



# **Secondary School Teachers' Perception of Occupational Stress Causes in Mwanza Region, Tanzania**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents findings of the study that had examined the teachers' perception of the causes of occupational stress in Tanzania's secondary schools. Grounded in the job-demand control model, the study employed a mixed methods research approach and specifically a descriptive design. The study collected data from a sample of 460 participants drawn from secondary schools in Mwanza city and Ilemela municipality, Mwanza region of Tanzania. The data were collected between December 2021 and June 2023 using a questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions to generate both qualitative and quantitative data. Interviews were also held with some of the purposively selected teachers to provide complementary in-depth explanation. The results show an increase in teachers' heavy workload, low salaries, mounting debts, family problem, and a low rate of job promotion emerged to be major causes of occupational stress. These causes were mainly classified as environment, management, and interpersonal stressors. The secondary school

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teacher respondents identified other stressors as lack of support from administration and limited autonomy and control (work environment stressors), managing rights and needs, lack of professional development opportunities, insufficient on-the-job training and a lack of collaborative decision-making, and lack of support and resources (management); emotions, participants reported experiencing frustration, disappointment, depression and exhaustion (intrapersonal); and. poor relations, a lack of flexibility and adaptability, and a lack of patience and tolerance (interpersonal stressors). On the other hand, they suggested counter-strategies that included promoting a healthy work-life balance, providing emotional support and ensuring effective communication channels are in place. The study, therefore, recommends advocating for increased support and resources, strengthening professional development opportunities and developing a performance recognition system to address; fostering open communication, promote a positive and inclusive school culture, and providing conflict resolution and interpersonal skills training; enhancing the work conditions among teachers and promoting collaboration and collective action. Overall, addressing these stressors could allow educational institutions to create a conducive and supportive work environment capable of enhancing teacher satisfaction and effectiveness.

*Keywords: Employee stress; occupational stress; causes of occupation stress; secondary school teachers.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress among teachers remains a seemingly intractable problem globally that can have detrimental effects on their well-being, job satisfaction, and overall performance. Thus, understanding the cause of occupational stress is essential in developing effective strategies and interventions aimed to alleviate stress and improve teachers' work conditions. As such, this study applied the job-demand control model as a theoretical framework to examine the teachers' perceptions of occupational stress causes in Tanzania's secondary schools. Empirical evidence contend that the interaction between job demands and job control can influence occupational stress (see, for example, Bakker and Demerouti [1]; Demerouti et al. [2]; Di Fabio & Kenny [36]. On the one hand, job demands such as workload, time pressure, and emotional demands, play a crucial role in individuals' work environment and can contribute to occupational stress. On the other hand, job control has to do with the level of decision-making authority and autonomy individuals exert over their work tasks (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Nashaufeli) [3]; Di Fabio & Kenny [36]. The model suggests that high job demands combined with low job control can lead to increased stress levels. In recent years, several studies have explored the causes of occupational stress among teachers and exposed various contributory factors that contribute to their stress levels.

On their part, Skaalvik and Skaalvik [40] found excessive workload, lack of support from colleagues and administrators, student behaviour issues and time pressure to be significant

sources of stress for teachers. Other key stressors for teachers include limited resources, administrative demands and emotional labour [4]. In the Tanzanian context, occupational stress among teachers has received limited research attention. Yet only few studies (e.g. Cheung et al. [5]; Masath [6]; Pascoe et al. [7]) have highlighted the presence of significant stressors in secondary schools. Danish et al. [8] identified high workload, large class sizes, limited resources and inadequate support from school administration as major stressors. These findings underline the importance of further investigation into the causes of occupational stress specifically in Tanzanian secondary schools. To address this lacuna, the present study examined the teachers' perceptions of the causes of occupational stress in Tanzania's secondary schools.

The study used a mixed methods approach to explore the interplay among job demands, job control, and occupational stress among teachers. By exploring the teachers' perception, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the specific causes of stress in the Tanzanian secondary school context. These insights can inform the development of targeted interventions and policies to mitigate occupational stress and enhance teacher well-being.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Employee Stress

Employee stress has become a thorny issue in today's fast-paced and demanding work environments. It negatively affects individuals'

well-being, job satisfaction and overall performance [9]. Understanding the cause of occupational stress is crucial for organisations to develop effective strategies and interventions aimed to promote employee well-being and organisational success. In this regard, organisational studies have highlighted various causes of occupational stress among employees analysed thusly.

## 2.2 Workload and Time Pressure

Heavy workload and time pressure consistently emerged as significant contributors to employee stress. Schonfeld and Chang's [10] study associated increased workload with higher levels of stress among employees and a negative impact of time pressure with employees' stress levels [11].

## 2.3 Job Insecurity

Job insecurity, resulting from organisational changes, layoffs, or uncertain employment conditions, significantly contribute to employee stress [12]. De Witte's [13] study affirmed perceived job insecurity to be a significant predictor of higher stress levels among employees.

## 2.4 Role conflict and Role Ambiguity

Role conflict and role ambiguity, arising from conflicting or unclear job expectations, have emerged as stressors for employees. In their study, Karatepe and Karadas [14] found a positive association between role conflict and role ambiguity with employees' stress levels.

## 2.5 Lack of Support

The perception of inadequate support from supervisors, colleagues, or the organisation is a significant source of employee stress [1]. Similarly, Nielsen and Miraglia [15] related lack of support at work with higher stress levels among employees.

## 2.6 Work-life Balance

Imbalances between work and personal life responsibilities can lead to increased stress levels [16]. Also, Allen et al.'s [16] study determined work-life conflict to be a significant predictor of employee stress.

## 2.7 Job Control

Lack of control or decision-making authority over work processes and outcomes is a key stressor for employees [17]. In this regard, workload and time pressure, job insecurity, role conflict and ambiguity, lack of support, work-life balance, organisational culture and climate and job control emerged to as key factors contributing to employee stress. Understanding these causes can enable organisations to develop strategies and interventions that address these stressors and create a healthier and more supportive work environment for employees.

## 2.8 Occupational Stress

Occupational stress has garnered significant attention due to its adverse effects on employee well-being and organisational performance. Usually, occupational stress is a complex phenomenon that arises because of an imbalance between job demands and an individual's ability to cope with those demands. The measurement of occupational stress often involves self-report scales that assess various dimensions such as workload, role conflict and job control. Researchers have applied established scales such as the Job Demand-Control-Support model Karasek [38] and the Effort-Reward Imbalance model to examine different aspects of occupational stress. Moreover, occupational stress has wide-ranging consequences for both employees and organisations. It negatively impacts on employee well-being, hence leading to increased psychological distress, burnout and eroded job satisfaction. Furthermore, occupational stress is also associated with physical health problems such as cardiovascular disorders and musculoskeletal issues. Also, organisational outcomes such as lowered productivity, higher absenteeism rates and high turnover have been linked to occupational stress. Additionally, both individual and organisational factors influence occupational stress. Individual characteristics such as personality traits, coping styles and work-related beliefs interact with organizational factors including leadership style, job design and organisational culture to shape the experience of occupational stress. As a complex concept, occupational stress with diverse causes and consequences. Overall, heavy workload, time pressure, job demands, job insecurity, lack of control, interpersonal conflicts and work-life imbalance are key contributory factors to occupational stress with detrimental effects on

employee well-being and organisational outcomes.

## 2.9 The Job-demand Control Model

The Job-demand control model (JDCM) presents a theoretical framework suggesting that job demands and job control play a pivotal role in influencing various job-related outcomes including job satisfaction, mental health and job performance [2]. Under this model, employees' experiencing of high job demands coupled with low job control can elevate the levels of occupational stress, hence inviting detrimental effects [18]. In the specific context of examining the teachers' perception of causes of occupational stress in secondary schools in Tanzania, employing the job-demand control model could offer valuable insights into the factors contributing to occupational stress in the teaching profession.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1 Research Approach and Design

This study employed a mixed methods research approach to benefit from both qualitative and quantitative research dimensions to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. This mixed methods approach allows a researcher to analyse both numerical and textual data thereby providing a more holistic perspective on the research topic [19]. Under the qualitative approach, researchers aim to explore the subjective experiences, perspectives and meanings attributable to a particular phenomenon through interviews, observations, and textual analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark) [19]. Under the quantitative approach, researchers collect and analyse numerical data to test hypotheses, identify patterns and establish statistical relationships between variables [20].

Specifically, the study employed descriptive design that describes the characteristics, behaviours and phenomena of a particular population or sample without manipulating or controlling any variables (Creswell & Creswell) [20]. This design helped to examine the teachers' perception of the major causes of occupational stress in addition to providing a detailed account of the causes of occupational stress as perceived by teachers in Tanzania's secondary schools.

### 3.2 Sample and Sampling Procedures

The systematic and logical procedures used to address a research problem on occupational stress among secondary school teachers (Ngirwa) [44]. The study had collected data from a sample of 460 comprising secondary school teachers. The study sample of secondary school teachers was drawn from Mwanza city and Illelela Municipality in Mwanza region using random sampling. This sampling involves selecting a sample from a population in a completely random manner that accords each member an equal chance of being included in the sample [21]. On the other hand, a few teachers simultaneously participated in interviews based on their readiness to answer supplemental question. As such, their inclusion was purposive until the study reached a data saturation point.

### 3.3 Measures

This study used the questionnaires as the main data collection tool. It had both open-ended and closed ended questions to collect requisite data. To ensure the reliability of the questionnaires the study utilised Cronbach's alpha to determine whether the instruments were reliable at an acceptable level or if any adjustments were necessary. Taber [45] states that, a Cronbach's alpha level of 0.7 or higher indicates acceptable internal consistency for an instrument. All the measurement scales in this study demonstrated high reliability, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.830 for all quantitative variables (i.e. time pressure, lack of resources, family problems and unfairness). This exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.7, implying that the instruments were dependable and consistent in measuring the intended constructs. Consequently, the study results were trustworthy and accurate. The questionnaire items for assessing teachers' perception of the causes of occupational stress were pre-tested during the pilot study, whose outcome helped to reframe the item questions for use in the field.

### 3.4 Demographic Information of Teacher Respondents

The participants' gender, age, and educational qualifications revealed that a larger number of respondents were male (n=276) in comparison with female (n=184). Also, a significant portion of the participants were aged 31-40 years (n=285). Education-wise, most of the respondents held a 1st degree (n=345), while a smaller number

**Table 1. Demographic information of teacher respondents**

Variables	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender	Male	276	60.0
	Female	184	40.0
Age (in years)	Below 21	2	0.4
	21-30	59	12.8
	31-40	285	62.0
	41-50	112	24.4
	Above 50	2	0.4
Experience (in years)	Less than 6	50	10.9
	6 -10	110	23.9
	11-15	184	40.0
	16 -20	77	16.7
	21- 25	29	6.3
	26 and Above	10	2.2
Academic qualification	Certificate	9	2.0
	Diploma	70	15.2
	Bachelor degree	345	75.0
	Post Graduate Diploma	13	2.8
	Master's degree	23	5.0

Source: Field Data (2023)

possessed a master's degree (n=23), postgraduate diploma (n=13), diploma (n=70), or certificate (n=9). These demographic details are pertinent to the study's objective of exploring the causes of occupational stress among secondary school teachers in Tanzania. The gender distribution offers insights into potential evaluation of levels of occupational stress between male and female teachers. Similarly, the distribution of age groups provides a glimpse into possible differences in occupational stress across different age brackets. Moreover, the diverse educational qualifications held by the participants shed light on the potential influence of academic credentials on levels of occupational stress and job performance among secondary school teachers. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the teacher respondents.

These demographic details are pertinent to the study focus of exploring the causes of occupational stress among secondary school teachers in Tanzania. For instance, the gender distribution offers insights into potential evaluation of levels of occupational stress between male and female teachers. Similarly, the distribution of age groups provides a glimpse into possible differences in occupational stress across different age brackets. Moreover, the diverse educational qualifications held by the participants shed light on the potential influence of academic credentials on levels of occupational stress and job performance among secondary school teachers.

#### 4. RESULTS

This study had recourse to two kinds of data: Quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Table 2 indicates the quantitative data on causes of occupational stress among secondary school teachers.

As Table 2 illustrates, the causes of occupational stress among the employees surveyed. The data is summarised in terms of the number of respondents (N), minimum and maximum scores, mean scores, and standard deviation for each cause of stress. Several factors reportedly contributed to occupational stress and the table provides insights into their impact based on the mean scores. Among the highest causes of occupational stress, the data revealed that an increase in workloads had the highest mean score of 3.73. In other words, employees experienced significant stress due to heavy workloads, suggesting that they might face excessive demands and struggle to cope with the volume of tasks assigned to them. Addressing the workload management problem and finding ways to distribute tasks more effectively could help alleviate this source of stress. Also, low salaries emerged as another prominent cause of occupational stress with a mean score of 3.76. This indicates that employees feel financially strained and dissatisfied with their compensation. Inadequate salaries can lead to financial insecurity and affect overall job performance,

hence the need for counter-measures aimed to ensure fair and competitive compensation packages might help alleviate stress related to low salaries.

Debts also identified as a significant cause of occupational stress with a mean score of 3.41. This finding suggests that employees are burdened by financial obligations and struggle with managing their debts. Offering financial support programmes, providing resources for debt management or promoting financial literacy within the organisation could help alleviate this stress factor. Family problems emerged as a notable cause of stress among employees, with a mean score of 3.32. Implicitly, personal issues such as conflicts within the family or challenges in maintaining work-life balance contribute to occupational stress. Policies or support systems that address work-life balance offer counselling services or provide flexible work arrangements might assist employees in managing their personal and professional responsibilities. Furthermore, a low rate of job promotion emerged as a cause of stress with a mean score of 3.22. Implicitly, employees feel frustrated and demotivated by the lack of career advancement

opportunities. Establishing clear career paths, providing mentorship or training programmes, and ensuring transparency in promotion processes could help alleviate stress related to limited job promotion.

Reported major causes of occupational stress include an increase in workload, low salaries, debts, family problems and a low rate of job promotion. The participants insisted that addressing these stressors required effective workload management, fair compensation practices, financial support programmes, work-life balance initiatives, and career development opportunities can contribute to reducing occupational stress and promoting employee well-being. Overall, the findings provide valuable insights into the perceived levels of stress and specific factors influencing occupational stress among teachers. The results presented in Table 2 further provide valuable insights into the causes of occupational stress among teachers in the study, and are consistent with previous research on occupational stress in the teaching profession supporting the notion that teachers face multiple work environment-related stressors [22].

**Table 2. Causes of occupational stress**

Causes of occupational stress	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Time pressure	460	1	5	3.02	.901
Discipline problems	460	1	5	2.96	.889
Lack of resources	460	1	5	3.31	.943
Lack of professional recognition	460	1	5	2.98	.943
Lack of support	460	1	5	3.03	.901
Diversity of tasks required	460	1	5	3.01	.943
Lack of knowledge on assigned task	460	1	5	2.85	1.001
Lack of on job training	460	1	5	3.05	1.015
Low rate of job promotion	460	1	5	3.22	1.112
Low level of education	460	1	5	2.82	1.029
Family problems	460	1	5	3.32	1.124
Debts	460	1	5	3.41	1.080
Depressions	460	1	5	3.08	.986
Exhaustion	460	1	5	2.98	1.020
Fatigue	460	1	5	3.03	1.009
Increase of conflicts	460	1	5	3.03	1.049
Job Pressure	460	1	5	3.18	1.013
Harassments	460	1	5	3.12	1.082
Torture	460	1	5	2.92	1.057
Unfairness	460	1	5	3.13	1.133
High job demand	460	1	5	3.22	.968
Secrecy	460	1	5	3.07	.941
People Classes	460	1	5	3.23	.986
Increase of workloads	460	1	5	3.73	.939
Low salaries	460	1	5	3.76	.991
Poor relations	460	1	5	3.10	.920
Valid N (list wise)	460				

Source: Field Data (2023)

One of the key findings is the high level of stress related to time pressure (mean = 3.02). This aligns with previous studies highlighting the demanding nature of the teaching profession and the challenges teachers face in managing their time effectively [23]. The high workload and time constraints may negatively impact on the teachers' job satisfaction and well-being emphasising the need for effective workload management strategies [24]. Another significant finding is the role of inadequate resources as a source of stress (mean = 3.31). This finding is in line with previous research indicating that teachers often face resource constraints such as limited classroom materials and outdated technology. The lack of resources can hinder the teachers' ability to deliver quality instruction and meet students' diverse needs, hence heightening stress levels.

The study further highlights the importance of social support in reducing occupational stress. Specifically, the results show that lack of support (mean = 3.03) and lack of professional recognition (mean = 2.98) contribute to teachers' stress. These findings are consistent with research emphasising the significance of supportive relationships with colleagues and administrators in mitigating teacher stress [25]. Indeed, strengthening support systems and creating a positive work culture that values teachers' contributions can help alleviate stress and improve job satisfaction [26].

Furthermore, the study identified personal well-being factors such as depression (mean = 3.08) and exhaustion (mean = 2.98) as significant sources of occupational stress. In fact, there is a growing body of research highlighting the effect of teacher burnout on mental health and overall well-being. In this regard, Carroll et al. [27] have highlighted the significance of addressing the emotional well-being of teachers through initiatives such as promoting work-life balance and providing access to counselling services to ease stress and improve teacher retention. Overall, the study findings shed light on the causes of occupational stress among teachers in the specific context of the study. The stressors identified including time pressure, lack of resources, lack of support and personal well-being factors have important implications for policy and practice development in education [27]. Interventions aimed to improve the work conditions, provide professional development opportunities, foster supportive environments and promote teachers' well-being are vital in

reducing stress and enhancing teacher satisfaction and effectiveness [28]. On the other hand and in complementary fashion, the qualitative data were recorded and categorised with the themes identified based on the narrations of teachers. Table 3 presents the teachers' perception of the causes of occupational stress in Tanzania's secondary schools.

As Table 3 demonstrates, teachers identified several factors applicable to the work environment that contribute to their stress levels. One major concern is the increase in workload. Many teachers expressed the need for improving the management of the excessive workloads to prevent overwhelming stress. Another issue is lack of support from the secondary school administration. Teachers also emphasised receiving adequate support in terms of resources and guidance from the school administration. Additionally, the limited autonomy and control over their work emerged as a stress factor since teachers desired more autonomy and control to effectively manage their classrooms and teaching methods.

For the management of rights and needs stressors, the study identified lack of professional development opportunities as a factor contribute to occupational stress. Not surprisingly, teachers stressed the importance of continuous learning and access to professional development programmes to enhance their skills and stay abreast of the evolving educational landscape. Similarly, the absence of on-the-job training emerged as a stressor with teachers expressing the need for training opportunities directly relevant to their roles. Lack of collaborative decision-making also emerged as a contributory factor, indicating that teachers desire more involvement in decision-making processes particularly those that affect their teaching and working conditions.

Teachers also acknowledged experiencing various intrapersonal emotions that contribute to their occupational stress. Frustration and disappointment were frequently mentioned as stemming from factors such as challenging students' behaviour, administrative issues and workload pressures. Teachers also expressed concerns about depression, as the high levels of stress could potentially impact on their mental health. Exhaustion was another prevalent emotion with teachers often feeling physically and mentally drained due to the demands of their

**Table 3. Teachers' perception of occupational stress causes**

S/N	Categories	Themes	Reasons/Explanations
1.	Working environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase of workloads</li> <li>• Lack of support from administration</li> <li>• Limited autonomy and control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement of working conditions among teachers</li> <li>• Improvement of collaboration and collective action</li> </ul>
2.	Management of rights and needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of professional development opportunities</li> <li>• Lack of on-job training</li> <li>• Lack of collaborative decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement of school leadership support</li> <li>• Improvement of Needs assessment and individualized training plans.</li> </ul>
3.	Intrapersonal emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration and disappointment</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Exhaustion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote a healthy work-life balance</li> <li>• Provide emotional support</li> <li>• Implement effective communication channels</li> </ul>
4.	Managerial failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of support and resources</li> <li>• Lack of recognition and appreciation:</li> <li>• Limited career advancement opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for increased support and resources</li> <li>• Strengthen professional development opportunities</li> <li>• Develop a performance recognition system:</li> </ul>
5.	Interpersonal relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor relations</li> <li>• Lack of flexibility and adaptability</li> <li>• Lack of patience and tolerance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster open communication</li> <li>• Promote a positive and inclusive school culture</li> <li>• Provide conflict resolution and interpersonal skills training</li> </ul>

Source: Field Data (2023)

profession. To address these intrapersonal emotions, teachers underscored the importance of promoting a healthy work-life balance providing emotional support and implementing effective communication channels.

Teachers further identified several managerial issues that contribute to their occupational stress. Particularly, lack of support and resources emerged as a primary concern with teachers emphasising on the need for increased support from school administrators and access to necessary resources for effective teaching. The absence of recognition and appreciation for their efforts and contributions was also mentioned in connection with feelings of undervaluation and demotivation. Regarding the limited career advancement opportunities further relative to stress, teachers expressed the desire for more professional growth and upward mobility avenues in their careers.

Poor interpersonal relations such as strained relationships with colleagues and the wider school community emerged as a significant stressor among teachers. Lack of flexibility and adaptability in the work environment was another contributing factor since it can lead to conflicts and challenges in collaboration. Moreover, a lack of patience and tolerance in interpersonal interactions further compounded the stress levels teachers endured. Finally, the teachers stressed the importance of fostering open communication, promoting a positive and inclusive school culture and providing conflict resolution and interpersonal skills training to improve interpersonal relations. These findings shed light on the factors that contribute to the teachers' occupational stress and provide insights into potential strategies and interventions to alleviate their stress levels and enhance their overall well-being.



## 5. DISCUSSION

The work environment emerged as a significant factor contributing to occupational stress among teachers in the secondary schools under review. Specifically, the participants mentioned an increase of workloads was a prevalent concern, with many of them expressing signalling being overwhelmed and having limited time to plan for and deliver quality lessons [34,35]. Additionally, lack of support from administration made the teachers feel that they lacked guidance and assistance when facing challenges. Limited autonomy and control over decision-making processes were also cited as sources of stress. To address these issues, they called for improving the work conditions among teachers particularly workload management, and fostering collaboration and collective action in the school environment [29]. During an interview, one of the teachers (no.20) from school C lamented:

The heavy workloads in our profession are overwhelming. We are constantly bombarded with administrative tasks, lesson planning, grading papers and managing classroom dynamics. It feels like there's never enough time to catch our breath. The workload consumes a lot of time on our well-being, making it challenging to provide quality education to our students. It's like a never-ending cycle of stress and it's affecting our mental and physical health. (Teacher no. 20)

This statement also resonates with stressors associated with the management of rights and needs. The teachers expressed concerns about lack of professional development opportunities, which hindered their growth and learning. Moreover, they insisted on-the-job training was insufficient; as leaving teachers to navigate their responsibilities without adequate support [37,39]. Furthermore, the absence of collaborative decision-making processes made teachers feel excluded from important discussions and decision-making. To address these stress-causing issues, participants emphasised on the importance of improved school leadership support, needs assessment and individualised training plans aimed to meet the specific needs of teachers [30]. In this regard, a teacher (no. 47) from school B said: "We need more workshops and training programmes to enhance our teaching skills. On-the-job training is almost non-existent. We have to figure things out on our own, which

can be stressful and disturbing at the working places."

Also, intrapersonal emotions contributed significantly to occupational stress among teachers. The teachers reported that frustration and disappointment stemming from constant policy changes and lack of clarity were common sentiments. They further cited depression linked to the immense workload and pressure. The teachers also experienced both physical and mental exhaustion. To alleviate these emotions and reduce stress, the participants suggested promoting a healthy work-life balance in addition to providing emotional support mechanisms and effective communication channels to enhance understanding and transparency [31]. Another teacher (no. 50) described the reasons behind the teachers' depression thusly:

Continual changes in policies and lack of clarity lead to frustration and disappointment among teachers. It affects their motivation and job satisfaction. The immense workload and pressure contribute to feelings of depression. It is thus important to address mental health and provide support to the teachers. (Educational official no. 50).

The situation was also compounded by managerial failure that the teachers cited as a cause of teachers' occupational stress, specifically lack of support and resources available to them which hampered their delivery of quality education and meet students' needs. The absence of recognition and appreciation for their efforts also emerged a significant stressor that made them feel undervalued. Also, there were limited career advancement opportunities that made teachers stagnant without clear growth pathways. A teacher (no. 62) from school A said.

We often struggle with insufficient resources and support, which makes it difficult to deliver quality education and meet students' needs. The lack of recognition and appreciation for our efforts demotivates us. It is important to acknowledge and value the hard work teachers put in. The limited opportunities for career advancement make us feel stuck and undervalued. There should be clear pathways for growth and promotion career advancement opportunities among teachers (Teacher no. 62).

Recommendations to address these stress-causing issues included advocating for increased support and resources, strengthening

professional development opportunities and developing a performance recognition system to acknowledge and appreciate teachers' contributions, much in line with Woo et al. [32].

Finally, interpersonal relations also emerged as contributory factors to occupational stress among the secondary school teachers. They reported that poor relations among staff members were created a negative work environment that hindered collaboration and teamwork. The lack of flexibility and adaptability in policies and practices also made it difficult for the teachers to navigate the changing circumstances. Additionally, the absence of patience and tolerance among colleagues led to a toxic work environment. To address these issues, participants highlighted the importance of fostering open communication, promoting a positive and inclusive school culture and providing conflict resolution and interpersonal skills training to improve relations and create a supportive work environment, which was consistent with suggestions by Durlak et al. [33]. Another teacher (no. 52) from school D explained:

Poor relations among staff create a negative work environment. It is crucial to promote teamwork and build positive relationships for better collaboration. The lack of flexibility in policies and practices hinders our ability to adapt to new challenges and changes in the education landscape. A lack of patience and tolerance among colleagues leads to a toxic work environment. We need to cultivate empathy and understanding within the school community. (Teacher no. 52)

These findings shed light on the factors that contribute to teachers' occupational stress and provide insights into potential strategies and interventions to alleviate their stress levels and enhance their overall well-being [41-43].

## 6. CONCLUSION

Occupational stress among teachers in Tanzania's secondary schools under review can be attributable to factors related to their work environment, management of the rights and needs, intrapersonal emotions, managerial failures, and interpersonal relations. The work environment stressors comprised increased workload, lack of support from administration, and limited autonomy and control contribute to occupational stress and, hence, required

improving work conditions, enhancing collaboration among teachers and promoting collective action to address the root causes of stress. The management of rights and needs stressors, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of providing professional development opportunities, on-the-job training and collaborative decision-making in addition prioritising improving school leadership support and implementing needs assessment and individualized training plans. Also, intrapersonal emotions such as frustration, disappointment, depression and exhaustion significantly impacted on occupational stress, whose mitigation could include promoting a healthy work-life balance, providing emotional support, and establishing effective communication channels to create a supportive environment for teachers. The study found managerial failures to include lack of support and resources, recognition and appreciation including limited career advancement opportunities contribute to stress among teachers. As such, it is imperative to advocate for increased support and resources, strengthening of professional development opportunities and developing performance recognition systems aimed to address these issues and boost teacher morale. Finally, interpersonal relations in the school community such as poor relations, lack of flexibility and adaptability, lack of patience and tolerance among colleagues also aggravated occupational stress the teachers experienced. Such an atmosphere would require creating an environment that fosters open communication, a positive and inclusive school culture, and conflict resolution. Indubitably, in such cases interpersonal skills training could help improve interpersonal relationships and reduce stress levels among the secondary school teachers.

## 7. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study findings have several implications for policy and practice development, teacher well-being and retention, the quality of education, professional development and growth, as well as organizational culture and communication. Understanding the causes of occupational stress among teachers can guide the development of targeted strategies and interventions to address these stressors, ultimately, improving the well-being of teachers and the quality of education.

On the other hand, the generalizability of the study findings may be limited due to the nature of

the sample and the specific context of the study. Thus, further research with larger and more diverse samples from various educational settings can enhance the generalizability of the findings. However, the findings of the current study are still valid and useful and opening the ways to mitigate occupational stress in educational settings. Also, since the data collected for this study are self-reported and based on teachers' perception, there is a possibility of response bias, where participants may provide socially-desirable responses or may not accurately represent their experiences. Nevertheless, the study provides a snapshot of teachers' perception of occupational stress at a specific point in time without necessarily capturing the dynamic nature of occupational stress and its changes over time. As such, longitudinal studies that follow teachers over an extended period can provide a deeper understanding of the causes of occupational stress and its impact on teachers' well-being.

## CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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