

**RESEARCH PAPER****Socio-Demographic Predictors of Psychological Distress among Female School Teachers: Role of Age, Education and Socio-Economic Status****<sup>1</sup>Bisma Akhlaq\* and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Aqeel Ahmad Khan**

1. PhD, Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan

**Corresponding Author**

bismakhlaq@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

This study was carried out to address the socio-demographic predictors of psychological distress among female school teachers. This is an acknowledged fact that psychological distress among teachers is manifested in various ways, affecting their emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being. That is why, understanding these common socio-demographic predictors of psychological distress are important for identifying and addressing the mental health challenges faced by the teachers. To explore the socio-demographic predictors a sample of 176 female teachers was recruited by using multistage sampling method. The level of psychological distress was measured by using Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). This was a quantitative research and the cross-sectional research design was used. The collected data was analysed by using SPSS. The findings from the results revealed that age, education and socio-economic status were significant socio-demographic correlates of psychological distress among the female teachers. Furthermore, the level of psychological distress was higher among younger teachers, doctors and among those having high or middle socio-economic status. On the basis of the findings of this study it recommended that socio-demographic correlates are also contribute to the level of psychological distress among teachers. Hence, there is a dire need to address these socio-demographic correlates to decrease the teacher's psychological distress.

**Keywords:** Socio-Economic Status, Psychological Distress, Education**Introduction**

Over the years, a number of definitions and extensive research have emerged, primary in connection to the broader understanding of stress as a psychological response to external circumstances. Therefore it is considered that the school teachers particularly females and very prone to psychological distress while adjusting with these external atmosphere. School teachers are tasked not only with delivering curriculum content but also with addressing the diverse learning needs of their students, including managing classrooms, fostering a supportive learning environment and often addressing behavioural and emotional issues among students, which often leads them towards psychological distress. There are also many other causes of psychological distress among different professionals such as copying styles, workload, social support, interpersonal difficulties and challenges, increased job demands, and challenging student behaviour. Other factors can be said to cause psychological distress such as emotions also play an important role in causing distress (Heffernan et al., 2022).

Anxiety is defined as excessive worry, uneasiness, and fear including symptoms such as persistent concern or fear in ordinary circumstances, restlessness or feeling on edge, difficulty concentrating, and physical symptoms such as elevated heart rate,

perspiration, and trembling (Schneier et al., 2014). So, the teachers with suffering anxiety, feel overwhelmed by their obligations, fearful of making mistakes, or concerned about their pupils' conduct and performance. Because it is caused by a variety of factors, such as the pressure to meet educational standards, manage classroom conduct, and balance work and personal life (Henry et al., 2003)

Then next is depression, which comprises persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest or pleasure in activities (Feldman et al., 2009). As well, for teachers, depression is particularly debilitating, affecting their motivation and ability to engage with students effectively. The known symptoms of depression are persistent sadness or low mood, Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, Changes in appetite and sleep patterns, Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, Difficulty concentrating or making decisions. Accordingly, depression among teachers is also triggered by factors such as prolonged stress, lack of support, and dissatisfaction with their jobs or working conditions (Henry et al., 2003).

A state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress is called burnout, which is particularly common among teachers due to the demanding nature of their jobs. Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, which is the feeling drained and unable to cope, depersonalization which means developing a detached, cynical attitude towards students and colleagues, then reduced personal accomplishment, like feeling ineffective and lacking achievement at work (Abayon, 2024). So, burnout often results from chronic work overload, insufficient resources, and lack of recognition or support from school administration (Henry et al., 2003).

## **Literature Review**

In Pakistan, research on this topic has also indicated significant findings. A study by AbuMadini and Sakthivel (2018) investigated psychological distress among female school teachers in Karachi and found a substantial negative correlation between psychological distress and quality of life. The study highlighted that teachers in private schools reported higher stress levels due to job insecurity and lower pay, while government school teachers experienced stress due to larger student-teacher ratios and administrative challenges.

Excessive stress is not normal for anyone and it has unpleasant effects on the physical and mental health of all individuals (Anasori et al., 2020). If there are adverse psychological working conditions then they affect the mental health of professionals. Such as teaching is consider more stressful due to the nature of work. Therefore most of the schools have changed their mode of teaching and other work (Yang et al., 2009).

When teachers are suffering from stress then there are chances for them to suffer from psychological distress which shows some negative consequences on their overall health. Stressors affect their overall well-being like quality of life, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence of them, and make them ill mentally and physically (Chan, 2008). That environment also plays an important role in causing psychological distress (Wang, 2024). People face different environments at home and work as the environment varies according to the nature of the profession. Such as teaching is considered a hectic profession due to the nature of the job because teachers are not bound to teach only they also perform other duties such as maintaining records, administrative duties, and different programs held in the schools. This extra work is a burden on them that proves to be a major cause of their distress. Sometimes teachers have to complete the data entries online for assessment purposes which compromises the sleeping hours of teachers (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2016).

Likewise, several other factors contribute to the high prevalence of psychological distress among teachers, such as:

1. Teachers frequently face excessive workloads, including lesson planning, grading, and administrative tasks, which can be overwhelming and lead to chronic stress (Abayon, 2024).
2. Managing student behaviour, particularly in larger classrooms, adds to the stress levels of teachers, who often feel ill-equipped to handle such challenges without adequate support (Ali et al., 2023).
3. Lack of support from school administration and insufficient resources to meet the demands of teaching further exacerbate stress levels among teachers (Chan et al., 2021).

Thus, all the psychological distress never comes alone, but with several symptoms.

Psychological distress is a prevailing concern nowadays. People with psychological distress feel uncomfortable and they cannot enjoy their life as a happy person. Psychological distress affects different areas of the life of an individual such as it can affect the well-being of a person as well as it can affect quality of life too (Markowitz, 1998). Every person reacts differently to stress and certain changes in their life. Therefore, psychological distress and its level are not the same in every person. It can be in the form of fatigue, sadness, anxiety, fear, and anger. Such as some people face sadness or fatigue and on the other hand some people may feel anxiety, fear, or anger, even currently, every person is prone to face different forms of psychological distress (Lerner & Keltner, 2001).

Capone and Petrillo (2020) stated that psychological distress encompasses a wide range of emotional and mental health challenges. For teachers, these types of distress can significantly impact their personal well-being and professional performance. Understanding the specific types of psychological distress can aid in identifying and addressing these issues more effectively. The main types of psychological distress include anxiety, depression, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress.

## **Material and Methods**

The participants of this study were the female teachers belonging from different age, education and socio-economic status. In this study only the female teachers were recruited. The sample was selected by using multistage sampling technique. This was a quantitative study with cross-sectional research design. Data was collected by using Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) and analysed by using SPSS.

Conceptually, psychological distress refers to a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety. This scale was chosen for its reliability and validity in various populations and settings, as demonstrated by Kessler, et al., (2003) and subsequent studies (Ahmed, et. al., 2015; Napa et al., 2017). Following the APA ethical guidelines the informed consent form was filled out prior collecting the data. It was also assured that there is no any risk or harm in this study. Lastly in the light of the literature review the following hypothesis were generated and tested by using statistical techniques.

1. Age, education and socio-economic status will significantly predict the level of psychological distress and its different dimensions among the female teachers.
2. Socio-demographic variables will not predict the level of psychological distress and its different dimensions among female school teachers.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Variables of Research Participants (N=176)**

Socio-demographic variables	(F)	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
20-29	51	(29.0%)
30-39	77	(43.8%)
40-49	48	(27.3%)
<b>Education</b>		
Bachelors	55	(31.3%)
Masters	85	(48.3%)
Doctorate	36	(20.5%)
<b>Social &amp; Economic Status</b>		
Low	37	(21.0%)
Middle	100	(56.8%)
High	39	(22.2%)

Note: The above table shows the detail of demographic variables of the participants along with their frequency and percentage.

**Table 2**  
**Level of Psychological Distress and its Facets as Predicted by Age**

Variables	20-29		30-39		40-49		F	p	$\eta^2$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Psychological Distress	42.22	2.43	37.62	4.46	34.10	2.49	67.82	.000	.44
Physical Health	29.20	3.59	27.31	3.61	18.40	2.18	156.94	.000	.65
Psychological Health	17.69	2.87	16.39	2.85	11.71	3.04	58.81	.000	.41
Social Relationships	9.31	3.71	9.96	2.96	5.58	1.91	34.32	.000	.28

Note: The above table reported a significant difference in psychological distress and its facets across different age groups of teachers (20-29, 30-39, 40-49). These differences are statistically significant for all variables ( $p < .001$ ),

**Table 3**  
**Level of Psychological Distress and its Facets as Predicted by Education**

Variables	Bachelors		Masters		Doctorate		F	p	$\eta^2$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Psychological Distress	37.67	3.77	36.31	4.56	42.47	2.75	30.23	.000	.26
Physical Health	23.73	5.91	24.86	5.18	29.36	3.16	14.34	.000	.14
Psychological Health	14.36	3.81	15.18	3.26	17.94	3.74	11.80	.000	.12
Social Relationships	7.11	3.60	8.62	3.02	10.72	3.30	13.32	.000	.13

Note: The above table showed that Psychological distress significantly differs by education level, with doctoral holders experiencing the highest levels ( $M = 42.47$ ,  $SD = 2.75$ ) compared to those with Masters ( $M = 36.31$ ,  $SD = 4.56$ ) and Bachelors ( $M = 37.67$ ,  $SD = 3.77$ ),  $F(2, 173) = 30.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.26$ , indicating a large effect.

**Table 4**  
**Level of Psychological Distress as Predicted by Socio-Economic Status**

Variables	Low		Middle		High		F	p	$\eta^2$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Psychological Distress	35.65	5.79	38.66	3.78	38.51	4.77	6.41	.002	.07
Physical Health	25.32	4.44	25.64	5.44	24.97	6.43	.21	.807	.00
Psychological Health	14.38	1.91	15.76	3.87	15.85	4.54	2.09	.127	.02
Social Relationships	8.03	2.42	8.61	3.91	9.03	3.19	.78	.458	.01

Note: The above table revealed that the level of psychological distress is significantly different across socio-economic groups of the school teachers.

## **Discussion**

The results from the collected data revealed a significant difference in psychological distress and its facets across different age groups of teachers (20–29, 30–39, 40–49). These differences are statistically significant for all variables ( $p < .001$ ), with moderate to large effect sizes ( $\eta^2$  ranging from .09 to .65). Younger teachers (aged 20–29) report the highest psychological distress ( $M = 42.22$ ,  $SD = 2.43$ ), which decreases with age, as the group aged 30–39 reports  $M = 37.62$  ( $SD = 4.46$ ), and those aged 40–49 report the lowest distress ( $M = 34.10$ ,  $SD = 2.49$ ). The effect size for this trend is substantial ( $\eta^2 = .44$ ). For instance, physical health scores are highest for the youngest group ( $M = 29.20$ ,  $SD = 3.59$ ), decline slightly in the 30–39 group ( $M = 27.31$ ,  $SD = 3.61$ ), and drop sharply in the 40–49 group ( $M = 18.40$ ,  $SD = 2.18$ ). The impact of education level (Bachelors, Masters, and Doctorate) on psychological distress was also significant. Psychological distress significantly differs by education level, with doctoral holders experiencing the highest levels ( $M = 42.47$ ,  $SD = 2.75$ ) compared to those with Masters ( $M = 36.31$ ,  $SD = 4.56$ ) and Bachelors ( $M = 37.67$ ,  $SD = 3.77$ ),  $F(2, 173) = 30.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.26$ , indicating a large effect.

Furthermore, a significant difference across socio-economic groups was revealed. The teachers belonging to middle socio-economic group reporting the highest levels ( $M = 38.66$ ,  $SD = 3.78$ ), followed by high socio-economic status individuals ( $M = 38.51$ ,  $SD = 4.77$ ) and low socio-economic status individuals ( $M = 35.65$ ,  $SD = 5.79$ ),  $F(2, 173) = 6.41$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.07$ , suggesting a small effect. Insignificant differences were found for physical health, psychological health, social relationships with  $p$ -values ranging from .319 to .924 and effect sizes near zero. The hypotheses of the study accepted and the results are in line with the previous researches such as a study conducted to check the socio-demographic correlates of mental illness among the teachers revealed a strong relationship of socio-demographic variables with mental illness ((Farooq & Kai, 2017). In connection with education a study concluded that the level of education also contribute in relation with the psychological issues among the teachers. The results of their study revealed that the teachers with higher education revealed higher level of distress (Seherrie, 2023). Similarly, age was also play a vital role in predicting the level of psychological distress among teachers. A study was conducted and reported a higher level distress among the teachers belonging to lower age group (Lavy & Ayuob, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

In the light of the study findings this concluded that socio-demographic variables of individuals play a vital role in predicting the psychological distress among the teachers. Similarly, this study revealed that age, education and socio-economic status of the female school teachers was a significant predictor of their psychological distress.

## **Recommendations**

On the basis of the study findings, this is recommended that apart from the job stress, work load or job status socio-demographic variables like age, education and socio-economic status of the teachers also contribute in the level of their psychological distress. So addressing these socio-demographic variables is crucial to enhance the quality of teachers and work performance of the female teachers.

**References**

- Abayon, M. (2024). Teacher Burnout in the Classroom: An Inquiry into Causes and Coping Strategies. *Nexus International Journal of Science and Education*, 1(2), 330-345.
- AbuMadini, M. S., & Sakthivel, M. (2018). Comparative study to determine the occupational stress level and professional burnout in special school teachers working in private and government schools. *Journal of Global Health Science*, 10(3), 12-25.
- Ahmed, Z., Muzaffar, M., Javaid, M. A., & Fatima, N. (2015). Socio-Economic Problems of Aged Citizens in the Punjab: A Case Study of the Districts Faisalabad, Muzaffargarh and Layyah, *Pakistan Journal of life and Social Sciences*, 13(1),37-41
- Ali, M. M., Fareed, M. Y., Phulpoto, M. A. A., & Ujjan, M. Z. (2023). The impact of Pakistani ESL college teachers' emotional intelligence on their students' esl proficiency, self-efficacy and motivation. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*. 4(1)1820-1835.
- Anasori, E., Bayighomog, S. W., & Tanova, C. (2020). Workplace bullying, psychological distress, resilience, mindfulness, and emotional exhaustion. *The Service Industries Journal*, 40(1-2), 65-89.
- Chan, D. W. (2008). General, collective, and domain-specific teacher self-efficacy among Chinese prospective and in-service teachers in Hong Kong. *Journal of Teaching*, 24(4), 1057-1069.
- Chen, J. (2021). Refining the teacher emotion model: evidence from a review of literature published between 1985 and 2019. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 51(3), 327-357.
- Capone, V., & Petrillo, G. (2020). Mental health in teachers: Relationships with job satisfaction, efficacy beliefs, burnout and depression. *Current Psychology*, 39(5), 1757-1766
- Farooq, M. S., & Kai, Y. T. (2017). A review of Pakistan school system. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(4), 97-101.
- Feldman, R., Granat, A., Pariente, C., Kanety, H., Kuint, J., & Gilboa-Schechtman, E. (2009). Maternal depression and anxiety across the postpartum year and infant social engagement, fear regulation, and stress reactivity. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 48(9), 919-927.
- Heffernan, A., Bright, D., Kim, M., Longmuir, F., & Magyar, B. (2022). 'I cannot sustain the workload and the emotional toll': Reasons behind Australian teachers' intentions to leave the profession. *Australian Journal of Education*, 66(2), 196-209.
- Henry, G., Osborne, E., & Salzberger-Wittenberg, I. (2003). The emotional experience of learning and teaching. Routledge. *Journal of Education*. 4(5), 99-115.
- Kessler, R. C., Barker, P. R., Colpe, L. J., Epstein, J. F., Gfroerer, J. C., Hiripi, E., Howes, M. J., Normand, S.-L. T., Manderscheid, R. W., Walters, E. E., & Zaslavsky, A. M. (2003). Screening for serious mental illness in the general population. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 60(2), 184-189. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.60.2.184>
- Lavy, S., & Ayuob, W. (2019). Teachers' sense of meaning associations with teacher performance and graduates' resilience: A study of schools serving students of low socio-economic status. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(4), 823-837.

- Lerner, J. S., & Keltner, D. (2001). Fear, anger, and risk. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81*(1), 146-159. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.1.146>
- Schneier, F. R., Vidair, H. B., Vogel, L. R., & Muskin, P. R. (2014). Anxiety, obsessive-compulsive and stress disorders. *Psychiatry, 3*, 168-203.
- Seherrie, A. C. (2023). Toward an innovative cooperative learning framework to counterbalance the effects of overcrowded classrooms. Axiom Academic Publishers. *The Learners.12*(2), 77-89.
- Markowitz, F. E. (1998). The effects of stigma on the psychological well-being and life satisfaction of persons with mental illness. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 39*(4), 335-347. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2676342>
- Napa, W., Tungpunkom, P., & Pothimas, N. (2017). Effectiveness of family interventions on psychological distress and expressed emotion in family members of individuals diagnosed with first-episode psychosis: a systematic review. *JBI Evidence Synthesis, 15*(4), 12-26.
- Sahito, Z., & Vaisanen, P. (2016). Dimensions of job satisfaction of teacher educators: A qualitative study of the Universities of Sindh Province of Pakistan. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching, 5*(2), 43-54.
- Wang, Y. (2024). Exploring the impact of workload, organizational support, and work engagement on teachers' psychological wellbeing: a structural equation modeling approach [Original Research]. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*(2), 15-29. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1345740>
- Yang, X., Ge, C., Hu, B., Chi, T., & Wang, L. (2009). Relationship between quality of life and occupational stress among teachers. *Public Health, 123*(11), 750-755.