iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 13 **Issue:** IX **Month of publication:** September 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2025.74257

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 13 Issue IX Sep 2025- Available at www.ijraset.com

Stress, Coping, and Burnout: A Psychological Perspective on Teachers in Low-Resource Institutions

Mrs. J. Saranya[1], Mrs. S. Poornima[2], Ms. M. Sharmila[3], Ms. K. Deepika[4], Mr. S. Sudhakar[5]
[1]*Head and Assistant professor, Department of Psychology, Nandha Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Erode, Tamil Nadu.*
[2, 3, 4, 5]*Assistant professor, Department of Psychology, Nandha Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Erode, Tamil Nadu*

Abstract: ***This study explores the psychological dimensions of stress, coping, and burnout among teachers working in low-resource educational institutions, a critical issue that not only undermines teachers' mental health and emotional well-being but also adversely influences student outcomes. Educators in such contexts are confronted with a variety of challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, large class sizes, limited professional support, and the broader socio-economic difficulties faced by their students.***

These stressors collectively heighten vulnerability to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Drawing upon recent empirical and theoretical literature, this article analyzes the antecedents of stress in under-resourced schools, tracing how prolonged exposure to adverse working conditions contributes to the manifestation of burnout. It also examines the coping strategies that teachers employ, ranging from adaptive approaches such as problem-solving, peer support, and resilience-building, to maladaptive responses including withdrawal and disengagement. A nuanced understanding of these coping patterns is essential for designing targeted interventions.

The paper further emphasizes the importance of psychological interventions and systemic changes to enhance teacher well-being. Recommended strategies include professional development workshops on stress management, access to mental health services, peer mentoring programs, and the integration of mindfulness and resilience training. At a structural level, policies that reduce teacher workload, improve classroom resources, and provide continuous support systems are necessary to address the root causes of stress.

Ultimately, this study highlights the interconnectedness of teacher well-being and student success, arguing that healthier teachers are better positioned to create supportive and effective learning environments. By addressing both individual and systemic factors, the research underscores the need for comprehensive strategies that safeguard educators' mental health while improving educational outcomes in marginalized settings.

Keywords: Stress, Coping, Burnout, Teachers, Low-Resource Institutions, Teacher Well-Being, Psychological Interventions, Resilience, Student Outcomes.

I. INTRODUCTION

Teachers in low-resource institutions face unique challenges, making their job a particularly high-stress occupation. These schools, marked by limited funding, outdated materials, and a lack of administrative support, create a breeding ground for chronic stress. This prolonged stress often leads to teacher burnout, a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion (Kyriacou, 2015). The consequences of burnout are far-reaching, negatively impacting not only the teacher's well-being but also classroom quality, student academic achievement, and teacher retention rates (Madigan & Kim, 2021). A psychological perspective is essential for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, as it moves beyond the surface-level issues. It examines the cognitive appraisals, emotional responses, and behavioral efforts that teachers employ to cope with their demanding work environment.

A recent study highlights the cyclical relationship between teacher well-being and student outcomes, finding that emotionally exhausted teachers are less effective in the classroom (Hoglund et al., 2015). Additionally, research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) identifies a lack of perceived control and low self-efficacy as major contributors to teacher stress in these settings. Understanding these psychological dynamics is crucial for developing effective interventions to support teachers and, in turn, improve educational quality for all students.

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II. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF STRESS AND BURNOUT

A. *Defining Stress and Burnout*

In psychology, stress is understood as a condition that emerges when there is a mismatch between external demands and the individual's perceived capacity to cope (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For teachers, these demands often involve excessive workloads, student misbehavior, administrative pressures, and performance expectations. In low-resource educational settings, such pressures are intensified by inadequate infrastructure, scarcity of teaching materials, and insufficient institutional support (Ghimire et al., 2024). Chronic exposure to these stressors heightens the risk of burnout, a multidimensional construct that has become a critical focus of contemporary research (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Tripathi, 2025).

Burnout represents the endpoint of prolonged, unmanaged stress and manifests in three interrelated dimensions (Maslach et al., 2001):

1) Emotional Exhaustion – Teachers experience deep fatigue, both physically and emotionally, leaving them unable to engage meaningfully in their roles. This dimension has been consistently identified as the most prominent predictor of teacher turnover (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

2) Depersonalization (Cynicism) – Educators adopt a detached, sometimes negative stance toward students or colleagues as a defense against overwhelming emotional demands. Recent studies suggest that social isolation and lack of collegial support intensify this symptom (Ghimire et al., 2024).

3) Reduced Personal Accomplishment – Teachers feel ineffective, undervalued, and incompetent in their work. This dimension strongly correlates with diminished job satisfaction and lowered student learning outcomes (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2023).

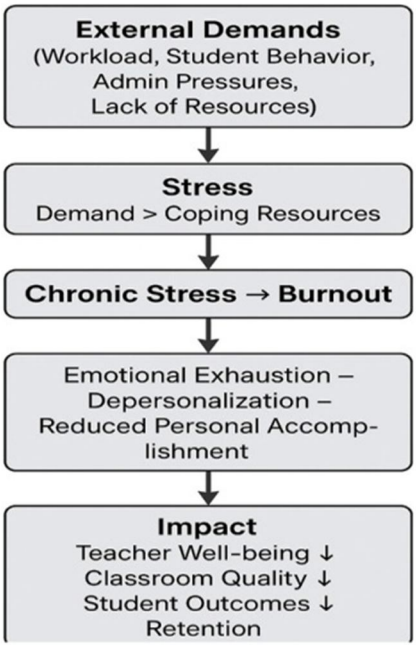


Fig1: Psychological Framework

Fig1 Shows Understanding these components within a psychological framework is essential for designing interventions aimed at promoting teacher resilience, well-being, and retention.

B. *The Unique Stressors in Low-Resource Institutions*

Teachers working in low-resource educational settings encounter a distinct set of stressors that significantly elevate their risk of burnout. One of the most pressing challenges is the scarcity of resources, where the absence of essential teaching materials, modern technology, and adequate support staff compels educators to compensate by investing additional time and emotional energy in lesson preparation. While this fosters creativity, it also heightens psychological strain (Burić & Kim, 2020). Another critical factor is the overwhelming workload. Teachers in these contexts often manage disproportionately large class sizes with limited teaching aides, while simultaneously shouldering administrative responsibilities. This workload frequently extends beyond the regular school day, blurring work-life boundaries and depleting recovery time (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021).

Furthermore, challenging student demographics amplify the pressure. Many students come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, facing hardships such as poverty, family instability, or limited parental support. These circumstances can manifest in behavioral issues, academic underachievement, and heightened emotional needs that require considerable teacher intervention (Aldrup et al., 2022). Such demands place educators in roles that extend far beyond instruction, often without the necessary psychological training or resources.

Finally, the lack of institutional support compounds these challenges. Ineffective leadership, limited opportunities for professional development, and insufficient collegial collaboration leave teachers feeling isolated and undervalued. The absence of a supportive organizational culture undermines resilience and accelerates the trajectory toward burnout (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Together, these stressors create a high-risk environment where teacher well-being, instructional quality, and student outcomes are all adversely affected.

III. COPING MECHANISMS: ADAPTIVE AND MALADAPTIVE STRATEGIES

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals use to manage the demands of stressful environments. For teachers, particularly in low-resource institutions, coping strategies play a crucial role in determining whether stress leads to resilience or escalates into burnout. Coping mechanisms are broadly classified into adaptive (healthy and productive) and maladaptive (unhealthy and counterproductive) strategies.

A. Adaptive Coping Strategies

Adaptive coping strategies enable teachers to manage stressors in ways that enhance both their personal well-being and professional effectiveness. These approaches involve constructive actions and positive psychological adjustments that not only reduce the immediate impact of stress but also build resilience over time.

One key form of adaptive coping is problem-focused coping, which emphasizes directly addressing the root causes of stress. Teachers may implement this by collaborating with colleagues to design lesson plans, seeking administrative guidance for workload management, or setting firm boundaries to protect work-life balance. By proactively managing the source of stress, they are better able to maintain efficiency and reduce feelings of overload (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Another important approach is emotion-focused coping, which helps teachers regulate their emotional responses to challenging circumstances. Techniques such as mindfulness, reflective journaling, physical exercise, or turning to supportive colleagues can foster emotional stability and reduce the risk of burnout. These practices encourage teachers to acknowledge their emotions while simultaneously developing healthier ways of responding to them (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).

A further dimension is collective coping, which highlights the value of shared experiences and communal resilience. Teachers may form professional learning communities, peer support groups, or advocacy networks to exchange strategies, voice concerns, and work toward systemic improvements. Such collaborative efforts not only address institutional shortcomings but also strengthen a sense of belonging and mutual support, which can buffer against isolation and exhaustion (Bandura, 2000). Ultimately, adaptive coping strategies provide teachers with sustainable pathways to navigate professional challenges while preserving their mental health and effectiveness in the classroom.

B. Maladaptive Coping Strategies

When teachers lack adequate support systems or effective coping resources, they may turn to maladaptive strategies. While these approaches might provide temporary relief from stress, they ultimately intensify emotional strain and increase vulnerability to burnout over time. One common maladaptive strategy is avoidance, where teachers disengage from their professional responsibilities as a way of escaping overwhelming demands. This can manifest in absenteeism, procrastination, or reliance on escapist behaviors such as excessive screen time or unrelated tasks. Although avoidance may reduce stress in the moment, it often leads to an accumulation of responsibilities and heightened long-term pressure.

Another detrimental response is depersonalization, which involves creating emotional distance from students and the work itself. Teachers adopting this strategy may develop cynical or indifferent attitudes, perceiving students and colleagues in detached or negative terms. While this defense mechanism might shield them from immediate emotional exhaustion, it undermines the teacher-student relationship and reduces overall classroom effectiveness. A further maladaptive pattern is self-blame and withdrawal. Teachers experiencing high stress may internalize failures, attributing challenges to their own inadequacies. This self-critical mindset fosters feelings of guilt, hopelessness, and diminished self-worth.

Over time, such teachers may withdraw not only from professional interactions with colleagues but also from personal relationships with family and friends, leading to greater social isolation. Ultimately, maladaptive coping does not resolve the underlying stressors but compounds their negative effects. Recognizing these patterns is essential, as early intervention and the promotion of healthier coping strategies can prevent long-term burnout and preserve both teacher well-being and classroom quality.

IV. INTERVENTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Effectively reducing teacher stress and preventing burnout in low-resource institutions calls for a comprehensive approach that operates at multiple levels. Solutions must not only strengthen individual resilience but also address broader organizational and systemic challenges. On the personal level, interventions should focus on equipping teachers with practical skills, coping strategies, and access to mental health resources that promote well-being. At the institutional level, reforms in workload distribution, administrative practices, and the provision of adequate teaching resources are essential to creating a more supportive environment. A combined effort that balances individual empowerment with systemic change is crucial to ensure sustainable improvements in teacher well-being and professional effectiveness.

A. Individual-Level Interventions

Supporting teachers in low-resource institutions requires strengthening their personal ability to manage stress and enhance resilience. Individual-focused interventions play a key role in equipping educators with practical skills to safeguard their mental health and sustain professional effectiveness. One effective approach is the incorporation of mindfulness-based stress reduction programs**,** which include practices such as yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises. These interventions encourage self-awareness, foster emotional regulation, and reduce the physiological effects of chronic stress. Recent studies show that mindfulness not only decreases anxiety and burnout symptoms but also improves teachers' classroom engagement and overall well-being (Taylor et al., 2023).

Another promising method is the application of cognitive-behavioral strategies**.** Drawing on the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), such interventions encourage teachers to identify and challenge negative thinking patterns, reframe perceptions of professional inefficacy, and adopt healthier coping strategies. This process enhances problem-solving skills and strengthens a sense of control over stressful circumstances, ultimately reducing emotional exhaustion (Dimitriu et al., 2021). Additionally, psycho educational initiatives provide teachers with the knowledge needed to understand the psychological and physiological aspects of stress and burnout. By recognizing early warning signs and learning when to seek professional support, educators become more proactive in protecting their mental health. Psycho education can be delivered through seminars, digital resources, or peer-support discussions, ensuring accessibility even in low-resource settings. Collectively, these individual-level interventions empower teachers to build resilience, manage stress more effectively, and maintain their motivation, which contributes directly to improved teaching outcomes and student success.

B. Institutional-Level Interventions

While individual coping strategies are important, long-term solutions to teacher stress and burnout must originate at the institutional level. School leaders, administrators, and policymakers play a crucial role in creating supportive environments where teachers can thrive, particularly in low-resource settings where systemic challenges are most acute. A central priority is building a positive and supportive school climate**.** This involves cultivating trust, encouraging open communication, and fostering collaboration among teachers, administrators, students, and parents. When educators feel heard and valued, they are more likely to remain motivated and engaged, reducing the likelihood of emotional exhaustion. Establishing regular forums for dialogue and feedback can strengthen this sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

Another key intervention is addressing excessive workloads and resource gaps**.** Large class sizes, administrative burdens, and insufficient teaching materials often amplify stress levels. Institutional reforms, such as reducing student–teacher ratios, employing teaching assistants, and ensuring access to modern instructional tools, directly alleviate these pressures. Even incremental improvements, like digital teaching aids or streamlined administrative processes, can substantially reduce teacher strain. In addition, mentorship and professional development programs are essential for enhancing teacher confidence and reducing isolation. Pairing novice teachers with experienced mentors helps them navigate challenges more effectively, while structured professional development builds pedagogical skills and reinforces a sense of competence. Such initiatives not only strengthen individual performance but also contribute to a culture of shared growth and learning.

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Finally, institutions must prioritize teacher well-being as an organizational value. This can include offering mental health services, providing flexible scheduling where possible, and acknowledging teacher achievements through recognition programs. By institutionalizing wellness initiatives, schools signal their commitment to valuing teachers as professionals and as individuals. Together, these interventions address the systemic roots of stress and burnout, ensuring that teachers in low-resource environments are supported in meaningful and sustainable ways.

V. CONCLUSION

Teacher well-being in low-resource institutions represents more than an individual concern; it is a systemic challenge with significant implications for the overall quality of education. Stress and burnout among educators emerge when high professional demands consistently outweigh the resources and support available to meet them. This imbalance manifests in emotional exhaustion, reduced professional efficacy, and disengagement, which not only undermine the teacher's personal health but also affect classroom performance, student achievement, and long-term teacher retention.

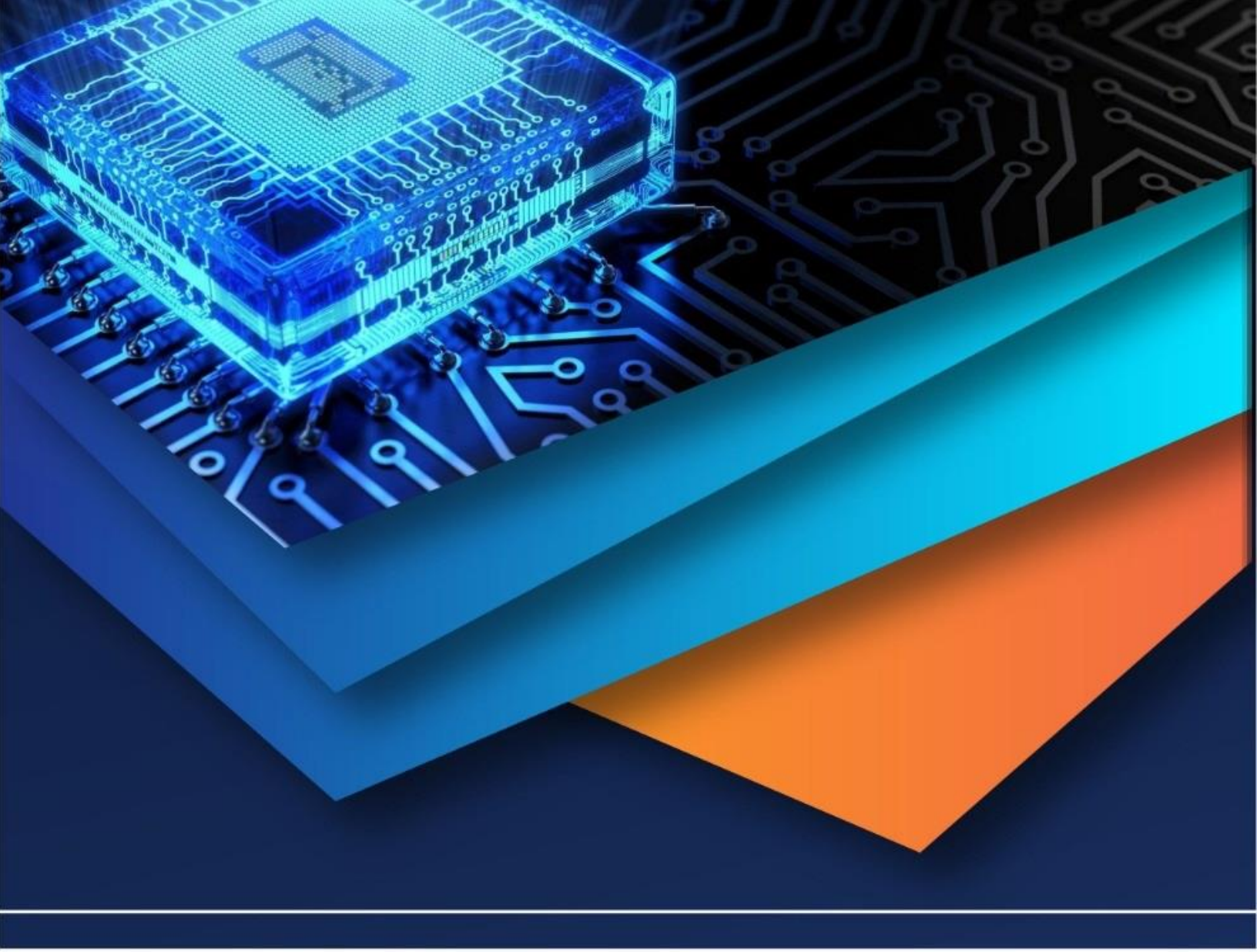
While individual coping strategies such as mindfulness, cognitive reframing, and social support can strengthen resilience, these measures alone cannot counteract the deeply rooted structural challenges in under-resourced schools. Teachers may temporarily manage their stress, but without systemic change, the cycle of burnout is likely to persist. Therefore, a comprehensive and integrated approach is necessary—one that simultaneously equips educators with psychological tools for personal well-being and addresses the institutional conditions that generate chronic stress.

At the systemic level, reforms must prioritize supportive school climates, adequate teaching resources, and policies that reduce excessive workloads. Institutional efforts to promote teacher well-being—such as mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and accessible mental health services—create sustainable environments where educators feel valued and empowered. When paired with evidence-based psychological interventions, these measures can significantly reduce stress and improve resilience. Ultimately, supporting teacher well-being is an investment in educational quality and equity. Teachers who are mentally healthy and professionally supported are more engaged, effective, and committed, which directly benefits student learning outcomes. By recognizing stress and burnout as both psychological and systemic issues, educational stakeholders can foster resilient institutions that empower teachers and strengthen the foundations of education for all learners.

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