

Perceived Occupational Health Challenges among College Teachers in Banke District: A Survey Study

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Article Received: 15-April-2023, Revised: 02-May-2023, Accepted: 22-May-2023

ABSTRACT:

The health challenges faced by college teachers in their work environments have received limited attention in many countries, including Nepal. This descriptive study aimed to explore the perceived occupational health problems among college teachers in the Banke district of Nepal. A questionnaire, comprising the Subjective Health Complaints (SHC) Inventory, was administered to 96 teachers from two selected colleges using cluster sampling. A total of 80 usable questionnaires were collected and analyzed. The findings revealed that a significant proportion of college teachers (71.25%) reported poor health conditions, with 93.75% (n = 75) of respondents experiencing at least one of the 37 subjective health problems included in the SHC inventory within the past 30 days. The top ten frequently reported work-related subjective health complaints among college teachers included voice disorder, tiredness, leg pain, eyestrain, headache, shoulder pain, neck pain, arm pain, anxiety, and sadness/depression. It is crucial to establish a healthy and teacher-friendly work environment in colleges to safeguard and enhance the health of teachers.

Keywords: college teachers, occupational health problems, subjective health complaints

INTRODUCTION:

The well-being of teachers is crucial for the effective functioning of educational institutions and the overall educational system. Teachers' occupational health plays a vital role in their ability to deliver quality education and contribute to students' academic success. However, the demanding nature of the teaching profession, coupled with various job-related stressors, can significantly impact teachers' physical and mental health. Kolbe et al. (as cited in Maharjan & Aryal, 2012) have highlighted that teachers experience various health problems that have a negative impact on students' success. Understanding the occupational health challenges faced by college teachers is essential for developing strategies to improve their well-being and enhance the educational environment. In the contemporary workplace, issues of health and well-being have gained increasing attention, including within the teaching profession. Concerns related to retirement due to ill-health and work-related sickness absence have become recurring issues (Wilson, 2002; Travers & Cooper, 1996). Teachers are not exempt from diseases, accidents, stress, and other health-related challenges. In developing countries, teachers often face long work hours, have to manage conflicts

among students, have limited time for rest and meals, work in hazardous environments, and generally receive salaries that do not commensurate with their workload (Alves et al., 2009). These circumstances expose teachers to various health risks. Recent data indicates that college teachers worldwide encounter a range of occupational health problems that can negatively affect their overall job performance and job satisfaction. Studies conducted in various countries have identified health-related issues such as stress, burnout, musculoskeletal problems, mental health concerns, and work-related fatigue among college teachers (Ammannito & Caricati, 2020; Maslach et al., 2001; Tytherleigh et al., 2005). Several common health issues including anxiety, depression, insomnia, heightened emotional and/or physical exhaustion, and the emergence of feelings of guilt are observed among college teachers (Mula-Falcón et al., 2022). In the context of Nepal, where the education sector has witnessed significant growth and expansion, the health and well-being of college teachers are of paramount importance. Maharjan and Aryal (2012) have noted that a considerable number of teachers in Nepal experience suboptimal health due to various physical, biological, mechanical, and psychosocial risks.

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How to Cite:

Toya Nath Pahadi. (2023). Perceived Occupational Health Challenges among College Teachers in Banke District: A Survey Study. *The Journal of Social Sciences Studies and Research*, 3(03), Page: 133–139. Retrieved from <https://tjsssr.com/index.php/tjsssr/article/view/99>

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Nepalese teachers face numerous health problems, such as a lack of timely meals, extended speaking hours, inadequate provision for health check-ups, and low priority given to their own health (Bishwokarma, 2012). Despite the importance of occupational health, it remains a neglected aspect in national policies, plans, programs, and research agendas. Banke district, located in the western region of Nepal, is home to numerous colleges and academic institutions, catering to a substantial student population. However, there is a dearth of research examining the occupational health challenges specifically faced by college teachers in Banke.

While attention to teachers' occupational health is crucial, there is limited recent research available. Despite the World Health Organization's emphasis on creating "healthy universities" to promote healthy working, learning, and living environments for students and staff (Tsouros, 1998), research and interventions for the health promotion of college teachers are lacking. College teachers encounter various health challenges in their work settings (Dooris et al., 2010), but these challenges remain relatively unknown in most countries, including Nepal.

Therefore, to fulfill this research gap, the authors of this survey research aimed to investigate the prevalence of perceived occupational health problems among college teachers in the Banke district of Nepal. This study will inform policymakers, educational institutions, and relevant stakeholders about those issues. By understanding these challenges, appropriate strategies and interventions can be developed to promote teachers' well-being and create a conducive work environment, ultimately benefiting both teachers and students.

METHODOLOGY:

This study employed a descriptive research design with a quantitative methodology to investigate the perceived occupational health problems among college teachers in Banke district, Nepal. The research utilized a questionnaire survey as the data collection method. Cluster sampling was employed to select two colleges out of the 13 colleges in the Banke district. From Mahendra Multiple Campus Nepalgunj and Bageswary Multiple Campus Kohalpur, a total of 96 teachers were selected as respondents based on their availability during the study period, as recorded in the attendance register.

To assess the perceived occupational health problems, an anonymous self-completion questionnaire was administered to the respondents. The questionnaire included the subjective health complaint (SHC) inventory with minor modifications based on the work of Eriksen et al. (1999). The inventory, translated into the Nepali language, comprises 37 subjective health complaints that cover a wide range of commonly experienced health issues among teachers. These

complaints are categorized into seven subscales, including musculoskeletal pain, pseudo-neurology, gastrointestinal problems, allergy, flu, eye problems, and teachers' common health problems.

The questionnaire also collected the demographic and occupational characteristics of the respondents, their general perceived health status, and subjective health complaints. Prior to the actual data collection, a pretest of the questionnaire was conducted with 10 college teachers to ensure its validity in measuring the prevalence of perceived health complaints among the respondents.

Informed consent forms were provided to the participants along with the questionnaire, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation and the assurance of anonymity. Personal identifiers were not included in the questionnaire to maintain confidentiality. Data processing and analysis were performed using Microsoft Word and Excel. The raw data were manually edited, entered into a master table, and then classified and analyzed in terms of frequency and percentage. The results of the study were presented using tables and figures in accordance with the study objectives. Whenever possible, the findings were compared to relevant national and international research on similar topics.

By employing this methodology, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into the perceived occupational health problems among college teachers in Banke district, Nepal, and contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this area.

Findings:

Demographic and Occupational Characteristics of the Respondents:

A total of 80 questionnaires were considered usable for analysis, resulting in an overall response rate of 86.02 percent. Out of the respondents, 68 individuals (85.0%) were male, while 12 individuals (15.0%) were female. Regarding teaching experience, a majority of the respondents (58.75%) had more than 5 years of experience in the field. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (67.5%) were under temporary employment with lower status designations such as teaching assistants or part-time teachers.

In terms of teaching workload, approximately two-thirds of the respondents (62.5%) reported teaching between 6-10 periods per day. A small percentage of respondents (6.25%) were teaching in only one college, whereas a substantial proportion (71.25%) were teaching in two colleges concurrently.

These findings suggest that the majority of respondents were male, had several years of teaching experience, and were employed in temporary positions with lower-status designations. Additionally, a significant proportion of respondents reported a relatively high teaching workload and were simultaneously teaching at multiple colleges. These characteristics provide

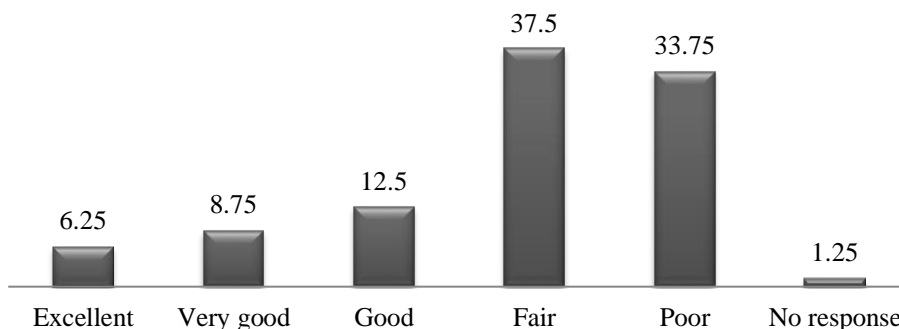
important insights into the occupational profile of college teachers in the study area.

General Perceived Health Status:

Participants were asked to evaluate their overall health status using a rating scale that included categories such

as excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. The findings indicate that a small percentage of respondents (6.25%) rated their health as excellent. However, the majority of respondents (71.25%) reported their general health as fair or poor.

Figure: 1. Perceived Health Status by Percentage of the Respondents



These results suggest that a significant proportion of the college teachers in the study perceive their overall health to be less than optimal. The high percentage of respondents reporting fair or poor health indicates potential concerns regarding their well-being. These findings highlight the importance of addressing health-related issues among college teachers to ensure their overall well-being and ability to perform their professional duties effectively.

Prevalence of Perceived Health Problems:

Among the respondents, a significant proportion (93.75%) reported experiencing at least one type of health problem within the past 30 days, based on the seven subscales of complaints. It is worth noting that a small percentage (6.25%) of teachers indicated they did not currently suffer from any of the listed

conditions. Many respondents reported experiencing multiple health problems during the specified time frame. Therefore, multiple responses were considered and analyzed in this study.

Among the seven subjective health complaint scales, the highest prevalence was observed in the pseudo-neurological scale (97.5%), followed by musculoskeletal (92.5%), common health problems for teachers (80.0%), eye-related (80.0%), flu-like symptoms (60.0%), gastrointestinal (57.5%), and allergic complaints (33.75%).

The ten most frequently reported health complaints among the teachers were tiredness (93.75%), eyestrain (78.75%), anxiety (75.0%), voice disorder (75.0%), sleep problems (71.25%), shoulder pain (71.25%), neck pain (66.25%), headache (62.5%), sadness/depression (53.75%), and lower back pain (53.75%).

Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Their Subjective Health Complaints

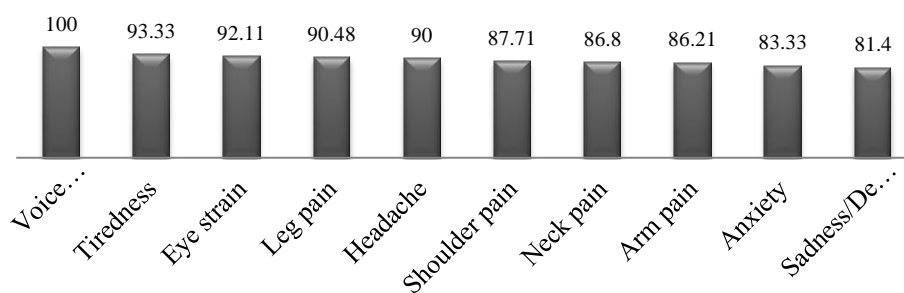
Complaints	Total no. of respondents (80)		Complaints caused or worsened by their job	
	Number	Percent	Yes Number (%)	No Number (%)
<i>Musculoskeletal</i>	74	92.5		
Lower-back pain	43	53.75	30 (69.77)	13 (30.23)
Neck pain	53	66.25	46 (86.8)	7 (13.2)
Shoulder pain	57	71.25	50 (87.71)	7 (12.29)
Upper-back pain	39	48.75	10 (25.64)	29 (74.36)
Leg pain	38	47.5	35 (92.11)	3 (7.89)
Arm pain	29	36.25	25 (86.21)	4 (13.79)
Headache	50	62.5	45 (90.0)	5 (10.0)
Migraine	22	27.5	7 (31.82)	15 (68.18)
<i>Pseudo-neurological</i>	78	97.5		
Anxiety	60	75.0	50 (83.33)	10 (16.67)
Sadness/depression	43	53.75	35 (81.4)	8 (18.6)
Dizziness	25	31.25	15 (60.0)	10 (40.0)

Extra heartbeats	31	38.75	21 (67.74)	10 (32.26)
Hot flushes	18	22.5	7(38.89)	11 (61.11)
Sleep problems	57	71.25	45 (78.95)	12 (21.05)
Tiredness	75	93.75	70 (93.33)	5 (6.25)
<i>Gastrointestinal</i>	46	57.5		
Diarrhoea	11	13.75	5 (45.45)	6 (54.55)
Gas discomfort	21	26.25	0	0
Heartburn	9	11.25	0	0
Stomach discomfort	27	33.75	0	0
Stomach pain	23	28.75	0	0
Ulcer/non-ulcer dyspepsia	17	21.25	0	0
Constipation	25	31.25	10 (40.0)	15 (60.0)
<i>Allergic</i>	27	33.75		
Allergy	10	12.5	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)
Asthma	10	12.5	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)
Breathing difficulties	8	10.0	5 (62.5)	3 (37.5)
Chest pain	12	15.0	2 (16.67)	10 (83.33)
Eczema	10	12.5	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)
<i>Flu</i>	48	60.0		
Cold/flu	42	52.5	34 (80.95)	8 (19.05)
Coughing	38	47.5	15 (39.47)	23 (60.53)
<i>Eye</i>	64	80.0		
Itchy eyes	23	28.75	12 (52.17)	11 (47.83)
Irritated eyes	17	21.25	9 (52.94)	8 (47.06)
Watery eyes	10	12.5	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)
Dry eyes	36	45.0	9 (25.0)	27 (75.0)
Eyestrain	63	78.75	57 (90.48)	6 (9.52)
<i>Common health problems for teachers</i>	64	80.0		
Contact dermatitis	19	23.75	3 (15.79)	16 (84.21)
Voice disorder	60	75.0	60 (100.0)	0
Varicose veins of lower limbs	0	0	0 (0.0)	0

Furthermore, respondents were asked if they believed their health problems were work-related, meaning caused or worsened by their job. The majority of respondents attributed the top ten subjective health complaints to their work, as reported for most of the musculoskeletal and pseudo-neurological sub-scale problems. These findings highlight the high prevalence of perceived health problems among college teachers

in Banke. The results suggest the need for interventions and support mechanisms to address these health concerns, particularly those related to musculoskeletal issues and pseudo-neurological symptoms. Additionally, workplace interventions aimed at reducing or preventing work-related health problems may contribute to improving the overall well-being and job performance of college teachers.

Figure: 2. Percentage Distribution of the Respondents by Top 10 Work-Related Subjective Health Complaints



The analysis of subjective health complaints revealed the top 10 complaints most frequently reported by the respondents as work-related. These complaints and their respective percentages are as follows: voice disorder (100.0%), tiredness (93.33%), leg pain (92.11%), eyestrain (90.48%), headache (90.0%), shoulder pain (87.71%), neck pain (86.8%), arm pain (86.21%), anxiety (83.33%), and sadness/depression (81.4%). The high prevalence of voice disorder as the most frequently reported complaint attributed to work suggests a potential occupational risk among college teachers. The demanding nature of their profession, including prolonged periods of speaking and vocal strain, may contribute to voice-related issues. Tiredness, leg pain, and eyestrain were also prominently reported, indicating the physical toll of teaching responsibilities. Headaches, shoulder pain, neck pain, and arm pain were common complaints, possibly associated with poor ergonomic practices, prolonged sitting or standing positions, and repetitive movements involved in teaching. The presence of anxiety and sadness/depression among the top reported complaints highlights the psychological impact of the teaching profession, possibly stemming from work-related stress and the demands of the educational environment.

These findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions and support systems to address the specific health concerns reported by college teachers. Measures such as ergonomic improvements, stress management programs, and mental health support services could help mitigate these work-related health issues. By addressing these concerns, educational institutions can contribute to creating a healthier and more conducive work environment for their teaching staff.

Number of Health Problems Suffered From:

The findings indicate that a significant proportion of the respondents, approximately 83.75%, reported experiencing multiple health problems within a 30-day period. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents (43.75%) reported suffering from more than four different health conditions. The high prevalence of multiple health problems among the respondents highlights the complex nature of health issues faced by college teachers. It suggests that teachers are likely to experience a range of physical and psychological health challenges concurrently, which can have a cumulative impact on their overall well-being and ability to perform their professional duties effectively. These findings underscore the importance of comprehensive health support and interventions targeting the diverse health needs of college teachers. Efforts should focus on promoting a holistic approach to health management that addresses both physical and psychological well-being. Providing access to

appropriate healthcare services, implementing stress management programs, and promoting a healthy work-life balance are key considerations in ensuring the overall well-being of college teachers.

DISCUSSION:

The present study provides valuable insights into the demographic and occupational characteristics of the respondents, as well as the prevalence of perceived occupational health problems among college teachers in Banke. The majority of participants were male college teachers, reflecting the low involvement of females in this profession. The respondents were mostly experienced, with many having more than five years of teaching experience. Surprisingly, a significant proportion of respondents were temporary college teachers, indicating a lack of job security. The workload among college teachers was found to be high, with most of them teaching in multiple colleges and having more than six periods per day. The study revealed a concerning fact that a large percentage of college teachers reported their health conditions as not good. The prevalence of health complaints among the respondents was alarmingly high, with the majority experiencing at least one type of health complaint. These findings highlight a serious public health issue among college teachers, which is consistent with previous research conducted among school teachers in Kathmandu (Bishwokarma, 2012). It is evident that the majority of teachers are facing health problems, indicating the need for urgent attention and intervention. Mental health problems, particularly pseudo-neurological problems, were found to be the most prevalent among the respondents. Tiredness, anxiety, sleep problems, and sadness/depression were the major complaints in this category. These findings align with previous studies highlighting the impact of work pressure, student misbehavior, curriculum changes, job dissatisfaction, and inadequate salary packages on the mental health of teachers (Thangarajathi & Tamilselvi, 2009). Musculoskeletal disorders were also prominent among the respondents, with shoulder pain, neck pain, headache, and lower back pain being the major complaints. These findings are consistent with the high prevalence of self-reported musculoskeletal disorders observed among teachers in previous studies (Erick & Smith, 2011; Korkmaz et al., 2011). The study further revealed that college teachers frequently experienced health complaints related to common problems faced by teachers and eye-related issues. Voice disorder and eyestrain were the most common complaints in these categories. These findings are supported by previous research conducted in Hong Kong and other countries, indicating the prevalence of voice problems among teachers (Chong & Chan, 2010; Sapir et al., 1993; Smith et al., 1997; Fritzell, 1996; Russell et al., 1998). The top 10

subjective health complaints identified in this study were primarily work-related, including tiredness, eyestrain, anxiety, voice disorder, sleep problems, shoulder pain, neck pain, headache, sadness/depression, and lower back pain. These findings highlight the impact of occupational factors on the health of college teachers. Similar patterns of health problems have been observed among school teachers in Brazil, emphasizing the prevalence of voice problems, musculoskeletal problems, and mental health problems among teachers (Maria de and Martins, 2009).

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the urgent need for interventions and support systems to address the health concerns of college teachers. Efforts should be made to reduce work-related stress, improve working conditions, and provide appropriate support and resources to promote the well-being of college teachers.

CONCLUSIONS:

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that a significant number of college teachers in Banke are experiencing health problems, with the majority suffering from at least one type of health issue. The most common work-related health problems among college teachers include voice disorders, mental health problems, and musculoskeletal disorders. This research provides valuable insights into the health problems faced by college teachers in Nepal, filling a crucial knowledge gap in this area. The findings of this study can serve as a valuable reference for the government and relevant organizations in formulating policies and strategies to address the health problems of college teachers. It is crucial to establish effective monitoring systems, such as occupational health units, within universities and colleges. Additionally, involving staff in shaping a healthy work environment and empowering local college management to take full responsibility for the health and well-being of teachers and staff are essential steps to improve the situation. Creating healthy universities and colleges is of utmost importance for promoting the health of teachers. The promotion of a healthy work environment in educational institutions across the country should be a top priority in order to safeguard and enhance teachers' health. Targeted health promotion programs tailored specifically for teachers should be developed and implemented. The results of this study highlight the need for teacher-friendly universities and colleges, as this aspect has been largely neglected in the realm of public health in Nepal. Furthermore, further in-depth studies focusing on the occupational health problems of teachers are essential to raise awareness among the public and stakeholders about the significance of addressing teachers' health issues. It is crucial to recognize that teachers' health problems deserve close

attention and concerted efforts to improve their well-being.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the pressing need for interventions, policies, and programs to address the health problems faced by college teachers in Banke. By prioritizing teachers' health and creating supportive work environments, we can contribute to the overall well-being and effectiveness of the teaching profession.

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