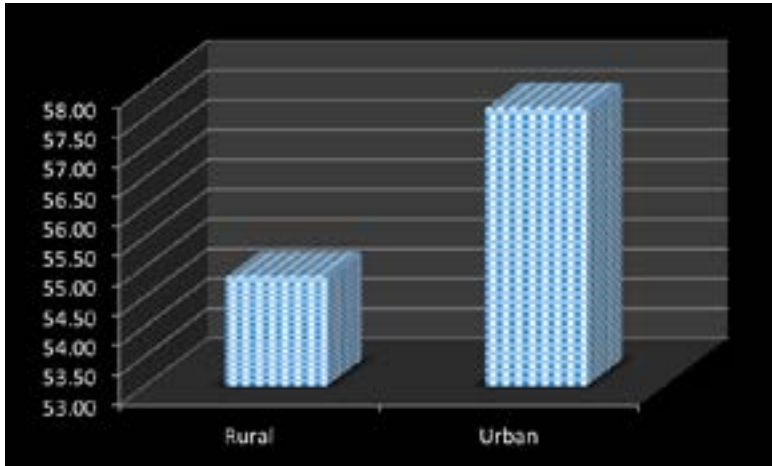
LOCATION

| | Mean | SD | Df | t-test |
|-------|-------|-------|----|--------|
| Rural | 54.83 | 17.84 | 49 | 0.52 |
| Urban | 57.67 | 13.47 | | |

*Significant level at .05 levels

In order to compare the level of stress according to the location, between rural and urban teachers, the mean and standard deviation were separately calculated. The findings showed that there was no significant difference between rural and urban area teachers. However, the mean score of urban teachers was higher than that of the rural teachers.

Level of Stress Based on Location



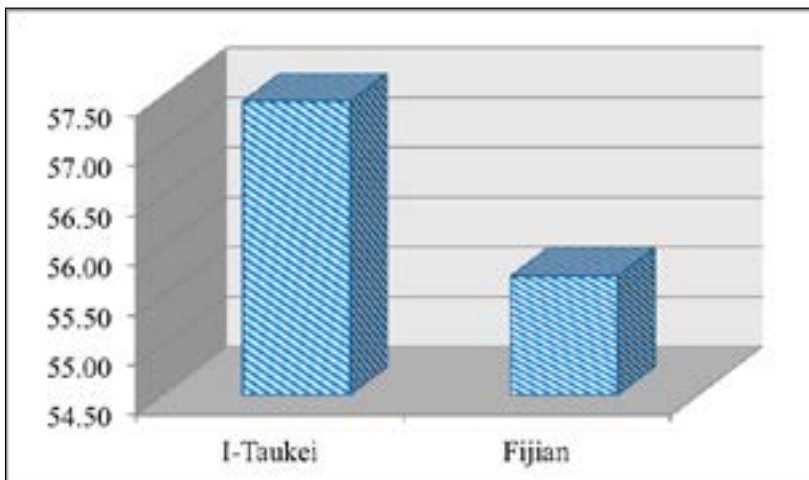
The graph shows the responses for the level of stress of the rural and urban teachers. In comparison the urban teachers had higher stress levels than the rural teachers.

ETHNICITY

| | Mean | SD | df | t-test |
|-----------------|-------|-------|----|--------|
| i-Taukei | 57.44 | 17.04 | 49 | 0.78 |
| Fijian | 55.69 | 16.09 | | |

In order to compare the level of stress according to the ethnicity, between i-Taukei and Fijian teachers, the means and standard deviation were separately calculated. The findings showed that there was no significant difference between the i-Taukei and Fijian teachers. However, the mean score of i-Taukei teachers was higher than that of the Fijian teachers.

Level of Stress Based on Ethnicity



The graph shows the responses for the level of stress of the i-Taukei and Fijian teachers. Comparatively, the i-Taukei teachers had higher stress levels than the Fijian teachers.

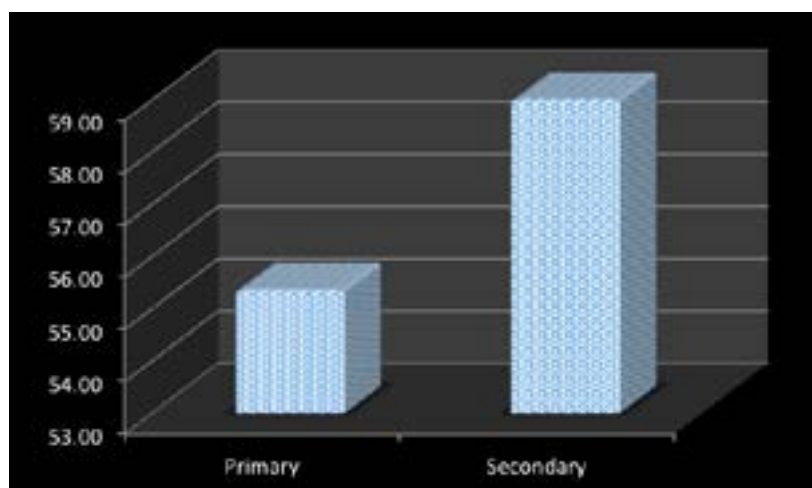
LEVEL OF STRESS BASED ON AREA OF SERVICES

| | Mean | SD | df | t-test |
|-----------|-------|-------|----|--------|
| Primary | 55.36 | 15.07 | 49 | 0.63 |
| Secondary | 59 | 21.05 | | |

**Significant level at .05 levels*

In order to compare the level of stress between primary and secondary school teachers, the mean and standard deviation were separately calculated. The findings showed that there was no significant difference between primary and secondary school teachers. However, the mean score of secondary school teachers was higher than that of the secondary school’s teachers.

Level of Stress Based on Area of Services



The graph shows the responses for the level of stress of the primary and secondary school teachers. Comparatively, secondary school teachers had higher stress than the primary school teachers.

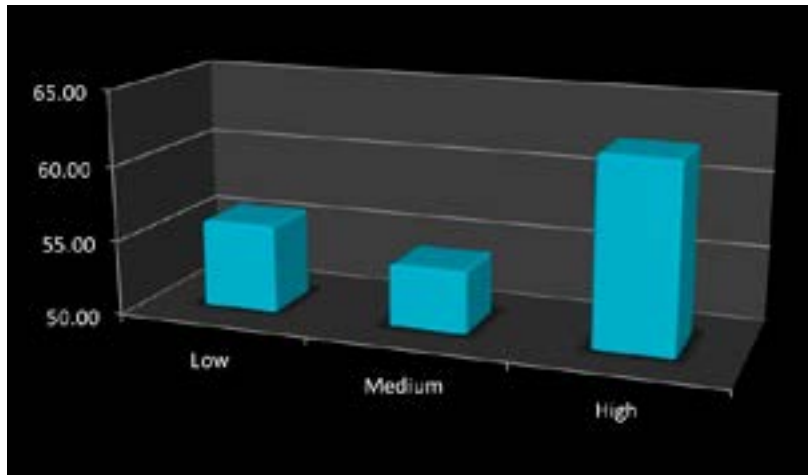
NUMBER OF YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE

| | Mean | SD |
|---------------|-------|-------|
| Low (1-8) | 55.87 | 16.12 |
| Medium (9-15) | 54.13 | 17.87 |
| High (16->) | 62.40 | 10.38 |

**Significant level at .05 levels*

In order to compare the level of stress according to their teaching experience, The teachers who have had 9-15 and year of experience had lesser stress then the teachers who have had 1-8 year of experience, the teachers who have had greater than 16 years of experience had the highest level of stress.

Level of Stress Based on Years of Teaching Experience

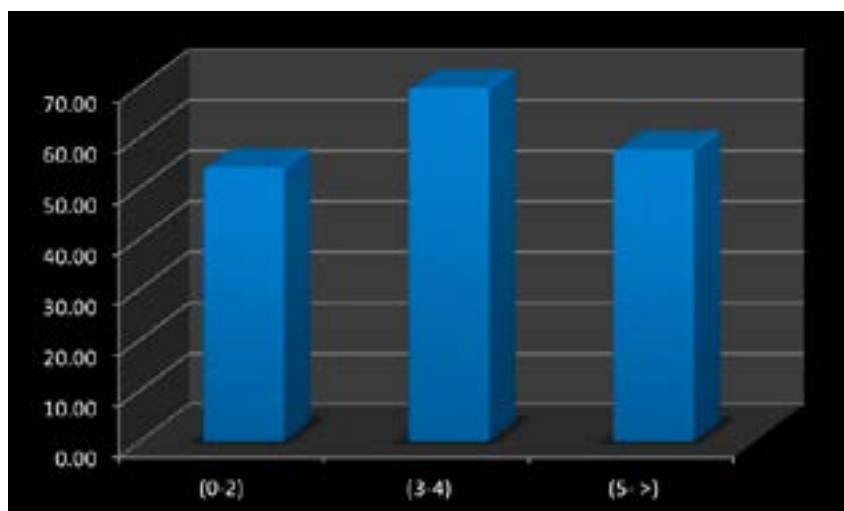


The graph shows the responses for the level of stress of the teachers according to their years of teaching experience. The teachers who have had 1-8 and 9-15 year of experience had almost same levels of stress but, the teachers who have had greater than 16 years of experience had the highest level of stress.

NUMBER OF DEPENDANTS

| | Mean | SD |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Few (0-2) | 53.94 | 18.05 |
| Some (3-4) | 69.58 | 12.58 |
| More (5 ->) | 57.40 | 20.58 |

In order to compare the level of stress among school teachers based upon their family dependants; the mean and standard deviation were separately calculated. The findings showed that the teachers who had low number of dependants had less stress while the teachers who had 3-4 dependants had more stress than the teachers who had more than four dependants.

Level of stress based on number of dependants

The graph shows the responses for the level of stress based upon the family dependants. When comparing the responses we can see that the graph shows that the teachers who had low number of dependants had less stress, while the teachers who had 3-4 dependants had more stress than the teachers who had more than four dependants.

CONCLUSION

The results of the data analysis, which have been explained, show that for this sample of fifty one teachers from the western division of Fiji, female teachers had higher stress levels than the male teachers, married teachers had higher stress levels than the single teachers, urban teachers had higher stress levels than the rural teachers, i-Taukei teachers had higher stress than the Fijian teachers, secondary school teachers had higher stress levels than the primary school teachers, teachers who had 9-15 years of teaching experience had lower stress levels than the teacher who had 1-8 year teaching experience, while the teachers who had greater than 16 years of experience had highest stress levels. The findings also showed that the teachers who had less number of dependants had less stress. While the teachers who had 3-4 dependants had more stress than the teachers who had more than four dependants. However, we can say that from this group of teachers there was no teacher who did not have stress, only one teacher had mild stress, sixteen teachers had moderate stress, most of the teachers had much stress, while only ten teachers had extreme stress.

There are certain discrepancies between these findings and those of prior studies; this could be the result of different instruments being utilised, or perhaps due to having different school working environment, contract duration, and so on. The results of the data can be used to guide further development of interventions to mitigate teacher stress and, consequently, improve teacher effectiveness, student behaviour and learning.

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