



## Theoretical article

### CULTIVATING CALM IN CHAOS: UNRAVELING THE COMPLEX WEB OF WORK ANXIETY AMONG EDUCATORS

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#### Abstract

*This article aims to provide valuable insights into the intricate web of work anxiety, shedding light on its multifaceted sources and implications, with the overarching goal of fostering a more nurturing and supportive educational environment for both educators and students.*

**Key words:** Anxiety, Educators, Occupational Stress, Teaching Profession, Work-Related Stress, Educational Challenges.

#### Introduction

In the realm of education, the profession of teaching stands as an exemplar of dedication and responsibility. Educators, entrusted with shaping the minds and characters of future generations, often bear the weight of multifaceted challenges, navigating the delicate balance between inspiration and instruction. Central to their journey is the intricate facet of work anxiety, a pervasive issue that demands comprehensive exploration.

Anxiety, a common response to stress and challenging situations, manifests in both constructive and debilitating forms, influencing individuals' emotional landscapes. The demands of modern education, marked by increasing expectations, diverse classroom dynamics, and evolving pedagogical landscapes, have left educators grappling with heightened work anxiety levels. This anxiety not only impacts educators on a personal level, leading to physical and mental health challenges, but it also casts a shadow on the academic performance and well-being of their students. As a result, substantial research efforts have been dedicated to exploring the causes of work anxiety among educators and developing strategies to mitigate its influence.

The sources of teachers' work anxiety are multifaceted, encompassing factors such as workload, classroom management, student discipline, personal attributes, and the ever-evolving educational landscape. Additionally, demographic characteristics like gender and age have been shown to influence the intensity of work anxiety experienced by educators. The complexity of this issue and the need for comprehensive support and intervention strategies highlight the urgency of understanding and addressing work anxiety among teachers.

#### Definition

**Anxiety:** Anxiety is a common response to stress and challenging situations, manifesting as physical tension and a flurry of thoughts (Akiskal, 1998; Dobersek, 2021). It can be a

constructive force, motivating individuals to confront difficulties, yet excessive or persistent anxiety can hinder daily functioning, leading to emotions like anger, frustration, fear, fatigue, and depression, as well as impatience and irritability (Kenny, 2010; Young et al., 2019). Anxiety's origins can be psychogenic or linked to physical conditions, influenced by cognitive and emotional processes, lifestyle, and perception (Adwas et al., 2019; Yazici & Hatipoglu, 2019). While everyone experiences some level of anxiety, elevated anxiety can harm well-being and disrupt daily life (Arenas et al., 2019; Kowalski & Schermer, 2019; Rawlings et al., 2022).

**Hofmann's Perspective:** Hofmann (2007) characterizes anxiety as arising when an individual perceives a gap between the demands of a situation and their own resources, be they biological, psychological, or social.

### **Work/Occupational Anxiety**

**Increasing Work Challenges:** In an increasingly challenging world, our relationship with work is strained as we grapple with daily societal, economic, and ethical issues (Rout & Rout, 2002). The modern work environment is rife with stress, as employers demand greater productivity, while employees contend with adverse conditions such as intense competition, cooperation issues, poor management, inadequate leadership, and dysfunctional organizational behavior (Bischoff et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2020).

**Origins and Prevalence:** Selye (1956) was among the first to conceptualize anxiety as a response to external stimuli that disrupt the human organism. Occupational anxiety emerges when factors within the professional space burden employees or create conditions detrimental to their mental and physical well-being (Beehr et al., 1995). This discord often arises from a mismatch between available resources and the demands of the work environment, especially when these demands surpass an individual's capacity to cope with or control (Dunseath et al., 1995). Work anxiety is often used interchangeably with stress in many studies, including this thesis, and is commonly known as "occupational anxiety" or "work anxiety" among teachers, reflecting the broader category of stress or anxiety related to the profession (Lamontagne et al., 2007; Rout & Rout, 2002).

### **Teachers' Work Anxiety**

**Teachers' High-Stress Levels:** Teachers often grapple with high levels of work anxiety and burnout, a phenomenon acknowledged in many countries (Klassen et al., 2013; Li & Zhang, 2019; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Teaching is a profession riddled with responsibilities, chief among them being the safety, well-being, and conduct of others (Kantas, 2001).

**Impact on Teachers and Students:** Research highlights the adverse effects of work-related stress on teachers' physical and mental health, with repercussions extending to students' academic performance. In the United Kingdom, for example, 72% of teachers experience moderate anxiety, while 23% face more severe forms of anxiety (Fontana, 1996; Fontana & Abouserie, 1993). Additionally, a staggering 78% of teachers identify their workplace as the primary source of stress in their lives (Cox et al., 2017).

**Broader Implications:** Teachers' work anxiety not only affects their individual well-being but also has broader implications for the educational environment and society (Antoniou et al., 2006; Antoniou et al., 2013). Consequently, significant research efforts have been dedicated to exploring the causes of teachers' work anxiety and strategies to mitigate it (Karavas, 2010; Vassilopoulos, 2012).

**Cause Categories:** Factors contributing to work anxiety in teachers encompass diverse categories, as elucidated by Cox et al. (1988). These factors include aspects related to

professional development, job intrinsic factors, personal attributes, school organizational structures, and external societal and political elements.

### **Cooper & Travers' Model of Work Anxiety**

**Categorization of Anxiety Sources:** Cooper & Travers' (2012) model of anxiety at work further categorizes the sources of anxiety into six groups: internal workplace factors, individual roles within the organization, workplace relationships, external societal factors, career development prospects, and organizational structure and climate. Among these, workplace conditions, role ambiguity, workplace relationships, and a lack of personal space significantly contribute to teacher anxiety (Kyriacou, 2001; Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2014).

**Teacher-Specific Stressors:** Teachers often grapple with student behaviors, lack of student effort, poor working conditions, excessive workload, and the absence of participation in decision-making processes (Kantas, 2001; Lazuras, 2006; Kalyva, 2013; Kourmoussi et al., 2015). These stressors can lead to negative psychological states and stress-related health issues. However, support from school administration can help alleviate some of these stressors (Vlăduț & Kállay, 2011).

**Additional Stressors:** In addition to the aforementioned factors, teachers' work anxiety can stem from their perceived inability to handle teaching duties, classroom environments, relationships with students and parents, class size, low pay, unmet career expectations, and the evolving educational landscape (Kabito & Wami, 2020; Junker et al., 2021; Hong et al., 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Gu et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021). The constant need for professional development in the face of evolving educational demands and technologies adds to their anxiety (Fahmi et al., 2022; Košir et al., 2022). Gender differences in experiencing and coping with work anxiety have also been noted, with men often experiencing it more intensely and struggling with effective coping strategies compared to women (Leontari et al., 2000).

**Workload and Home-Family Relationships:** Among the various sources of stress, workload stands out as a key concern for teachers, often encroaching upon their personal time (Karadimas et al., 2004). Factors outside of student behavior, such as home-family relationships, responsibility issues, and career-related concerns, also contribute to teacher stress (Karadimas et al., 2004). These multifaceted sources of work anxiety underscore the complexity of the issue and the need for comprehensive support and intervention strategies for teachers.

### **Literature Review about Work Anxiety**

**Categorization of Stressors:** Work anxiety has been extensively studied, often as both an independent and dependent variable, with influences stemming from various work-related behaviors and personal factors. Researchers typically categorize stressors into two main groups: those related to the work environment and those tied to individual employee characteristics.

**Demographic Influences:** Studies have shown mixed results regarding the influence of demographic characteristics on work anxiety among teachers. Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) found that teachers considered their profession stressful, with no significant influence of factors like gender, age, qualifications, years of service, or position in the school unit. In contrast, Byrne (1991) revealed that younger teachers and female teachers tended to experience higher levels of work anxiety.

**Factors Contributing to Work Anxiety:** Factors contributing to teachers' work anxiety encompass classroom management, relationships with colleagues, workload, student discipline issues, salary, and role conflicts (Kyriacou, 1977). Additional studies have identified workload and student indiscipline as significant stressors (Malik et al., 1991). Surveys by Farber (1984) and Capel (1992) highlighted that a significant percentage of teachers experienced burnout, influenced by satisfaction levels in their interactions with students and colleagues.

**Personality Traits and Character:** Personality traits and character have also been found to play a role in work-related stress (Cano-Garcia et al., 2005; Genoud et al., 2009). Al-Adwan & Al-Khayat (2017) reported low pay and relationships with students' parents as contributing factors to burnout among kindergarten teachers. Sharpe (2017) found varying levels of emotional exhaustion among teachers based on their teaching assignments, with those teaching special education classes experiencing higher exhaustion levels. Vesty et al. (2018) studied academic teachers in Australia and New Zealand and noted professional exhaustion, with high burnout mitigated by a strong sense of professional efficacy.

**Greek Context:** In Greece, Mouzoura (2005) identified stressors among teachers, including textbook delays, untimely substitute placement, and challenges related to managing learning and behavior problems. Pappa (2006) attributed teachers' work anxiety to role ambiguity and their inability to meet professional demands. Antoniou et al. (2006) conducted research on Greek primary and secondary school teachers, highlighting student discipline issues, interactions with students and colleagues, and classroom-related factors as major sources of work anxiety. Gender and age were also shown to influence teachers' work anxiety, with female and younger teachers reporting higher stress levels, often tied to the challenges of adapting to the profession (Antoniou et al., 2006).

**In Summary:** Work anxiety among teachers is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including workload, student discipline, gender, age, classroom management, and personal characteristics. These stressors can significantly impact teachers' well-being and job satisfaction, underscoring the need for comprehensive support and intervention strategies in the educational field.

## **Conclusion**

In the dynamic world of education, the phenomenon of work anxiety among educators emerges as a complex and pervasive challenge. Educators, often referred to as the architects of the future, face multifaceted responsibilities that extend far beyond the confines of traditional teaching. In this comprehensive review, we have delved into the intricate web of work anxiety, exploring its origins, prevalence, and profound implications for both teachers and students.

The educational landscape, marked by increasing expectations, evolving classroom dynamics, and the relentless march of pedagogical progress, has placed educators at the forefront of an ongoing battle with work anxiety. The repercussions of this anxiety are far-reaching, impacting not only the well-being and mental health of educators but also seeping into the academic performance and emotional development of their students. The statistics are striking, with high percentages of educators experiencing work-related anxiety and burnout, highlighting the pressing need to address this complex issue.

The sources of work anxiety among educators are multifaceted, spanning workload, classroom management, student discipline, personal characteristics, and the evolving educational landscape. Demographic factors, such as gender and age, have also been shown to play a role in the intensity of work anxiety experienced by teachers. As we conclude this exploration, it is evident that work anxiety among educators is not just a challenge but an urgent concern that necessitates comprehensive support and intervention strategies. The need to create a nurturing and supportive educational environment for both educators and students looms large, with the goal of not only fostering excellence in teaching but also ensuring the holistic growth and well-being of all participants in the educational journey.

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