



*Journal of Advances and  
Scholarly Researches in  
Allied Education*

*Vol. VIII, Issue No. XVI,  
Oct-2014, ISSN 2230-7540*

**LITERATURE REVIEW OF OCCUPATIONAL  
STRESS AND COPING MECHANISM WITH  
REFERENCE TO GENDER**

AN  
INTERNATIONALLY  
INDEXED PEER  
REVIEWED &  
REFEREED JOURNAL

# Literature Review of Occupational Stress and Coping Mechanism With Reference To Gender

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**Abstract – Stress has been a common factor affecting all aspects of life including interpersonal relationships, work, school, and family. Coping strategies play a critical role in an individual's physical and psychological well-being when faced with challenges and negative events. Also, coping can be viewed as an approach driven to manage goals and utilize social resources such as co-worker and family support to achieve one's goals. This paper focuses coping mechanism and occupational stress specific to gender.**

**Keywords: Stress, Coping, Strategies, Occupational**

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## INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is a major hazard for many workers. Increased workloads, downsizing, overtime, hostile work environments, and shift work are just a few of the many causes of stressful working conditions. This factsheet addresses some of the causes of workplace stress and solutions for change. The human body has a natural chemical response to a threat or demand, commonly known as the "flight or fight" reaction, which includes the release of adrenalin. Once the threat or demand is over the body can return to its natural state. A STRESSOR is an event or set of conditions that causes a stress response. STRESS is the body's physiological response to the stressor, and STRAIN is the body's longer-term reaction to chronic stress.

Occupational stress can affect health when the stressors of the workplace exceed the employee's ability to have some control over their situation or to cope in other ways. For example:

- Workers are overburdened with workloads that remain high regardless of their efforts: the workload is the STRESSOR
- Employees feel anxious and their heart rate speeds up because they cannot control their workloads: that is STRESS
- Increased blood pressure, insomnia, or chronic headaches: that is STRAIN

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stress and superintendence seem to be synonymous, but the specifics of work related stress in the position and how superintendent's deal with it has been disregarded (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2004). The 2007 mid-decade study of the state of the superintendence confirmed,

"An important challenge facing superintendents is how to handle personal stress in a positive and constructive manner without passing it on to their staff. Intellectually understanding that stress is a normal condition of the position is just as important as finding personal coping mechanisms to reduce its negative effects. Coping, understanding, and reducing superintendent stress should be a high priority for school boards and professional associations serving superintendents and boards".

During the last 15 years, the superintendents primary role has transformed into one that focuses more on being a facilitator than a figurehead (Andero, 2000). It has also become more about influencing stakeholders' decisions rather than simply making decisions (Brandt, 1993; Nussbaum 2007). School administrators in the next 15 years will face even more challenges. Reviewing the second edition of the Handbook of Research on Educational Research, Fowler (1999) stated, superintendents of the next decade will deal with a society in flux (p. 594). Glass (2002) agreed superintendents roles and responsibilities have made drastic changes in the past few years. With the fluctuation in expectations, and demands on the superintendent position, a

growing problem is superintendent turnover (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Nussbaum, 2007).

## IMPACT OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN HUMAN BODY

Acute, or short-term, stress causes an immediate reaction in the body. If the threat or demand passes quickly, the body generally returns to normal. However, with prolonged stress, many health problems can develop. Some of the early symptoms of stress-related problems include:

### ➤ **Physical Symptoms:**

- Headaches
- Stomach problems
- Eating disorders
- Sleep disturbances
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches & pains
- Chronic mild illnesses

### ➤ **Psychological & Behavioral:**

- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Low morale
- Depression
- Alcohol & drug use
- Feeling powerless
- Isolation from co-workers

If exposure to stressors continues for a longer period of time, chronic health problems can develop, such as:

### ➤ **Physical Conditions:**

- High Blood Pressure
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Spastic colon
- Immune system dysfunction
- Diabetes

- Asthma
- Musculoskeletal disorders
- **Psychological & Behavioral Problems:**
- Serious depression
- Suicidal behavior
- Domestic violence
- Alcohol abuse
- Substance abuse
- Burnout

## STRATEGIES FOR SOLUTIONS

Getting affected members to work together with union representatives is a key in addressing occupational stress. Documenting the problem is an important first step. This could include worker surveys, hazard mapping, analyzing existing employer data such as injury & illness logs or workers' compensation data, or tracking staffing patterns.

Where management cooperation is viable, the union and affected members can engage in a joint process to identify occupational stressors and develop interventions that will reduce stress. This can be done through health and safety and labor/management committees and training and education programs. Strategies may include involving workers in job and workplace design, having input on shift schedules, and/or developing a workplace violence prevention policy or program. Where management is not cooperative, the union can conduct its own campaign holding peer group meetings, filing mass grievances, or waging a public awareness campaign.

## COPING MECHANISMS

Equally important in the application of models to understand occupational stress is the study of coping strategies used by individuals. A wide range of coping strategies exist, perhaps as varied as individuals themselves. Researchers often distinguish these strategies as emotion-focused versus problem-focused coping. Lazarus and Folkman have described problem-focused coping as efforts to modify the problem at hand which includes generating options to resolve the problem, evaluating the pros and cons of different problems, and implementing steps to solve the problem. Additionally, this type of coping is more effective when the individual possesses a high degree of control over external stressors and factors and is associated with general wellbeing. On the other hand, emotion-focused coping involves aiming to manage the emotional distress that is associated with a particular situation and often involves coping

mechanisms such as denial, seeking, social support, positive reframing of events, and venting of emotions. The literature suggests that emotion-focused forms of coping (e.g., humor or prayer) are more likely to be effective when there has been an appraisal that nothing can be done to modify harmful, threatening, or challenging environmental or work conditions

## **CONCLUSION:**

In this paper we found that one form of stress that is commonly examined is occupational stress, also known as job or work stress. Occupational stress is prevalent in today's fast-past society. Such stress results in a variety of negative health outcomes, impacting not only the individual, but also the family and the organization at which the individual is employed. It stands to reason that a solid understanding of the causes and results of occupational stress can lead to greater job satisfaction and improved health among workers, both young and old.

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- Take Back Your Time Day <http://www.timeday.org>
- Job Stress Network <http://www.workhealth.org>
- Hazards Magazine: Do-it-yourself Research: <http://www.hazards.org/diyresearch>