

STRESS AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS IN PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract

In Vietnam, the profession of preschool teacher is a field of labor activity in the national education system, educating children at preschool age (from 0 to 6 years old). Teachers have very high stress levels because not only are teachers stressed when dealing with so many different children on a daily basis, but they are also responsible for their education and care for shaping and controlling their daily activities. Teacher stress is believed to have a significant negative impact on the physical and mental health of teachers, which leads to impaired educational quality and less effectiveness.

For the purpose of giving a detailed look at Stress as well as its manifestations, we conducted a random survey with 200 teachers from 10 preschools in a province in the southern region of Vietnam.

The analysis results show that the rate of teachers experiencing stress is 24.5%, of which the mild level is 15.3%, the moderate level is 6.2% and the severe level is 3.0%. Besides, the most common stress-related manifestations that teachers encounter are insomnia, headaches, feeling pressured, or irritable, worrying for no reason, and being easily agitated.

From these results, we believe that in order to improve the stress status of teachers, authorities, organizations and unions need to pay attention to supporting teachers, improving income, and reducing work pressure and working time.

Keywords: *stress, stress in preschool teachers, manifestations of stress, Vietnamese preschool teachers*

1. INTRODUCTION

Work stress can be understood as a change in a person's physical or mental state in response to the demands placed on the job (Colligan & Higgins, 2006). Stress is a feeling created when the body reacts to specific events, this is the body's way of overcoming challenges and preparing to face a difficult situation with concentration, strength, endurance, and heightened alertness (Kaur, 2011).

In Vietnam, the profession of preschool teacher is a field of labor activity in the national education system, educating children at preschool age (from 0 to 6 years old). In addition to educating students with necessary skills and foundational knowledge for learning at the next level of education, preschool teachers also carry out nurturing and educational activities such as eating, sleeping, and cleaning. students, etc. In addition, teachers also have to deal with unexpected situations such as crying children, vomiting children, children hitting friends, children swallowing foreign objects, etc. At the same time, they also have to take care of many children in the classroom.

Kaur (2011) argues that teachers have very high stress levels because not only are teachers stressed when dealing with so many different children on a daily basis, but they are also responsible for educating and helping to shape they become useful members of society. Ho, Leung & Fung (2003) argue that increasing workload and culture of acceptance both cause stress for teachers. Teacher stress will have a significant negative impact on the physical and mental health of teachers, which will accelerate teacher turnover, leading to a weakening of the entire educational system. (Lo, 2014). Researches by Huong (2013) and Thoa (2013) show that most teachers have manifestations of occupational stress such as headaches, loss of concentration, fatigue, and unwillingness to work, sometimes aggressive behavior towards children. They believe that the stress of preschool teachers affects the physical and mental health of teachers, thereby affecting the quality of education.

It can be seen that preschool teachers are a group of subjects that are easily stressed by work, and at the same time, stress of preschool teachers not only affects their own health and psychology but also affects their effectiveness, and the quality of preschool educational institutions. We conducted this study to give a detailed look at the stress level of preschool teachers as well as its common manifestations from which to make recommendations for stress reduction. To conduct this study, we answered the following questions:

- (1)What is the stress level of preschool teachers?
- (2)What are the specific manifestations of stress in preschool teachers?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Stress

Selye (1950) defined Stress as a nonspecific biological response of the body to stressful situations. These are reactions aimed at restoring homeostasis, overcoming situations to ensure adequate maintenance and adaptation to changing living conditions, when it is not adapted, stress can promote the body to make the body susceptible to disease. Another study Selye (1975), took a broader view of stress and suggested that stress is a rhythm of life that is always present at any point in our existence, any effect on any organ can cause stress; Stress is not always the result of injury, on the contrary, there are two different, opposing types of stress: normal healthy stress "Eustress", toxic stress or negative stress "Dystress". Lazarus (1966) said Stress as a special interaction process between humans and the environment. In which the subject perceives the event from the environment as a challenge, a disappointment or as a requirement that the subject cannot cope with - the subject faces danger. Together with it Beehr & Newman (1978) argue that occupational stress is the interaction between working conditions and worker characteristics that alter normal psychological or physiological functions or both. Oanh (2003) said that Stress is the adaptation of people to the working environment or to the requirements of the system, and the system's adaptation to people are also factors that cause fatigue in the process.

2.2 Stress in preschool teachers

Early childhood teachers are under tremendous pressure to ensure that their young students are prepared for future success, pressures that add to their vulnerability to stress (Gooze, 2014; Sandilos et al., 2018). Teacher stress is thought to be a negative emotional experience related to an individual's ability to deal with stressors in the classroom (Kyriacou, 2001; Sandilos et al., 2018; Greenberg, Brown & Abenavoli, 2016).

Fimian & Fastenau (1990) suggest that teacher stress is mainly due to occupational stress, it is related to frustration due to lack of control over work-related decisions and limited access to development opportunities. In addition, Hagekull & Hammarberg (2004) perceived lack of control over their work as a major cause of work stress. Issues related to student behavior management are a prominent and frequent cause of stress for teachers, regardless of grade level (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014). In many early childhood settings, these high job-related demands are not equated with adequate job support, and for that reason teachers have high rates of burnout and turnover in the workforce (Whitebook, Phillips & Howes, 2014).

Teacher stress has consequences for the quality of interactions in the preschool classroom (Hamre & Pianta, 2004), which in turn affects the social, emotional, and academic skills of young children (Raver, 2004). At the same time, the level of teachers' job stress is also related to pressure to increase academic ratings in preschool children (Pakarinen et al., 2010).

2.3 Stress-related manifestations in preschool teachers

Fimian & Fastenau (1990) asserted that teacher stress includes emotional, physical, and work-related behavioral manifestations. Logan & Ganster (2005) stress leads to significant negative physical as well as mental manifestations. (i) *Physical manifestations*, prolonged weakness, muscle tension, tension headaches and persistent migraines, increased and unstable blood pressure....(Khue, 1995; Bui, Nguyen & Le, 2022). (ii) *Psychologically manifest*, this is a change in emotions, concentration, memory, thinking, language, behavior, these changes were to varying degrees, depending on the intensity and duration of the stressors and the subject's self-assessment of those triggers (Worchel & Shebilsue, 2007; Ehsan & Ali, 2019). (iii) *Cognitive manifestations*: According to Thong (2006) that when there is a certain level of stress, it can lead to a positive change in thinking, memory, attention ability, but if the stress is excessive or prolonged, this can lead to the decline in human cognition such as: feeling, less sensitive perception (such as slow reception of information, seeing, hearing, hearing, feeling). Either it leads to impaired memory, inability to focus attention on anything, or incorrect decision-making (Revelation, 2001). (iv) *Behavioral manifestations*: when under stress, people can display three basic behaviors: destructive, withdraw, stop responding (Lan & Nguyen, 2007; Khai, 2001)

Thus, we realize that stress not only changes physically and physiologically but also changes psychologically and behaviorally. From these negative changes, the subject's quality of life and work can be severely affected.

3. Data and methods

Data

To measure the level of stress as well as its manifestations in preschool teachers, the study conducted a random survey with 200 teachers from 10 preschools in 1 province in the south of Vietnam during the period from February 2022 to July 2022.

The scale

To determine the level of stress, the research used the Stress, depression, and anxiety scale (DASS 21), the DASS-21 scale was evaluated for reliability and validity with Cronbach's Alpha index from 0.70 to 0.88 for sub-categories and for the entire scale (Tran, Tran & Fisher, 2013). Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with 0 scores corresponding to the situation that does not occur and 3 corresponding to the current condition occurring frequently. Total score to determine stress in which the composite score of S questions in DASS is multiplied by 2. Teachers are stressed when the DASS stress score is ≥ 15 , in which the degree of stress is mild (15-18 scores), moderate (19-25 scores), heavy (Severe stress: 26-33 scores) and very heavy ≥ 34 scores)

The scale of stress expression of preschool teachers is built on a 5-level Likert scale, from never to very often, corresponding to a score from 0 to 4. This scale is built based on literature review and combined with expert interviews and pilot surveys with 50 preschool teachers. The official scale to measure the expression of stress of preschool teachers was tested for its reliability and validity by Cronback's Alpha reliability and principal component analysis (PCA). The test results have shown that the reliability and validity of these scales are guaranteed; Teachers' expressions are classified into two main groups: psycho-emotional expression with 17 questions and behavioral expression - behavior with 14 questions.

Data analysis methods

To accomplish the goal of the study, we use descriptive statistics combined with comparison, the analytical support tool is SPSS software version 26 of IBM.

4. Research results

4.1 Stress level of preschool teachers

The results of the analysis of stress levels with 200 teachers from 10 preschools included in the sample are shown in Figure 1. The stress rate of preschool teachers is 24.5%, in which mild level accounts for the highest rate (15.5%), severe level (3%), and moderate level is 6.2%.

With this result, it can be said that $\frac{1}{4}$ of preschool teachers suffer from Stress, in which 9.2% of preschool teachers suffer from moderate and severe stress.

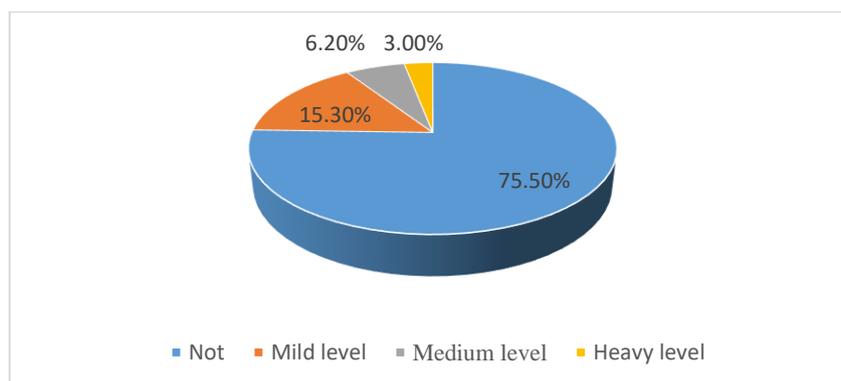


Figure 1: Stress level of preschool teachers

4.2 Stress expression in preschool teachers

Expression of emotions - psychology

Table 1 describes the psychological-emotional scores of teachers when facing stress problems. The analysis results show that the average score of the expressions is 1.69 (on a scale from 0 to 4). This means that the preschool teacher's expression level on psycho-emotional level is "sometimes" (2 scores) mainly.

In addition, the study also analyzes and compares the teacher's emotional-emotional scores according to demographic characteristics through the T-test. The analysis results show that all the P.values of the comparison pairs are > 0.05, so there is no significant difference.

Table 1. Preschool teacher's expression on psychology - emotion

Demographic characteristics	Mean	SD	t	P.value
Age group				
≤ 30	1.71	0.23	0.63	0.527
>30	1.68	0.26		
Education				
Graduated from college	1.69	0.26	0.22	0.827
Graduated from university	1.70	0.24		
Experience				
<5 years	1.70	0.23	0.43	0.668
≥ 5 years	1.69	0.26		
Overall GPA	1.69	.25		

Note: Preschool teachers' stress-related behaviors were measured by 5 levels, from no expression to very frequent expression, corresponding to a scale of 0 to 4; The average score is the teacher's performance level, the higher the average score, the more frequent the expression level.

Figure 2, describes in detail the expression level of each component of emotion - psychological state when facing stress-related problems of preschool teachers. In which the most mentioned emotion is "feeling pressured, pressed about work", the expression level of these two emotions reached 2.26 scores (on a scale from 0 to 4 scores). Next is the expression "no longer feeling interested in work and being too sensitive and vulnerable", these two emotions reach 2.16 and 2.14 scores respectively. With the above scores, these are emotions that are expressed mainly in the "frequent" and "occasionally" levels. Meanwhile, the emotion with the lowest expression score is "depressed, suicidal" with 0.54 scores, equivalent to the rate of expression mainly "never" and "rarely". In addition, other emotions have expression scores ranging from 1.17 to 2 scores, corresponding to the predominant expression level from "rarely" to "occasionally".

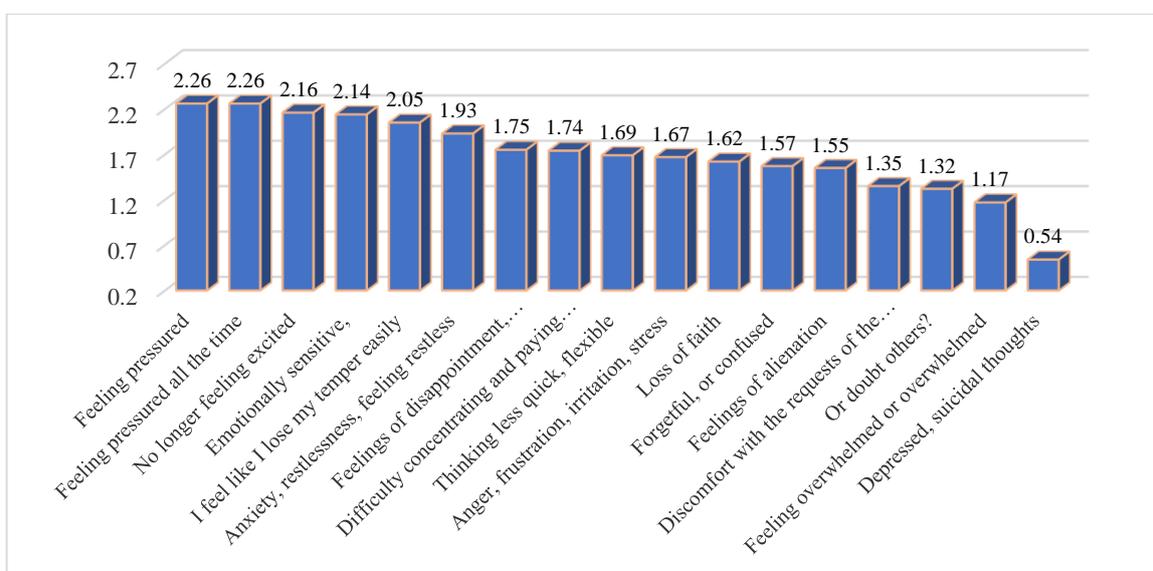


Figure 2. Expression of emotions

Manifestations of behavior – conduct

The measure of teachers' behavior- conduct performance when having stress problems is 1.53 scores, lower than the emotional-psychological expression above (1.69). The fact shows that emotions affect behavior, but it is not how the behavior is felt, but the behavior depends on many issues such as external circumstances, environment, time ...Therefore, the expression level of emotions will be higher than the level of expression in the aspect of behavior - behavior when

teachers encounter stress-related problems. Besides, the analysis results of Table 2 also show that there is no statistically significant difference in behavior according to the characteristics of teachers.

Table 2: Preschool teachers' expressions of behavior and manners

Demographic characteristics	Mean	SD	t	P.value
Age group				
<30	1.56	0.34	0.66	0.509
>30	1.52	0.40		
Education				
Graduated from college	1.54	0.37	0.22	0.823
Graduated from university	1.53	0.40		
Experience				
<5 years	1.57	0.33	0.93	0.54
≥ 5 years	1.52	0.41		
Overall GPA	1.53	.38		

Note: Preschool teachers' stress-related behaviors were measured by 5 levels, from no expression to very frequent expression, corresponding to a scale of 0 to 4; The average score is the teacher's performance level, the higher the average score, the more frequent the expression level

Figure 3 describes in detail the levels of behavior and behavior of preschool teachers when facing stress-related problems. The expression score of each behavior is different and ranges from 0.87 scores to 2.11 scores. The behaviors of preschool teachers when facing stress-related problems that occur most often are “Having vague thoughts, mainly negative thoughts (2.11 scores); working sluggishly, without enthusiasm at work (2.07 scores); always hesitant, less flexible at work (2.05 scores)”. The behaviors of preschool teachers when dealing with stress-related problems that occur least often are “There is a need to invite friends to drink alcohol, beer, go out and play for fun (0.93); Give up, ignore everything (0.87). In addition, other components have expression scores ranging from 1.1 to 1.9 scores, corresponding to the expression level mainly from "rarely" to "occasionally".

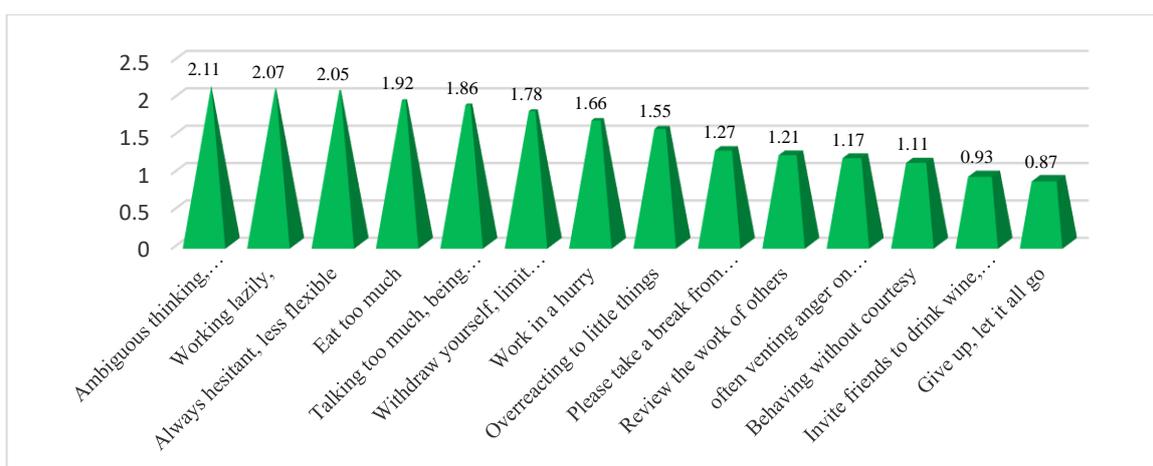


Figure 3. Behavioral expression level

Thus, the analysis results above show that there are many negative expressions of teachers in terms of emotions and behaviors when stressed. The above negative expressions include expressions related to work as well as daily life. Stress can make teachers have negative thoughts, may give up and not be interested in their daily work anymore. More serious is that there are teachers who have thoughts of giving up their jobs.

5. Conclusion – Discussion

Analytical results based on a survey sample of 200 preschool teachers in a province in the south of Vietnam show that the stress at work in preschool teachers is currently at an alarming state, with nearly one-quarter of teachers suffering from stress. , of which about 10% are moderate and severe. the fact that teachers have a high rate of stress has been proven by previous studies such as: Borg and Falzon, 1989 reported that up to a third of teachers are stressed; Research by Chi & Tien, (2014) shows that the teacher's stress rate is 27.6%. However, our research results have a higher percentage of teachers suffering from stress (24.5%) than in the study of Quynh et al., 2022 (19.8%). We believe that this difference is due to different survey subjects: In the study of Quynh et al (2022), the survey subjects were lecturers of universities; While preschool teachers are our survey subjects; With it preschool teachers are said to be subject to a lot of pressure (Ho, Leung & Fung, 2003; Lo, 2014).

Research results on teachers' expressions of stress-related problems show that Psycho-emotional manifestations such as insomnia, headaches, feeling pressured, are common problems. most frequent. Along with it in terms of behavior when

there is stress, teachers often have behaviors such as irritability, unreasonable anxiety, excitability, fear of sounds. These expressions are also found in the study of Huong (2013) and Thoa (2013). The two authors said that the most common negative manifestations that preschool teachers encounter are headaches, stress, distraction, fatigue, unwillingness to work, and sometimes aggressive behavior towards children.

Explaining the problem that preschool teachers often have the above symptoms, we believe that preschool teachers must regularly observe and pay attention to all children's activities to avoid injury and ensure children's safety. . In addition, children in the class have different psycho-physiological characteristics that require teachers to always be in a state of high concentration, improvising flexibly in the process of working. Therefore, it is such a high-pressure environment, having to work continuously for many hours a day, having little time for yourself and having little opportunity to develop yourself that is the cause of the above symptoms.

6. Recommendations

To minimize stress for preschool teachers, managers need to pay attention to a number of issues related to the working regime such as: increasing salary income, increasing overtime allowance and reducing working hours to increase motivation and re-energize teachers. In addition, school trade unions need to pay attention to the spiritual life of preschool teachers, mutual support and help in daily work as well as in life. Creating a supportive and cooperative environment helps preschool teachers feel comfortable working to minimize pressure.

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