

# Analysis of Coping Strategies In The Face Of Occupational Hazards - A Study Of White Collar Employees Of Education Sector In West Bengal (India)



**Rupsha Roy<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

*Education Scenario in West Bengal is in news always for reasons which are highly unacceptable to the culture and belief of the education sector of West Bengal. West Bengal is always considered as the cradle of Indian renaissance and national freedom movement. It is also considered as a land of intellectual awakening. The recent events of recurrence of student's confrontation in colleges and universities, often quite disrespectful to even teachers, add insult to injuries. Overall, education in Bengal is suffocating for lack of fresh thinking how to rejuvenate the sagging morale and spirit of the teaching community, students and their worried parents. Hence this study is made because of its importance and relevance in today's education sector as it has become a major concern to provide a hazard free workplace to the Employees working in this sector. In today's teachers face many physical and psychological problems due to their workload and also occupational stress at the workplace. This study aims to discuss about pertinent issues related to the occupational hazards of the education sector and how it can be dealt effectively by using the coping strategies. The research method that is used to identify the hazards and also the factors influencing the coping strategies are mixed in nature i.e is both qualitative and quantitative research. The factors are identified using the qualitative content analysis method on secondary data and written narratives of in-depth interviews taken. Based on the conceptual framework that is obtained from qualitative data hypothesis is formulated.*

*The study finally contributes to the knowledge of the occupational hazards and its impacts on the employees working in educational sector of West Bengal. It enhances the awareness of the most common sources which escalate the impacts of the occupational hazards on the individuals. The study also identifies of various coping strategies adopted by the employees to cope with the hazards also highlighting the factors which influence the individual in adopting the specific coping strategies.*

*Keywords: White Collar, Education Sector, Occupational Hazard, Coping Strategy, Stakeholder Complexity, Stakeholder Multiplicity.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Working in education sector has traditionally been regarded as low hazardous occupation. This concept has made a huge migration of employees from other corporate to the education

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<sup>1</sup> PhD, ICFAI University Jharkhand, rupsharoy@gmail.com

sector. To some extent in the historical point of view this idea could be considered as true, but it is not so with the modern education system. Drawing on a considerable body of empirical evidences it is argued that during the past decades hazards in the education sectors have a tendency to increase in all continents. It is generally agreed that one of the most common determinants of these hazards are the increasing demand of the employees in the education sector.

An extensive literature review has been carried out in the areas of occupational hazards in education sector, sources of the occupational hazards, overview of education sector of West Bengal, Myers-Briggs type indicator and Coping Strategy Inventory published in International and National journals to identify the research gaps,

## **OBJECTIVE & HYPOTHESIS**

Research objective emanated from the research problem statement are:

1. To provide the general background to the discussion on occupational hazards faced by the employee working in white collar jobs in the Educational sector in West Bengal.
2. To review and summarize the impacts of these occupational hazards on the employee's working in the education sector of West Bengal.
3. To identify the factors causing occupational hazards to the employees in the education sector.
4. To identify and prioritize the sources of these occupational hazards.
5. To analyse the coping strategies adopted to cope with the occupational hazards of the education sector.
6. To analyse the factors influencing the coping strategies of the employees facing the occupational hazards in the education sector.

In order to achieve these objectives a set of 22 hypotheses have been formulated for this study and tested. The research hypothesis are categorised in three groups.

- The **First group** deals with the impact of occupational hazard among different age groups, gender, marital status, educational level, earning status, working modes, working experience, different organisations, different funding agencies, respondents occupying different positions in the organisation and different personality traits.
- The **Second Group** tries to investigate the significant predictors of the impact of occupational hazards.
- The **Third group** deals with variables influencing the different coping strategies.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology that is followed is of the type mixed research design in terms of both qualitative and quantitative research design approach has been adopted for achieving the objective of the research.

The research design is divided into two phases. Initially the qualitative research method is adopted to identify the hazards, sources of hazards, coping strategies and factors influencing the coping strategies amongst the respondents working in the education sector of West Bengal with the help of "the public voice". This phase has been utilized to identify the concepts to develop a conceptual framework. The qualitative research is used as a precursor to quantitative method used in phase – 2.

The concepts evolved from the phase – 1 were utilized in developing a questionnaire for testing the conceptual framework so evolved. The questionnaire consists of eight sections. These eight sections are to capture data of demographic details of the respondent, occupational information of the respondent, personality trait identification, impact of occupational hazard, sources of occupational hazard, stakeholder related information, task related information and coping strategy questionnaire.

The research instrument used is a well designed questionnaire for converting the qualitative data into quantitative. Two very popular instruments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) instrument and the Coping Strategy Inventory (CSI) instrument are used. The MBTI instrument is used to analyse the personality trait of the respondent and the CSI instrument is used to analyse the coping strategies adopted by the respondents when faced with occupational hazard.

## **DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS**

Data that is used for this research is collected in two phases.

First phase is the qualitative data, which is collected with the help of unstructured interview of respondents who faced and agreed to participate in this research, provided their identity is not disclosed.

The second phase of data was collected from the population of the academicians in whole of West Bengal belonging to 15 universities, 10 colleges, 5 professional institutes and 10 Schools. The data was collected both by personal administration and by online tools like Google forms and Survey Monkey.

The primary data collected from respondents was edited, coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS 20.0 software. Pilot survey data is analysed for corrections and modifications of the questionnaire. Data Analysis is presented in two sections. Section – I deals with Qualitative Data Analysis and Section – II deals with Quantitative Data Analysis.

Out of the total 22 hypotheses, 11 were tested using ANOVA test while the remaining 11 were tested through linear regression analysis. Out of the 11 hypothesis 7 hypotheses were retained since their significant value was below the cutoff value of 0.05. Three exploratory factor analyses was performed on the 13 scale items of the sources of occupational hazards, 24 scale items of stakeholder related concepts and 7 scale items of task related concepts. Two linear equations were obtained for predicting the impact of occupational hazard. The first linear equation is to predict the impact of occupational hazard with the demographic and organisational variables. The second linear equation is used to predict the impact of occupational hazard with the factors of sources of occupational hazards, stakeholder concepts and task concepts.

## **FINDINGS**

The research findings are divided into qualitative data analysis findings and quantitative data analysis findings. These findings are explained below:-

### **Qualitative data analysis Findings:**

1. Stake holder related concepts, task related concepts, organisational policies, organisational culture, management issues, job related variables like job profile, job security etc, relationship with parents, student handling and control process all

contribute to escalate the occupational hazards among the employees of the education sector of West Bengal.

2. The hazards impact the employees both physically and mentally. Physically by causing damage to their health and body and mentally by making them too loose interest in their jobs, causing boredom and fatigue impacting their performance and quality of work life.
3. To cope with these hazards the employees adopt various strategies like emotion focused, problem focused, self criticism, social withdrawal, seeking support and if they can't cope then they exit either by resigning or re-locating themselves from the place of hazard.
4. To adopt any coping mechanism the employee's personality trait and their experience in their jobs influences a lot.

### **Quantitative data analysis Findings:**

The theories formed from the findings of the qualitative phase are tested through the help of a questionnaire and collecting primary data with his questionnaire. The findings that emerged from the quantitative data analysis are as follows:

Initially the impact of occupational hazard was analyzed with the demographic variables like gender, age group, marital status, educational level and earning status. On analysis with these variables the following findings were obtained:

1. The impact of occupational hazard is not significantly different for male or female employees. It means that the impact is same as to making them exhausted sleepless, losing appetite and sometimes even have to take the help of medicines.
2. The employees belonging to higher age groups are impacted by the hazards more than those belonging to lower age groups.
3. In the case of the educational level of the respondents it was found from the data that the higher the education level the higher is the impact.
4. It was found that the impact was quite higher for respondents who were sole earners. Where as in case of shared earners the impact was less.

The impact of the occupational hazard after being analysed with the demographic variable were analysed with organisational variables like academic experience, mode of working, type or category of the organisation in which the respondents are working, the type of funding mode of the organisation, and also the position held by the respondents in their organisation. The findings obtained by this analysis are as follows:-

1. The higher the academic experience the higher is the impact.
2. It has been found from the data that the employees who are permanently employed are having high potential of impact compared to temporary employees. As the temporary employees are quite free to avoid the unpleasant situations in their jobs either by changing the organisation or by remaining away from the situation.
3. In West Bengal the hazard is near to negligible in case of primary schools and secondary schools. Professors, Associate Professors and Assistant Professors are entrusted with clerical duties like maintenance of attendance records, defaulter's list, evaluation data, assessment data etc, administrative work, social work, counseling, mentoring, participation in conferences and workshops, paper publications, paper corrections, handling examinations, working with students in

their projects and also in private colleges additional responsibility is given to the professors to get students a type of marketing job also. Targets are there for all these activities and pressure is also given on them for these activities.

4. In West Bengal there are both private and public players in the organisations belonging to the educational sector. The school is run by both state government and private organisations. Even in case of universities in West Bengal there are universities run by state government, private universities, deemed universities and also one university run by the central government. Hence the impacts of the hazards are different for organisations run by state government or private organisations.
5. The data analysis in this perspective revealed that higher the position occupied is more prone to the hazard and hence the impact is also high. It is quite evident that employees who occupy higher positions in the organisations have more responsibilities and commitments to their jobs. Hence more the responsibility more prone to hazards likes stress and burnouts.

One more important finding that was observed from this study is that the personality trait that emerged as maximum number among the respondents is extroverted sensing thinking and judging in short it is abbreviated as ESTJ. Robert Heyward suggests in his personality page that ESTJ's when they deal with issues rationally and logically, their primary mode of living is focused externally. Whereas when they take things via their five senses in literal and concrete fashion, their secondary mode is internal.

The next emerging personality trait is introverted sensing thinking and judging in short it is abbreviated as ISTJ.

On analysis of the demographic variables and organisation variable the analysis focuses on the sources of the hazards. Three groups of sources were identified. They are individual and organisational sources, stakeholder related sources and task related sources.

The factor analysis reduced individual and organisational variables into 4 factors, stakeholder related variables into 6 factors and task related variables into 3 factors. So the research identified a total of  $(7 + 4 + 3)$  14 factors as sources of the hazards in the education sector of West Bengal. These 14 factors are entity interface, work structure, work environment, policies, and transparency in organisation, stakeholder administrative issues, stakeholder interface, stakeholder policies, student control, parent control, task control, task density and task conflict.

These 14 factors were then analysed using a linear regression model. The model derived the significant sources for the hazards as task conflict, task control, student control, stakeholder interface, transparency in organisation and work environment. Hence these sources have a great role to play in either escalation or de-escalation of the hazards.

A very interesting finding in this study is that the coping strategies that are adopted by the individual to cope with the occupational hazard are a combination of multiple coping strategies. As per the theory of Niedl (1996), Zapf and Gross (2001) the individuals adopt avoidance strategies in the beginning of the hazards. But the finding of this study says that most of the individuals adapt to the problem focused strategies. As per the descriptive statistics the coping strategies with the highest to the lowest means are in the order of problem solving, cognitive restructuring, social support, express emotion, wishful thinking, social withdrawal, problem avoidance, political and self criticism respectively. Coping strategies are basically a conscious effort to solve problems of both personal and inter-

personal nature to overcome, minimize or tolerate any hazards like stress or conflict. As per various researches the two main types of coping strategies are emotion and problem focused coping.

After understanding the coping strategies adopted by the individuals the next analysis was to find the demographic and organisational factors which are influencing the employee to adopt the particular coping strategy.

1. To analyse individually gender is significantly associated with the coping strategy of self criticism only.
2. Age group of the employees is significantly associated with coping strategies like problem solving, cognitive restructuring, express emotion, problem avoidance and self criticism.
3. Educational level is significantly associated with all the nine coping strategies.

On analysis of organisational variable with coping strategies it was found that the variables like organisation type, the funding agency of the organisation and the position held by the employees are significantly associated with the coping strategy adopted by them.

1. Out of these three variables the organisation type is significantly associated with only one coping strategy that is wishful thinking.
2. The other two variables like funding agency of the organisation and the position held by the individual is significantly associated with all the nine coping strategies.

Many researchers have supported the theory that individuals who were post graduates, individuals who were in the position of head of the department or organisation and individuals with greater work experience adopted the problem focused coping strategies to a greater extent. Another research also stressed on the fact that the female employees adopted emotion focused strategies to a greater extent.

The study also revealed that the personality trait of an individual has a greater influence in the adoption of the coping strategy by the individual. Personality influences coping in many ways. Even prior to coping, personality influences the frequency of exposure to hazards and also the type of hazards experiences. We have from theories that neuroticism predicts exposure to interpersonal stress and tendencies to appraise events as highly threatening.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research concludes that:-

1. Few of the hazards that are highlighted in this study are burnouts, campus violence, stress and false accusations. Among them majority spoke of burnout. According to the respondents the cause for the burnouts was due to job overload, meeting expectations of management and peers, students and their guardian's etc. The respondents working in schools spoke of musculo-skeletal disorders (MSD) due to the board work and furniture's used in the schools. The major impacts of these hazards are physical health variables and psychological variables like fatigue, burnout etc.
2. The highest impact was on health and they had to take medicines for hypertension etc. Most of the people complained of sleeplessness, exhaustion, and boredom and losing interest in the job. Few of them also complained that such unpleasant situations have damaged their relationships with their colleagues. According to self reporting the employees spoke of difficulties in maintaining work – home balance.

3. The respondents perceived of few factors causing the hazards, which can be grouped into three categories. They are general factors, stakeholder related concepts and task related concepts. The factors belonging to the group of general categories are organisational policies, management issues, job profile, job security, organisational politics, and student handling, parents and outsiders interactions. The outsiders are political parties, community etc. The factors belonging to the stakeholder concepts are stakeholder multiplicity, interface, complexity, administration and operating paradigm. The task related concepts involve factors like task ambiguity, task complexity, task description and task control.
4. The most significant sources of the hazards are task conflict, task control, and student control, stakeholder interface and campus culture. Among these the highest in priority is in the order are stakeholder interfaces, task conflict, student control, and task control and campus culture.
5. The major and common coping strategies that are adopted by the employees of education sector were problem solving, cognitive restructuring, social support and express emotion. Though it was found from the study that an individual uses a combination of coping strategies to cope with unpleasant situations in their work, but few strategies that were mentioned above were commonly used by most of the employees to cope with their problems.
6. The qualitative analysis revealed that personality trait and experience in this sector has a major influence on the coping strategies. The quantitative analysis revealed that personality trait if the employee, funding agency of the organisation, position held by the employee in the current organization.

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