OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTION: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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Abstract. Occupational stress in preschool education institutions is increasingly affecting staff well-being, yet this phenomenon remains insufficiently studied. The objective of this research was to identify the primary stress-inducing factors among preschool staff, to assess their coping strategies, and to evaluate the effectiveness of organisational and individual interventions. The present study concentrated on stress experienced within the preschool work environment. In order to address this gap in the literature, researchers applied a mixed-method approach, combining theoretical models of stress and burnout with a structured questionnaire. A total of 62 staff members, constituting 80.5% of the institution's workforce, participated in the survey. The results indicated that 73% of employees experienced work-related stress, with 58% reporting stress several times a week and 10% daily. The principal stressors identified were excessive workload, low salary, and inadequate organisational support. Furthermore, 48% of respondents reported symptoms of burnout, primarily due to limited decision-making power and few development opportunities. The majority of staff members coped through physical activity, effective time management, and social support. Relaxation techniques and emotional expression were utilised to a lesser extent. It is noteworthy that a mere 18.6% of the participants expressed confidence in their organisation's provision of support for emotional well-being. Consequently, the study emphasises the necessity for enhancements in psychological safety, leadership practices, and stress management training. The findings provide practical insights for the creation of healthier, more sustainable work environments in the field of preschool education.

Keywords: emotional exhaustion, psychosocial work environment, coping strategies, professional burnout, staff well-being, stressors, workplace mental health, institutional support, self-regulation.

JEL Classification: J28, M12, I21

1. Introduction

Novelty. The phenomenon of occupational stress has been extensively examined in the scientific literature (Burman & Goswami, 2018; King & Lawley, 2016; Brooks, Rubin & Greenberg, 2019; Koinis et al., 2015).

However, the majority of studies focus on general workplace factors or the healthcare sector. Despite its pertinence, the stress experienced by employees in preschool education institutions remains an under-researched area, and the applicability of practical stress management strategies in this field continues to be limited.

The novelty of this study is revealed in several key aspects. Firstly, it provides an empirical assessment of occupational stress within a specific organisational context, namely a preschool education institution. Such units have rarely been the focus of in-depth research, and thus this research highlights unique stressors faced by employees in the preschool sector, including excessive workload, emotional exhaustion, lack of support, and limited opportunities for professional development.

Secondly, the study aims not only to identify the causes of stress but also to evaluate the coping strategies employed by staff, their effectiveness, and their alignment with theoretical stress management models. The analysis draws on both classical stress theory and modern managerial frameworks, such as the standards of the UK Health and Safety Executive,

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which emphasise the significance of organisational factors (Kuodytė & Pajarskienė, 2017).

Thirdly, the research proposes practical recommendations for reducing the effects of occupational stress through organisational and individual interventions, tailored to the specific needs of employees and the operational context of the institution.

In this manner, the study makes a significant contribution to the extant literature on the subject, whilst concurrently supporting the development of more targeted solutions that are aimed at enhancing the well-being of employees and improving organisational effectiveness in the preschool education sector.

The objective of the present study is to examine the process of occupational stress management among employees in a preschool education institution. This process encompasses the identification of stress causes, the assessment of stress impact, and the analysis of applied management strategies.

The aim of the study is to analyse the causes of stress experienced by employees in a preschool education institution and to evaluate the stress management strategies applied, with the goal of identifying effective organisational and individual interventions to ensure employee well-being.

Research objectives:

1. To analyse the concept of stress, its types, and the causes of workplace stress based on scientific literature sources.

2. To evaluate theoretical models of stress management and their applicability within organisational contexts.

3. To identify the main sources of stress and assess their impact on the emotional and physical health of employees in a preschool education institution.

4. To evaluate the stress management strategies employed by preschool education staff and provide recommendations for improving their effectiveness.

Research methodology. This study employed a mixed-methods approach. First, a review of the scientific literature was conducted to enhance the theoretical understanding of occupational stress and its management principles. For the empirical part, an anonymous questionnaire survey was used as a quantitative research method. Descriptive statistical methods were employed to analyse the data, including calculating frequencies (percentages) and means. The results were presented in tables and charts.

Restrictions of the research. This research has several limitations. Firstly, the study was conducted in a single institution, which limits how generalisable the findings are to other educational or organisational contexts. Secondly, the data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire, which may have introduced subjective bias, since respondents could interpret the questions differently or give answers that they thought would be perceived as favourable.

Additionally, as the research was limited to quantitative data collection, it does not provide deeper insights into employees' personal experiences or the emotional aspects of stress. Time constraints and the relatively small size of the sample may also have influenced the depth and scope of the analysis.

Future research could benefit from including multiple institutions, applying mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative), and expanding the sample size to improve reliability and applicability.

Originality/Value. The present article proffers a timely and empirically grounded exploration of stress among preschool education staff, an area that has been often overlooked in favour of studies on general or higher education teachers. By addressing this gap, it provides a contextualised view of emotional well-being challenges in early childhood education settings.

The study's value lies in its dual focus: it analyses theoretical stress management models alongside real-world employee experiences, thus highlighting both the causes of stress and the coping strategies used. Furthermore, it identifies gaps in organisational support.

Of particular note is the article's proposition of pragmatic, systemic recommendations, encompassing the enhancement of emotional literacy, the cultivation of psychologically sensitive leadership, and the promotion of a supportive workplace culture. These insights are of particular relevance to policymakers and institutional leaders seeking to enhance staff well-being.

In summary, the article makes a significant contribution to the discourse on emotional health in education and establishes the foundation for further research in this critical area.

The article is structured logically into distinct sections. The introduction delineates the research problem, objectives, and relevance. The theoretical section of the study presents a review of stress concepts, types, causes, and stress management models based on scientific literature. The empirical section details the research methodology, presents the collected data, and analyses the key findings regarding stress sources, effects, and coping strategies among preschool education staff. The article concludes with the presentation of synthesised insights and practical recommendations.

2. Theoretical Analysis of Occupational Stress Management

The Concept of Stress and Types of Stressors

Stress is a pervasive problem in contemporary society, exerting considerable influence on both physical and mental well-being, as well as on professional performance. This multifaceted phenomenon encompasses biological, psychological, and social

domains, giving rise to physiological, behavioural, and emotional responses.

From a biological standpoint, McEwen (2017) defines stress as the body's response to environmental challenges, resulting in an "allostatic load" – long-term physiological changes that impact brain structure and function. De Kloet (2016) emphasises the dynamic role of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis in regulating the stress response via corticosteroid receptors. Dysregulation of this axis can lead to physical and psychological dysfunction. Wood (2020) adds that neuroinflammation and genetic predispositions influence stress reactivity, emphasising that stress affects everyone differently – what energises one person may exhaust another.

The General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), delineated by Selye (1936), is a model that comprises three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. This paradigm illustrates how initial adaptive responses to repeated stress can ultimately result in resource depletion and adverse outcomes. Robbins and Judge (2007) later distinguished between "challenge stress", which can be beneficial, and "hindrance stress", which impairs functioning. McEwen (2017) also posits that eustress can become distress if it is excessively frequent or intense. Distress has been demonstrated to be deleterious to health, with the potential to induce hormonal imbalance, immune suppression, and structural changes to the brain, particularly in the hippocampus.

Contemporary psychological literature conceptualises stress as the result of a dynamic interplay between environmental demands and individual coping resources. As Idoko, Agoha, Muyiwa and Kunle (2015) emphasise, the subjectivity of the phenomenon is of key importance. In addition, Wood (2020) posits the view that responses are shaped by neurobiological traits, such as inflammation sensitivity or cortisol regulation.

Stressors, or the factors that trigger stress, are commonly categorised by type and duration. Physiological stressors include noise, extreme temperatures, and sleep deprivation. Psychological stressors include information overload, responsibility, threats and interpersonal conflict. Stressors can be acute (sudden and intense, e.g., accidents), chronic (persisting over time, e.g., prolonged job strain) or cyclical (occurring predictably, e.g., exams or deadlines).

Different types of stressors affect individuals in different ways. Physiological stressors can lead to symptoms such as insomnia or muscle tension, whereas psychological stressors can provoke anxiety, irritability or depression. Exposure to chronic stress is linked to burnout, cardiovascular disease, anxiety disorders and other psychosomatic conditions.

Alongside biological and environmental factors, individual characteristics can have a significant influence on stress experiences. Seaward (2018) emphasises that everyone has a unique stress tolerance threshold, which is shaped by genetic, psychological and social factors. Therefore, effective stress management requires personalised approaches that integrate knowledge of biological systems with emotional regulation techniques. Some people may find relaxation helpful, while others may benefit more from cognitive behavioural therapy or physical activity.

In summary, stress is a complex experience influenced by a variety of factors, including biology, environment and individuality. While short-term stress can facilitate adaptation, chronic stress poses serious risks. It is crucial to understand the variability of stressors and personal coping responses in order to develop effective strategies and ensure psychologically safe environments.

Workplace Stress Factors

Workplace stress is a pervasive phenomenon that affects employees across various roles, sectors, and levels of qualification. The phenomenon is commonly associated with elevated demands, inadequate task allocation, stringent supervision, job insecurity, ambiguous objectives and insufficient managerial support (Burba, Sitnikovas & Lankaitė, 2014). It is well-documented that, over time, such stressors can result in a state of emotional exhaustion, significant psychological distress, and the onset of physical health complications. McEwen (2017) posits that the phenomenon of stress originates when environmental demands exceed an individual's coping resources, resulting in allostatic load, which in turn disrupts physiological balance and impairs performance.

Cooper and Cartwright (2018) proposed a model demonstrating the impact of the balance between job demands and control on stress levels. They categorise jobs into four types: low-strain (low demands, high control); passive (low demands, low control); active (high demands, high control); and high-strain (high demands, low control). Their framework highlights that stress can result not only from workload, but also from the degree of autonomy that employees have over their tasks.

De Kloet (2016) adds that occupational stress can be attributed to organisational and psychosocial factors, such as poor communication and limited resources. His research emphasises the role of corticosteroid receptors and the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis in stress regulation. Major stressors include strained workplace relationships, excessive workload, limited control, job insecurity, poor communication, resource shortages, work-life imbalance, unmet salary expectations, organisational apathy and deteriorating psychological and physical health.

Wood (2020) emphasises that work becomes stressful when demands exceed capabilities and support is lacking, particularly in neurobiological conditions

such as brain inflammation. She notes that, while short-term, low-level stress can enhance productivity and problem-solving abilities, chronic, unmanaged stress can result in a decline in performance and cause mental or physical health issues. It is therefore essential to identify stress sources in order to develop effective coping strategies.

Furthermore, gender is also a significant factor in this regard. Gyllensten and Palmer (2005) identified several stressors commonly experienced by women in the workplace, including collective responsibility, emotional fatigue, low appreciation, interpersonal conflict, and work–family imbalance. A greater proportion of male subjects report experiencing stress due to time pressure, financial strain, career expectations, mistrust, emotional detachment and social isolation. The factors contributing to these variations encompass both biological and social influences. The authors posit that gender is a social construct, and that it is associated with distinct roles, behaviours, and even stress coping styles. For instance, societal norms frequently dictate that women should provide emotional support and men should assume financial responsibility, a situation which may act as a deterrent for both genders to seek psychological assistance or to discuss challenges in the workplace.

This issue is particularly evident in leadership roles. Men often feel pressured to assert dominance, while women may encounter scepticism related to motherhood. Stress frequently originates from interactions across personal, cultural, and social environments, beyond gender and workplace structures. Therefore, managing occupational stress requires a systemic and contextual approach incorporating organisational change, skill development, emotional intelligence and robust support networks.

In summary, occupational stress is a complex phenomenon influenced by organisational dynamics, individual characteristics, gender roles and external social factors. While stress can occasionally boost productivity, it more frequently has a negative impact on employee well-being, performance, and workplace culture. Mitigating its effects requires identifying the sources and understanding their broader context, particularly with regard to gender. A holistic approach is essential to fostering a resilient and healthy work environment.

Assessment of Work-Related Stress Consequences

Workplace stress is a major challenge in contemporary organisational psychology and management, with significant consequences for employee well-being and organisational performance. As asserted by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2019), the underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon encompass substandard working conditions, ineffective leadership, inadequate work organisation, and deficient communication. Key stressors include an excessive workload, unclear tasks, undefined roles, limited decision-making autonomy and poorly managed organisational change. These can lead to emotional distress and, over time, serious physical and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease and sleep disturbances (Burba, Sitnikovaite & Lankaite, 2014).

McEwen (2017) explains that ineffective organisational policies and a lack of autonomy can lead to allostatic load, which increases stress levels and harms mental and physical health. This diminishes work quality, motivation and commitment, and increases staff turnover. Wood (2020) adds that chronic stress, intensified by neurobiological factors such as brain inflammation, negatively impacts productivity, operational stability and public reputation.

Stress is known to manifest in a number of ways, both emotional and physiological. Among the emotional manifestations are irritability, anger, and depression, while the physiological symptoms include, but are not limited to, high blood pressure, immune suppression, and cardiovascular irregularities. These impairments have the potential to adversely impact performance and pose long-term health risks. As Šulcienė (2016) emphasises, although stress is unavoidable, it can be managed by reframing challenges as personal growth opportunities.

Stress can affect teams and the wider organisation, resulting in reduced focus, procrastination, low motivation and poorer work quality. Bugakovas and Merkevičius (2019) describe "presenteeism", which occurs when employees work despite feeling unwell, resulting in reduced productivity and ultimately harming the organisation.

De Kloet (2016) emphasises the importance of taking a systemic approach that combines individual psychological resilience with organisational support, particularly with regard to regulating the HPA axis, which controls the body's response to stress. Blackwell et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of creating emotionally supportive environments and implementing strategies to promote employee well-being.

Galdikienė (2007) suggests considering stress as a spectrum ranging from mild discomfort to emotional dysfunction, depending on individual characteristics. One of the most severe consequences is burnout syndrome. Kavaliauskienė and Balčiūnaitė (2022) observe that burnout is prevalent in roles requiring emotional labour, including education, healthcare, and social services. It manifests as emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment. Prolonged stress and insufficient emotional support can result in temporary work incapacity.

Çollaku, Aliu and Ahmeti (2023) identify the symptoms of late-stage burnout, which include

cynicism, emotional detachment and depression. They emphasise that burnout involves both emotional and cognitive factors, such as fatigue, demotivation, and declining productivity. The authors recommend viewing burnout as a process that evolves from initial enthusiasm to apathy and eventual withdrawal from work. Burnout is the result of prolonged interpersonal stress, characterised by exhaustion, emotional detachment, and a sense of ineffectiveness.

These findings confirm that workplace stress is a multifaceted phenomenon with serious consequences for individuals and organisations. While moderate stress can occasionally enhance performance, chronic, unmanaged stress can lead to burnout, health issues, and decreased productivity. In order to retain employees and encourage engagement, organisations must identify stressors and develop personalised, structured stress management strategies.

Workplace Stress Management Strategies

Workplace stress is one of the most common professional risks in modern organisations. According to Bruce S. McEwen (2017), stress arises when employees' capabilities do not meet job demands, resulting in allostatic load and disrupting physiological balance. Similarly, E. Ronald de Kloet (2016) emphasises that stress results from misaligned regulation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis, requiring environmental changes and the development of psychological resilience.

Robbins, Judge, Millett and Boyle (2013) identified three key areas of stress management: restructuring work, clarifying roles and strengthening social support. Effective strategies include redesigning jobs, offering flexible schedules, balancing workloads, enabling participation in decision-making processes, and defining responsibilities clearly. This reduces uncertainty, which is a key psychological stressor, as noted by Quick, Cooper, and Gavin (2008). Organisations should also respond proactively to change and assess risks. The UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2019) provides guidelines for interventions, such as training, counselling, team-building activities, and improving the feedback culture within an organisation. Other measures include flexible working arrangements, autonomy, clear roles, open leadership dialogue, emotional wellbeing programmes and career planning opportunities.

Beyond structural solutions, individual strategies are also crucial. Susan K. Wood (2020) suggests relaxation techniques, self-reflection and cognitive behavioural therapy as preventive methods for managing neurobiological stress responses. Research highlights the benefits of regular physical activity, balanced work-rest routines and mindfulness practices (Perminas et al., 2014). Personal coping strategies include: emotional regulation (relaxation, breathing, emotional literacy); problem-focused coping (situation analysis,

goal-setting); social support (from peers, family, mentors); prevention (exercise, nutrition, quality sleep). Conversely, maladaptive responses, such as alcohol use or emotional suppression, have the potential to engender long-term psychological risks.

As Quick and Henderson (2016) argue, leadership training can assist managers in recognising and addressing employee stress, thereby cultivating an organisational culture characterised by empathy, clarity, and accountability.

In summary, effective stress management requires a systemic approach. Organisations must provide structured, communicative, and development-oriented environments, while individuals build resilience through emotional regulation, problem-solving, and healthy habits. The implementation of an integrated strategy is instrumental in ensuring the attainment of enduring well-being at both the individual and organisational levels.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design

The research design employs an applied approach, with the objective of practically implementing theoretical insights within a real organisational context, specifically a preschool education institution. The objective of the present study was to identify the causes of stress, assess its frequency and consequences, and explore the stress management strategies used by employees.

In order to comprehensively and scientifically analyse the characteristics of stress management among preschool education staff, a combination of theoretical and empirical methods was employed, thus ensuring the validity, reliability, and applicability of the research in a practical setting.

The initial phase of the study was predicated on a systematic review of the extant scientific literature, with the objective of conceptually substantiating the theoretical foundations of stress, occupational burnout, and their management. The analysis incorporated a variety of theoretical perspectives: H. Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), B. S. McEwen's concept of allostatic load, E. R. de Kloet's neurobiological stress mechanisms, as well as modern occupational psychology research by Cooper & Cartwright, Leiter, Maslach, and others. The theoretical analysis was conducted in accordance with the principles of scientific systematisation, involving the selection, critical evaluation and synthesis of information. This provided a robust methodological basis for the empirical part of the study.

The empirical part of the study employed a standardised questionnaire, which is one of the most widely used quantitative methods in organisational management and psychology. This questionnaire

was developed based on the theoretical literature reviewed in the first part of the study. Questions were formulated using insights from: Bruce S. McEwen (2017) on allostatic load and physiological stress effects; E. Ronald de Kloet (2016) on HPA axis regulation and neurobiological stress response; Susan K. Wood (2020) on emotional reactions, inflammatory processes, and individual variability; Robbins & Judge (2007) on challenge vs. hindrance stress; Cooper & Cartwright (2018) on the job demands-control model; Lithuanian scholars Župerkienė, Kasiulis, Barvydienė, Valantukevičius, among others, on stressor classification, burnout symptoms, and coping strategies.

The questionnaire consisted of 17 questions, which were divided into six thematic sections: Frequency of Stressful Situations, Sources of Stress, Effects of Stress, Stress Management Strategies and Individual Coping Methods, Burnout Symptoms and a Demographic Section. Most of the questions were closed (primarily scaled), allowing for quantitative trend assessment, while several open questions gathered additional insights from respondents. The intensity of responses was evaluated using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 or 1 to 4.

Data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics and Microsoft Excel. Data analysis included: descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage distribution); cross-tabulation to examine relationships between sociodemographic variables and stress expression; data visualisation using charts and tables to clearly present key trends. This analytical process ensured that empirical results were not only quantitatively valid but also interpretable within the context of theoretical models.

Research Sample

A purposive total population sampling method was used, which is appropriate when the target of the research is all employees within a specific institution or organisation. In this case, the target population comprised all employees of the preschool education institution, regardless of job title, level of education, or work experience. At the time of the study, the institution employed 77 people. To ensure statistical reliability and a low margin of error, the required sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula. This was done under the assumption of a 93% confidence level and a margin of error of 7%. The minimum required sample size was 55 respondents. A total of 62 employees participated in the study, exceeding the required threshold and enhancing the representativeness and reliability of the results.

Ethical Considerations

Adherence to ethical standards is paramount in any empirical research, especially when dealing with sensitive psychosocial issues such as workplace stress, emotional well-being and burnout. This study strictly adhered to the core principles of research ethics in order to protect the rights, privacy and emotional safety of participants. Key measures included obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, providing assurance of emotional safety, maintaining researcher neutrality, and obtaining institutional approval. These measures ensured the study's ethical integrity, aligning it with academic research standards.

4. Research Findings

Employee-Experienced Stress and Its Causes in a Preschool Educational Institution

The majority of the study participants were women (approximately 95%), who were employed as teachers, teaching assistants or support staff. Most respondents had higher or advanced educational qualifications, and had typically worked for over 10 years. This demographic profile suggests that the participants were familiar with the specifics of their professional environment, positioning them well to assess the challenges and stressors they encountered. However, extended work experience may also be associated with both strong professional competencies and an increased risk of emotional burnout, particularly when individuals are exposed to prolonged stress.

The survey data indicates that 73% of respondents reported experiencing stress in their professional environment, while 27% stated that they did not. With regard to the frequency of stress, the majority (58%) of respondents indicated experiencing it several times per week, 10% reported daily occurrences, and 2% experienced stress multiple times a day. A mere 31% of respondents reported being free from all work-related stress. The findings of this study indicate that stress is both prevalent and frequent among preschool staff, posing a significant threat to their emotional well-being and long-term professional performance.

A survey of employees' attitudes towards stress management revealed that the majority of respondents (56%) regarded stress management as a personal responsibility, with the understanding that effective stress management entails the capacity to self-regulate and maintain composure in challenging situations. A mere 6% of respondents linked stress management to training provided to employees, while only 2% associated it with organisational initiatives. This finding suggests a deficiency in perceived institutional accountability, despite the existence of evidence indicating that organisational measures are imperative in the reduction of systemic stress.

The most prominent stress-inducing factors identified were tension related to working conditions, high workloads, insufficient remuneration, and a lack of information. Specifically, 48% of respondents

reported that working conditions caused them stress, while 46% cited workload and large group sizes as key stressors. Almost half of the respondents (45.9%) expressed discontent regarding the incongruity between their salaries and the level of responsibility demanded by their roles. The responses obtained lend support to the notion that an imbalance between work input and reward, encompassing both financial and emotional aspects, constitutes a primary source of long-term stress.

Intriguingly, interpersonal conflict was not regarded as a significant source of stress, with 45% of respondents categorically dismissing it as a stressor. A comparable tendency was noted in the domain of role clarity, wherein 46.7% of respondents expressed strong disagreement with the perception that their responsibilities were ambiguous. These findings suggest a generally positive organisational microclimate and well-defined roles. However, the results of the survey indicate that nearly one-third of the respondents agreed that communication between staff and management was insufficient, and 18.3% strongly agreed that there was a lack of concern for employee well-being.

Stress at work has immediate and long-term effects on health and emotional stability. More than half of respondents (59.7%) reported feeling emotionally exhausted after work. Other common symptoms included a lack of energy (48.3%) and reduced motivation (40%). Irritability was reported by 43.4% of respondents. Although only 6.8% expressed anxiety before work, 41.7% admitted that stress negatively affected their health, manifesting as headaches or sleep disturbances. These symptoms demonstrate that stress can manifest in both emotional and physiological ways.

Furthermore, stress frequently permeated into personal life, with 36.6% of respondents concurring that work-related stress exerted an influence that extended beyond the workplace. This phenomenon not only poses a threat to the mental well-being of employees but also has the potential to disrupt their personal lives and diminish their long-term job satisfaction. It is noteworthy that 30% of participants expressed a lack of adequate appreciation for their work, indicating a deficiency in recognition and a concomitant internalised frustration.

In summary, stress among employees in preschool educational institutions is a widespread and significant issue, tied to physical, emotional, and social strain. The majority of employees encounter stress on a regular basis, yet they tend to attribute its management to themselves rather than to the institution as a whole. This underscores the urgent need to develop organisational preventive measures, including fostering emotional awareness, improving communication, clarifying roles, enhancing compensation policies, and providing access to psychological support services.

Stress Management Strategies and Measures Employed by Preschool Educational Staff

The study data indicate that employees have different opinions about the stress management resources provided by the organisation. The most commonly used measures were emotional well-being training, with 35.6% of participants fully agreeing, and collective relaxation activities, such as events or excursions, with 28.8% of participants fully agreeing. These findings suggest that practical, accessible and community-building formats are particularly appealing. Furthermore, nearly 61% of employees reported receiving emotional support from colleagues or management, reflecting a generally positive organisational microclimate. However, openness about emotional states remains limited: only 18% of employees fully agreed that they could speak freely about their emotional state, while 29.5% gave a neutral response. This suggests that, despite the non-confrontational atmosphere, psychological safety is lacking.

The practice of flexible scheduling was found to be positively regarded by 38.3% of employees, with full agreement that their work schedules were adapted to their personal needs. Such flexibility has been demonstrated to enhance a sense of autonomy and to help reduce emotional strain. Conversely, the broader emotional well-being policy was met with varied responses. While 18.6% acknowledged its consideration, a significant proportion of 30.5% remained neutral, potentially signifying deficiencies in communication or inconsistent accessibility of these measures.

Several frequently used methods emerged when positive stress management strategies were examined. The majority of employees (64%) said that they manage their time effectively to reduce their workload. Furthermore, 66.7% of employees reported that physical activity, either through exercise or active leisure, was beneficial. Additionally, 73.8% of respondents reported that positive relationships with colleagues helped them cope with stress, thereby highlighting social support as one of the most effective stress-buffering factors. In a similar vein, 63.4% of respondents indicated that they are able to clearly differentiate between their professional and personal lives, suggesting a mature approach to work-life balance.

Conversely, relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises or meditation were used significantly less frequently: only 8.3% of people actively used them. Notably, 35% considered these strategies unfamiliar or impractical, suggesting a lack of training and practical skill development in this area. Although creative activities and participation in community events were used less frequently, they were still valued: 26.7% and 20.3% of employees, respectively, reported using them regularly.

Several unproductive behavioural patterns were identified when analysing maladaptive coping strategies. For example, 45.9% of respondents at least partially avoided discussing their emotional state at work, indicating a common tendency towards emotional suppression. 43.4% of employees reported impulsive or overly emotional reactions to stress, and 36% admitted to ignoring problems altogether. Furthermore, 43.3% reported increased consumption of caffeine or sweets during stressful periods. While these behaviours may temporarily alleviate emotional distress, they can have long-term negative effects on health.

Another concerning trend was not getting enough rest during the working day. While only 3.3% of respondents fully agreed that they took no breaks despite feeling exhausted, 23.3% acknowledged engaging in this behaviour to some extent. This raises questions about the organisation's culture of support and whether it encourages taking breaks and resting. Furthermore, 40% of employees admitted to feeling guilty after stressful situations without taking further action, suggesting the need to bolster emotional resilience and self-reflection skills.

When asked about desired stress management measures, psychological training was the most frequently mentioned, with 19% of respondents expressing a need for such programmes and another 16% favouring practical workshops on stress response techniques. This indicates a desire to expand knowledge and actively acquire practical coping skills. Additionally, 13% prioritised developing their personal skills, while 12% emphasised the importance of learning relaxation techniques. Personalised support in the form of individual psychological counselling was mentioned by 11% of respondents. Less commonly mentioned, yet still important, were wellness programmes, stressor diagnostics and enhanced organisational support (8–9%).

It is interesting to note that managerial or organisational roles in stress reduction were not prioritised by respondents, with only 3-4% selecting these as desired measures. This may imply that managerial involvement is either taken for granted or not communicated in an effective manner.

In summary, preschool educational staff actively employ a variety of stress coping strategies, most commonly relying on individual self-regulation methods such as time management, physical activity, and social support. Conversely, relaxation techniques, emotional expression, and creative activities are not being utilised to their full potential. While organizational measures such as training and flexible scheduling are met with approval, employees often report a lack of psychological safety when it comes to discussing emotional well-being. While some demonstrate maladaptive stress coping behaviours,

there is also a clear and growing interest in personal and organisational development. In order to ensure sustainable emotional well-being, a comprehensive approach is required, integrating employee initiative, practical skills training, and a strategic organisational policy that fosters a culture of psychological safety. It is only through such integration that a healthy, empathetic and resilient work environment can be created, in which stress is not destructive but managed and transformed into opportunities for professional growth.

Factors of Long-Term Stress and Occupational Burnout Among Preschool Education Staff

The research findings reveal that the stress experienced by employees often persists beyond the initial triggering event. 37% of respondents reported feeling tense until the end of the working day, 31% for several hours afterwards, and 10% for several days. Only 26% said they recovered immediately after a stressful episode. These results suggest that stress is often prolonged rather than episodic, which poses a potential risk to employees' emotional well-being over time.

When assessing the prevalence of occupational burnout among staff, it was found that 48% of respondents had encountered this condition. This suggests that almost half of employees have experienced long-term emotional exhaustion or feelings of helplessness. Conversely, 52% stated that they had not experienced burnout, suggesting that some members of the workforce demonstrate higher levels of psychological resilience.

The study also explored the specific factors that employees believe contribute to occupational burnout. The most frequently cited cause was a lack of autonomy in decision-making: 50.8% of respondents fully agreed with this statement, while 36.1% partially agreed. The second most common factor was limited opportunities for professional development, with 41.7% and 35%, respectively, fully and partially agreeing. Significant attention was also given to workload and constant pressure, which were acknowledged by 34.4% and 37.7% of respondents, respectively.

Organisational issues also emerged as critical contributors: 38.3% of respondents indicated a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities, and 33.3% described the work environment as unsafe or unsupportive. A mismatch of values was also a notable concern, with 35% of employees stating that their personal values were misaligned with those promoted by the organisation. These results emphasise the multifaceted nature of burnout, which is often driven by both working conditions and the psychological climate.

In summary, the data show that long-term stress and occupational burnout are prevalent and systemic issues in preschool education settings. Most employees

report that stress has lasting effects, and almost half have experienced burnout symptoms. The main contributing factors are limited decision-making autonomy, an excessive workload, restricted opportunities for professional growth, role ambiguity and value misalignment. These findings suggest that the pressure experienced by employees is not solely the result of individual characteristics, but also stems from broader organisational dynamics.

Analysis of Interrelationships in Research Data

The study revealed several significant interrelationships, providing a robust understanding of the connections between stressors, coping strategies and employees' emotional and physical well-being. Despite the analysis being based on aggregated rather than individual data, logical dependencies emerged clearly and consistently.

Evidently, frequent stress was associated with stronger signs of burnout. Respondents who reported often or constantly feeling stressed were also more likely to report symptoms such as fatigue, lack of motivation, irritability, sleep disturbances and emotional exhaustion. This finding is consistent with the mechanisms described in scientific literature on chronic stress and burnout, suggesting that unmanaged emotional strain directly impacts psychological well-being.

There was also a clear link between the number of reported stress factors and general well-being. Participants who identified multiple stress factors, such as an excessive workload, a lack of information or inadequate remuneration, more frequently reported poor emotional and physical health. This cumulative effect suggests that multiple stressors interact synergistically, increasing overall strain and reducing resilience over time.

A notable relationship was identified between the coping strategies employed and the ability to manage stress. Employees who proactively engaged in positive coping mechanisms, including physical activity, effective time management, and communication with colleagues, exhibited a higher propensity to report successful stress management. Conversely, individuals who did not identify any discernible strategies or exhibited a tendency to disregard stressful circumstances were more prone to mention adverse consequences, such as burnout or health issues. This finding indicates that the implementation of self-regulation mechanisms may serve to mitigate the adverse effects of stress, thereby promoting sustained professional effectiveness.

A further significant correlation was identified between organisational support and employees' emotional state. It was reported by respondents who did not feel supported by management or who lacked access to information that greater emotional insecurity, heightened tension, and a diminished sense of control were experienced. These findings indicate

that an organisation's role is pivotal in facilitating effective stress management and promoting employee well-being.

Despite the absence of a quantitative correlation between work experience and specific responses, qualitative observations indicate that employees with more years of experience more frequently identified structured coping strategies. This finding suggests a potential correlation between professional tenure and enhanced stress resilience, as well as more effective stress management skills.

In summary, the study reveals consistent interconnections between the intensity of stress, its sources, chosen coping tactics, and overall employee well-being. The relationships described highlight the importance of addressing stress not only through individual efforts but also through systemic organisational support aimed at fostering psychological well-being in the workplace.

5. Scientific Discussion

The theoretical framework of this study posits that stress is an inherent part of modern work life, particularly in emotionally intensive fields like education. The present study has confirmed the existence of a link between chronic stress and adverse psychosocial conditions, and both emotional and physical health issues. Furthermore, 68% of respondents reported experiencing stress that persisted until the end of the day, while 10% reported experiencing stress for several days, indicating a state of persistent emotional exhaustion.

The key burnout factors identified in the theory – lack of control, high workload, limited growth opportunities, unclear responsibilities and value misalignment – were confirmed by empirical evidence. For instance, 50.8% of respondents reported a lack of decision-making autonomy, while 41.7% strongly agreed that professional development opportunities were inadequate.

A strong alignment between theory and practice emerged. While theoretical models emphasise employers' responsibility to promote emotional well-being, only 18.6% of employees felt that their organisation genuinely supported their mental health. This highlights the discrepancy between theoretical ideals and their implementation in the real world.

The theoretical underpinnings of individual coping strategies, encompassing physical activity, relaxation techniques and time management, were examined and partially substantiated by the data. The data revealed that, while 36.7% of respondents frequently engage in physical exercise, only 8.3% of these individuals also regularly utilise relaxation techniques. This finding indicates that, while some coping strategies are evident, others remain underutilised.

In accordance with the findings of academic research, 63% of respondents recognised the significance of work-life balance in the prevention of burnout.

In conclusion, the study confirms most of the theoretical assumptions concerning stress, burnout and coping mechanisms in educational settings. However, the limited practical application of certain organisational and individual strategies highlights the need for a closer integration of theory and practice to promote employee well-being.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the concept, types, and causes of stress revealed that stress is a multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon, rooted in both biological and psychosocial foundations. In scientific literature, stress is defined as a subjective interaction between external demands and an individual's internal resources. Within the context of the workplace, the genesis of stress is predominantly influenced by structural factors, including workload intensity, ambiguous responsibilities, communication deficiencies, and a paucity of social support. In the domain of preschool education, these stressors assume a distinct form due to constant emotional demands, high levels of responsibility, and limited opportunities to disengage from sources of stress.

Effective stress management requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond individual coping strategies. Organisations must create conditions that reduce allostatic load, such as offering flexible working hours, ensuring roles are clearly defined, fostering open communication and enhancing managerial competencies in psychological well-being. At the same time, employees should be encouraged to practise self-regulation methods such as physical activity, emotional awareness and relaxation techniques.

Empirical evidence has indicated that the predominant sources of stress within preschool institutions pertain to aspects such as workload, inadequate compensation, and a paucity of information. The prevalence of stress is pervasive and recurrent, with a significant proportion of respondents reporting persistent emotional exhaustion and diminished motivation. Despite the positive ratings pertaining to the interpersonal climate among colleagues, the organisation's role in stress management remains insufficiently proactive. The manifestation of physiological and emotional symptoms, including sleep disturbances, irritability, and health complaints, signifies a deepening impact that extends beyond the realm of work performance, encompassing the long-term well-being of employees.

The management of stress is chiefly the domain of the individual, yet the implementation of such strategies is often lacking in both systematic rigour and practical application. The most common strategies employed, namely time management, physical activity, and social support, are positive but insufficient. It is evident that relaxation techniques, emotional expression, and psychological safety remain underdeveloped and seldom practised. A salient trend that has been observed is one of emotional suppression, reluctance to disclose personal information, and avoidance of potentially stressful situations. This may be indicative of a deficiency in practical coping mechanisms and inadequate organisational support. Approximately 50% of the employees exhibited symptoms of professional burnout, particularly with regard to limited decision-making autonomy and constrained opportunities for professional development.

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