

A Comparative Study of Stress, Anxiety and Depression Levels between General Educators and Special Educators

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ABSTRACT: The study was conducted to find the difference in the stress, anxiety and depression level of general educators and special educators. Data was collected from a sample of 40 teachers, 20 being the general educators and 20 being the special educators from Study Hall and Lucknow Public School, Lucknow. DASS-42 self-report inventory was administered to both the groups, and the scores for stress, anxiety and depression were obtained. The comparison of scores of both the groups was done using t-test. The results indicated that there is a significant difference in the stress and depression levels of general and special educators. The special educators have a higher level of stress and depression as compared to general educators. However, there is no significant difference in the anxiety of both the groups.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is simply a reaction to a stimulus that tends to disturb the physical or mental equilibrium of an individual. It triggers the ‘flight and fight’ response of the sympathetic nervous system of an individual and the person either fights with the stressful situation or tries to escape from it. The release of the hormones, adrenaline and cortisol surge through the body which results in the redirection of the blood flow and therefore the blood instead of going to the brain redirects to the other body parts. This results in improper working of the brain, ultimately affecting other body functioning. Stress has been linked with many cognitive, emotional, physical as well as behavioral disturbances for example, mental slowness, frustration, depression, heart diseases, and other health issues. Stress is not always threatening; rather it is an important aspect of life which triggers response from our body. If a person has no stress, then it becomes nearly impossible for him or her to respond to certain situations. It helps an individual to act quickly in an emergency or helps to meet a deadline. But, as the level of stress hormones increases in the body, it causes negative impact. Stress is something that is very common and hence people consider it as a matter of everyday life, unaware of the harmful impacts it can have on their health.

For the professional workers, stress results into burnout. If a teacher is undergoing stress for a long period of time may experience teacher burnout. The teacher undergoing this situation may experience emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 2003). Burnout is a function of feeling inconsequential—feeling that no matter how hard one works, the payoff in terms of accomplishment, recognition, or appreciation are not there (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1981). There are many negative outcomes of burnout which include teacher attrition, teacher health issues and negative student outcomes.

Everyone has different stress triggers but being a teacher or a trainer, teaching, itself can be the most common stress trigger. Though in the teaching profession, stress is a well-recognized phenomenon but research has found special education to be more demanding than mainstream education (Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs, 2009). Special education is a program designed for children who are mentally, physically, emotionally and/or socially delayed. This aspect of “delay” is broadly characterized as a developmental delay and signifies an aspect of the child’s overall development, i.e. a physical, cognitive and scholastic skill, which places these children behind their mates. These children have special requirements and hence they are required to be treated in a different way. The traditional classroom environment fails to provide them the facilities they require and hence a different setup is set for these special students that adapt content, teaching methodology and delivery instruction to meet the appropriate needs of each child.

Special educators are the one who provide children with one or more special needs and adapt different types of methods to educate them. These specially-trained educators create and apply appropriate curricula and assign activities that are specific to each student’s abilities and needs. Special education teachers also involve themselves in each student’s academic, social and behavioral development. These special needs of the students, the extra efforts as well as the pressure to provide them with good quality of education often lead to stress in

special educators. This ultimately leads to teacher burnout and it has been found that special educators are more prone to teacher burnout as their working conditions align with many factors associated with burnout (Nelson et al., 2013).

Teaching can be incredibly a fulfilling occupation but at the same time it can be very stressful. The interaction of teachers with the students, parents and coworkers can lead to stress. In a study, the job satisfactions and dissatisfactions of the teachers of special education and general education have been compared and the results show that teachers of students in special education programs were the most dissatisfied. Specific stresses and frustrations, both from within and from outside the classroom, were found to be associated with the dissatisfaction (Lori & Roger, 2016). Teacher stress is defined by Kyriacou (2001) as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression, resulting from aspects of work as a teacher.” The imbalance between the demands at school and the resources teacher has for coping with them may be perceived as the teacher stress (Esteve, 2000; Troman & Woods, 2001). Symptoms of teacher stress may include impaired performance, anxiety and frustration, and ruptured interpersonal relationship at work and home (Kyriacou, 2001).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a research, the coping orientation and resources of the teachers educating learners with intellectual disabilities was studied. An exploratory, descriptive survey design was employed in the study. A sample of 59 special education teachers was administered to Antonovsky's Orientation to Life Questionnaire (SOC-29) and Hammer and Mailing's Coping Resources Inventory (CRI). A fairly high mean score on SOC-29 and average mean score on CRI was revealed in the key findings. Significant positive correlations were also evident between the SOC-29 and the CRI total mean score and some of the subscale scores of the CRI. It was summarized that the coping orientation of the special education teachers were low. ((Brown, Howcroft & Jacobs, 2009).

In a study by Miller, Brownell, and Smith, 1999, it was found that teachers are more likely to leave the special education classroom when they are highly stressed by the unmanageability of their work load. Special education teachers have more reasons to feel stressed. A study from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) revealed that high rate of special educators leaving the field, going through stress and teacher burnout is due to poor teacher working conditions (CEC, 1998). A series of studies reveal that special education teachers undergo higher level of stress due to their job responsibilities (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999 ; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). All of these studies indicate that mentoring support for special education and teacher retention has a connection. Another series of studies suggested that reducing stress would lead to enhancing retention for special education teachers (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Russ, Chiang, Rylance & Bongers, 2001; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

Researchers have found that significant amount of stress affect learning (Lupien, Maheu, Tu, Fiocco, and Schramek, 2007) and may lead to adverse health effects (Bruno & Frey, 2006; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Hinkle, 1973). The physiological or biological responses of the body to stress (e.g., mucous and sweat production, stomach acid secretion, increase in blood pressure, distressed motor skills) are similar to those the body exhibits in response to exposure to pathogens and other diseases assaulting the body (Hinkle, 1973). Moreover repeated exposure to stress can lead to long term effects. These long term effects include physical and mental illness, burnout and in some cases may lead to death. . Excessive amounts of stress lead to high blood pressure, weight gain or loss, heart attack, coronary heart disease and other diseases (Bruno & Frey, 2006; Wu, Li, Wang, Wang, & Huangyuan, 2006); headaches, chest pain, and other muscle aches (Bruno & Frey, 2006); and personal and relationship problems (Hughes, 2006) as well as affect the immune system, and in severe cases, may lead to mental illness, depression, and suicide (Baca-Garcia, Parra, Perez-Rodriguez, Sastre, Torres, Saiz-Ruiz, de Leon, 2007; Friedman & Farber, 1992; Bruno & Frey, 2006; Prymachuk & Richards, 2007).

A number of researches have been done examining differing aspects of teacher stress over the course of more than 20 years (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; Borg, 1990; Chan, 1998; Dussault, 1997; Eichinger, 2000; Fimian, 1985; Guglielmi and Tatrow, 1998; Hughes, 2006; Hutchinson, 1998; Kyriacou, 2001; Lazuras, 2006; McKinneyToodle, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Ndigi & Sibaya, 2002; Ravichandran & Rajendran, 2007; Wu, Li, Wang, Wang, & Huangyuan, 2006; Zurlo, Pes, & Cooper, 2007). Rarely has any distinction been made between eustress, i.e. the stress that is motivating and positive, and distress, i.e. stress that is inhibiting and negative. Teacher stress, as stated previously, is that which makes a teacher anxious or otherwise uneasy during the course of performing daily duties and activities (Kyriacou, 2001).

Lazuras (2006) and Embich (2001) found that special education teachers experienced more stress and higher levels of burnout than general education teachers. Embich (2001), in a study of 300 special education teachers, found that special education teachers experienced low levels of depersonalization and high levels of emotional exhaustion on two of the three subscales on the Maslach Burnout Inventory, regardless of the type of special educator. These high scores were due to three primary reasons: role ambiguity, workload and perceived lack of administrative support. Role ambiguity related to the autonomy and accountability of the special

educator and how tasks need to be accomplished within the confines of those often conflicted structures. How much confidence special educators felt their principal had in their abilities is concerned with lack of perceived administrative support. Workload related to course preparation, parent meetings, grading papers, and other activities in which teachers engaged in on a daily or weekly basis.

Since 1990, educators have been voicing their concerns about the high rate of burnout in special education teachers as compared to the general education teachers (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1990). In a recent study by Kaufhold, Alvarez, and Arnold (2006), it was found that frustration being the main component of stress was due to the lack of materials for the special education teachers. Several studies regarding the burnout in special education teachers found that the increase expectations for inclusive instruction and the increasing paperwork load on special education teachers increased the risk of burnout.

Teachers with different burnout risks differ in their mental and physical state of health. Teachers with low burnout risk seem to mentally feel healthiest whereas teachers with high burnout risk show highest deficits in their mental state of health. Significantly higher level of complaints and lower level of well-being was reported by the teachers having high risk of burnout after a vacation. On the contrary, high level of well-being and low level of complaints over time was exhibited by the teachers having low burnout risk. Teachers who have a varying burnout risk reported increased levels of well-being and decreased levels of complaints after vacations (Hoyos & Kallus 2005).

Goddard, O'Brian, and Goddard (2006) examined questions about the perception of inequitable and high workloads that were prescribed for beginning teachers. In this study, self-report data on burnout, work climate, the personality trait neuroticism, and self-report data on burnout and perceptions about the work environment was collected using a sample of beginning teachers. This information was collected over a two-year-period on three subsequent occasions. The Work Environment Scale, Maslach Burnout Inventory, and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire were used to measure neuroticism. It was evident from the results that work environments that did not support innovative teaching were resulted in significant increase in teacher burnout, even after controlling for neuroticism.

A research on stress and burnout in special education teachers conducted a study on a sample of 90 teachers who were linked to special education. Two scales were used: one which assesses stress and burnout levels (CBP-R) and another which assesses self-efficacy (SES). The results revealed that 80% teachers were affected from stress, feeling lack of recognition for their work and professional fulfillment. Moreover, the teachers who were either older in age or divorced showed higher level of stress and burnout and a perception of low self-efficacy. Evidence showed that teacher's stress and burnout is variable and multidimensional. Nonetheless, a significant number of special education teachers are affected by this (Martins, R., Andrade, A., Albuquerque, C., & Cunha, M., 2015).

A study by Platsidou and Agaliotis, 2009, focused on perceived level of burnout, job satisfaction and job related stress factors in special education teachers. Maslach Burnout Inventory, the Employee Satisfaction Inventory, and the Inventory of Job-related Stress Factors were administered on a sample of 127 Greek special education teachers. Moderately high levels of satisfaction with their job, average satisfaction with work conditions and low satisfaction with prospects of promotion and pay were reported by them. These results were found to be consistent with other studies that focused on Greek general education teachers, which revealed that this group does not experience high levels of occupational stress.

Another national study in Greece examines the sources of job stress in special education teachers with a sample of 373 Greek special educators. Self-report questionnaire was administered to the sample which assessed job stress, its perceived sources, and its demographic and professional characteristics. The teachers considered their job stressful because of the special needs of children, such as their progress, safety and social development. It was reported the teachers dealing with autistic children and with those having behavioral and emotional disabilities is a very stressful job (Kokkinos & Davazoglou, 2009).

III. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Several researches are done regarding the difference in stress level of special educators and general educators, but very few have related less stress level of special educators with their anxiety and depression levels. So it is important to find out the relationship between stress, anxiety and depression and compare these dimensions with general and special educators.

IV. METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the study is to compare the anxiety, depression and stress level of general educators and special educators.

HYPOTHESIS:

- 1) The stress level of special educators is more than that of general educators.

- 2) The anxiety level of special educators is more than that of general educators.
- 3) The depression level of special educators is more than that of the general educators.

SAMPLE:

Purposive or judgmental sampling has been used in the study, which is based on the typicality of the cases to be included in the sample. As the study is a comparative study between the special educators and general educators, a sample from the population of special educators and general educators has been taken. A sample of 40 individuals has been taken, with 20 special educators and 20 general educators. The data has been collected from Study Hall and Lucknow Public School, Lucknow.

TOOLS:

Data for this study was collected using the DASS-42 self-report inventory which not only measures stress, but along with that other two dimensions of depression and anxiety can also be measured, which could prove to be a positive sign for the study if the result came out to be significant.

DASS-42

The DASS 21 is a 21 item self-report questionnaire designed to measure the severity of a range of symptoms common to both Depression and Anxiety. In completing the DASS, the individual is required to indicate the presence of a symptom over the previous week. Each item is scored from 0 (did not apply to me at all over the last week) to 3 (applied to me very much or most of the time over the past week). The essential function of the DASS is to assess the severity of the core symptoms of Depression, Anxiety and Stress. Accordingly, the DASS allows not only a way to measure the severity of a patient’s symptoms but a means by which a patient’s response to treatment can also be measured.

PROCEDURE:

The study was designed by reviewing the previous researches based on various aspects of special education, general education and stress. The data was collected from the defined population of special and general educators. A healthy rapport was established with the participants and both the groups were asked to fill the DASS-42 self-report inventory. Scoring was done and the mean scores of all the three dimensions, namely, depression, anxiety and stress was calculated for both the groups. By calculating the standard deviation, the t-test was calculated and the results were interpreted and discussed.

V. RESULTS

Table 1: stress level of general educators and special educators

	N	Mean	St. deviation	t-value
Special educators	20	19.7500	4.63255	5.486**
General educators	20	10.8500	5.58452	5.486**

**0.01
*0.05

Table 2: depression and anxiety of general educators and special educators

	N	Mean	St. deviation	t-value
Depression				
Special educators	20	11.6000	3.20197	3.598**
General educators	20	11.6000	4.88715	3.598**
Anxiety				
Special educators	20	10.2500	3.33837	1.225
General educators	20	8.6500	4.79336	1.225

**0.01
*0.05

INTERPRETATION

Table 1 represents the stress level of general educators and special educators. There is a significant difference between the stress level of general educators and special educators; the stress of special educators being more than that of general educators. The result is significant at 0.01 level which indicate that there is a 99 percent chance that the same result would occur again.

Table 2 represents the results for the depression and anxiety of special and general educators. Though not much researches have been done for depression and anxiety of the special educators, the results of this study show that there is a significant difference in the depression level of special educators and general educators; the depression level of special educators being higher. The result is significant at 0.01 level which means that there is 99 percent chance that the depression for special educators will be more than general educators. There is no significant difference in the anxiety of both the groups, which means that the anxiety level of both the groups is somewhat same and do not have a significant difference.

VI. DISCUSSION

A lot of researches has been done in the field of stress and it has been found from the previous researches that stress causes severe emotional and behavioral problems in an individual that can lead to severe damage to the immune functioning and ultimately the whole body functioning. Stress is the reaction to a stimulus that disturbs an individual's mental and physical equilibrium but it is also an important part of life. If there is no stress, then person would become passive and would become careless regarding his or her work. Therefore a certain level of stress is necessary for an individual to deal with day to day situations. When these day to day situations become threatening and the individual find it difficult to overcome that situation, stress become chronic and then the bodily functions become improper (Baca-Garcia, Parra, Perez-Rodriguez, Sastre, Torres, Saiz-Ruiz, de Leon, 2007; Friedman & Farber, 1992; Bruno & Frey, 2006; Pryjmachuk & Richards, 2007).

Every individual go through stress, whether it be academic stress, job stress, work load stress, relationship stress, family stress etc. Teachers undergo stress that is generally related to the students' outcome, maintenance of the classroom environment, good teaching techniques, etc. Teacher stress, as stated previously, is that which makes a teacher anxious or otherwise uneasy during the course of performing daily duties and activities (Kyriacou, 2001). For teachers who deal with normal children with healthy mental and physical abilities, it is easier to handle them and the stress level of these general teachers is low regarding the education of normal students. But, teachers who deal with students who are either physically, mentally, emotionally and socially disabled, it is comparatively a tough job. These special children need special care and attention, individually and it becomes stressful for the special educators to fulfil each student's requirement. Therefore special education teachers have more reasons to feel stressed (Miller, Brownell, and Smith, 1999).

Lack of facilities that are needed for the proper education of special children, their progress, social development and safety of the special children are all the factors that lead to more perceived stress of special educators. Apart from this, special educators have high expectations for inclusive instruction and the increasing paperwork load. Teacher stress includes impaired performance, anxiety and frustration, and ruptured interpersonal relationship at work and home. This leads to less job satisfaction and is related with depression among special educators (Kokkinos & Davazoglou, 2009). These educators have high risk for burnout. They start feeling that no matter how much hard work they put for the education of special children, the payoff in terms of accomplishment, recognition, or appreciation are low (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1981). This leads a teacher to put less effort to bring up with new ideas and techniques to fulfil the requirements of the children.

On the counter part, if general education teachers are concerned, then there is less stress that leads to lesser anxiety, depression and burnout risk. They are comparatively more satisfied with their jobs and the feeling of not receiving the payoffs of recognition and appreciation are less in general education. This does not mean that these teachers do not have any stress. They do undergo stress of handling a number of children from different backgrounds and having different attitudes and learning abilities. They undergo stress of being able to pay attention to each and every student in a class and being unbiased for every student.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to find the difference between the stress, anxiety and depression level of general educators and special educators and the results indicated that special educators are more stressed and depressed than general educators as there is a lot of difference in the teaching styles, work load, work environment and the expectations. The previous researches revealed that special educators are more stressed due to the special needs of the special children and also because of the lack of facilities that are required to provide proper education to them. General educators have much lower depression and stress level as they deal with normal students and there is not that much work load as compared to special educators.

It is very important to focus on the problems of special education. If the educators themselves are stressed and depressed then it would be difficult for them to look after the needs of the special kids. Special children who are either physical disabled or mentally, emotionally or socially retarded tend to have low self-esteem and thus they need greater motivation, love and care to build up themselves as strong individuals. The problems of educator's stress need to be resolved by providing them different sessions regarding techniques and new ideas that could be applied for the education of special children. Also, the environment that is required for proper education in a special education classroom, with all the equipment and facilities. Remuneration should be higher for special educators. The school management should show more empathy and consideration for these educators. Their mental and psychological well-being is of utmost importance. Therefore, stress management classes, workshops, yoga, meditation etc. can be suggested for these special educators. Further researches should be done in this area to discover more innovative techniques for dealing with special children.

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DECLARATION

I, hereby, declare that the term paper entitled “**A Comparative Study Of Stress, Anxiety And Depression Levels Between General Educators And Special Educators**” being submitted to Amity Institute of Behavioral and Allied Sciences, Amity University Uttar Pradesh, for the award of the degree of “Bachelor of Arts” in Psychology, is original research work and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree or diploma of any other university.

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