

# JOB SATISFACTION AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN HARYANA

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**Abstract:** *Identifying factors influencing job satisfaction and occupational stress is timely as the ability to cope with change has become increasingly important for primary school principals working in government schools in Haryana. The findings indicate that overall, government primary school teachers are satisfied with their jobs. However, the relationship between job satisfaction and occupational stress in schools is complex.*

*A number of ways to prevent low levels of satisfaction and high occupational stress include creating a positive and supportive school climate/ethos, an effective approach to management, good communication and sense of collegiality among staff, and adequate school facilities and resources.*

**Keywords:** *Job Satisfaction, Job Stress, Primary School Principals*

## 1. Introduction

Majority of research papers explore the factors influencing the job satisfaction of teachers, with fewer focusing on school principals. Sodoma and Else [6] noted that a sharp increase in responsibilities in recent years has made the job of principals of primary schools extremely stressful. While issues have been extensively researched internationally, research in Haryana on job satisfaction among principals in the government schools has remained relatively limited. In addition, increasing pressures on school principals these days is likely to impact on their job satisfaction. Examination of the nature of principalship and the factors that contribute to job satisfaction can provide a better understanding of their job, a topic particularly relevant with regard to difficulties in recruiting principals in recent years.

This study thus enabled us to provide the first systematic analysis of the micro (individual) and school level factors shaping job satisfaction and stress among primary school principals in Haryana and

provided an important evidence base to inform policy-making in the area.

The study addressed the following questions:

1. What background variables (gender, age, qualifications, years of experience, etc.) are likely to impact on job satisfaction among primary school principals in Haryana?
2. What institutional variables (school size, number of staff, condition of school buildings, etc.) are likely to impact on job satisfaction among primary school principals in Haryana?

It is expected that a combination of background and school-level variables will have an impact on the job satisfaction and stress of primary school principals.

## 2. Literary evidences

The existing research concerning job satisfaction among school principals explores a variety of teacher demographic and school level factors that impact on teachers' experiences in their work environment.

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Principals are basically teachers, assigned administrative duties, hence the factors of job satisfaction and occupational stress affecting principals in primary schools need to be acknowledged and all research efforts need to be based on such factors plus some administrative concerns if one has to study the job satisfaction and stress levels of principals.

Prolonged dissatisfaction with one's job may lead to teacher stress. According to Kyriacou [4], "teacher stress may be defined as the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher". Teacher stress can also involve a negative emotional experience associated with the level of pressure and demands made on an individual, as well as the degree of mismatch between these demands and his/her ability to cope with those demands. Kyriacou [4] listed the main sources of stress facing teachers as teaching pupils who lack motivation; maintaining discipline; time pressures and workload; coping with change; being evaluated by others; dealings with colleagues; self-esteem and status; administration and management; role conflict and ambiguity; and poor working conditions. These factors apparently remain operative over the principals' domain as well.

Usually a combination of micro and macro level factors affect the perceived satisfaction, stress levels and motivation. Bishay [1] found that job satisfaction and motivation correlated significantly with teachers' gender and age; but also with their responsibility levels, subject, years of teaching experience, and activity. Thus Principals being at higher positions than the teachers who have to perform administrative duties as well, are likely to have desecrating impact on job satisfaction and occupational stress. Johnson and Holdaway [3] explored job satisfaction among elementary and junior high school principals in Alberta, Canada. The authors argue that in view of the changing role of school principals, studies of job satisfaction and the importance of job facets for satisfaction are urgently needed. Important areas to focus on include involvement in the hiring of staff and the performance of students and teachers. Dick and Wagner [2] found that workload and feeling overwhelmed by the tasks required led to stress reactions among German school teachers, whereas principal support reduced the perception of workload and feeling overwhelmed. Smith and Bourke [5] in Australia explored work-related stress and job satisfaction among secondary school teachers and

identified four aspects of teacher stress: staff tensions and conflict, time pressure, students and classroom conditions, and lack of rewards and recognition. Teaching context, workload and satisfaction were found to affect stress directly.

Kyriacou [4] highlighted the positive impact of working in a school with a positive climate in terms of social support. The author noted that senior managers/principals in schools must avoid creating unnecessary sources of stress through poor management (e.g. setting unrealistic targets for the completion of tasks or failing to communicate adequately with others). He listed characteristics of a healthy school as including: good communication between staff; a strong sense of collegiality; management decisions based on consultation; consensus established on key values and standards; whole school policies in place; roles and expectations clearly defined; teachers receiving positive feedback and praise; a good level of resources and facilities to support teachers; support available to help solve problems; policies and procedures being easy to follow; red tape and paperwork being minimized; additional duties being matched to teachers' skills; a building environment which is pleasant to work in; senior management making good use of forward planning; and induction and career development advice being given to remain insulated from the concerns of job satisfaction and stress for the principals.

### 3. Data and Methodology

Questionnaires were completed by the government primary school principals working in Haryana. The questionnaires recorded school-level details on characteristics including size, challenges, ethos etc., along with some personal details about the principal. The sample included fifty percent of male and fifty percent of female principals. About 47 percent of the total principals included in the sample were in the age group of more than 50 years. Fifty three percent principals were in the age group of 40 to 49 years.

In the questionnaire, the principals were asked to indicate a) how satisfied they felt with their job; and b) how stressed they felt by their job. The scale of the answers ranged from 'very', 'fairly', 'not very', to 'not at all'.

Primary school principals reported high levels of job satisfaction (see Exhibit 1). Forty-nine per cent were 'very satisfied' and 45 per cent 'fairly satisfied'. Because satisfaction levels are high among principals, the

following analyses focus on teacher-level and school-level factors associated with being 'very satisfied'.

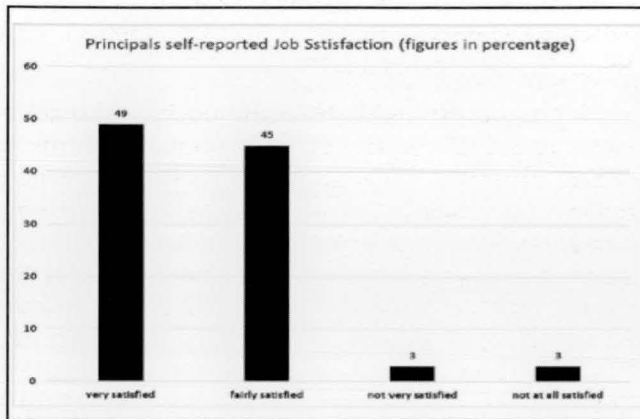


Exhibit 1

The analysis further showed somewhat higher job satisfaction levels among male principals than female principals but the difference is not marked. Age seemed to be a factor; younger principals were somewhat less likely to report being satisfied with their job compared to their older colleagues (see Exhibit 2). The highest satisfaction levels were found among the small group of principals aged over 50 years; this pattern may reflect the fact that more satisfied principals retire at a later time-point than their less satisfied peers.

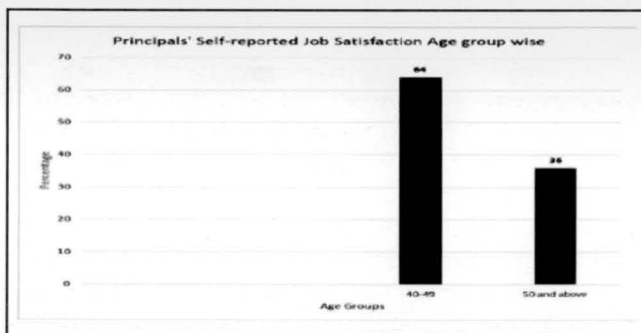


Exhibit 2

When self-reported job satisfaction scores of principals by years of service were analysed, it was found that satisfaction levels among principals was higher among newly appointed principals and among those with longer service. Principals too may experience a 'honeymoon period' early in their career, with a slight dip in satisfaction among those in the job 4-6 years.

*School level factors*

School-level factors that impact the job satisfaction as specified in the literature include e.g. class size, number of pupils in the school, sense of control/ autonomy, working conditions.

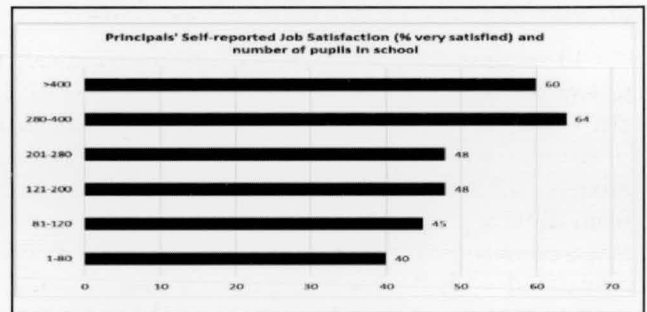


Exhibit 3 : Note – Differences are significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

The analysis of principals' responses revealed that principals in larger schools were somewhat more likely to report being satisfied with their job.

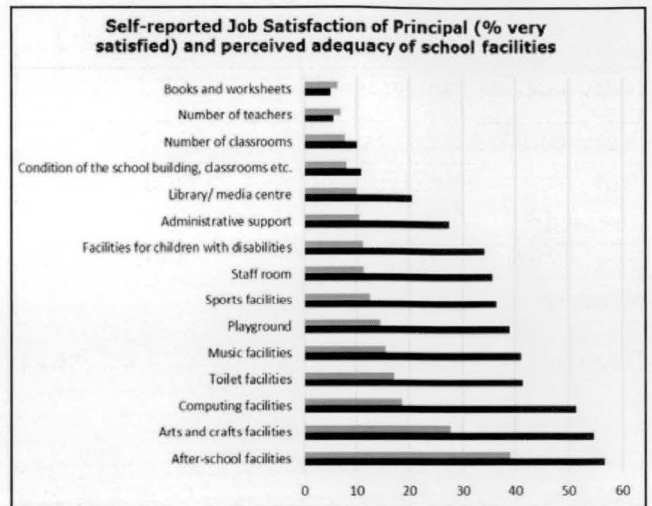
The multivariate analysis presented below explores whether this pattern reflects other characteristics of larger schools. Job satisfaction was somewhat greater among principals in urban and mixed schools (64% and 54% 'very satisfied') compared with principals in rural schools (42%). Once again, the multivariate analysis will shed light on whether this reflects location per se or other characteristics of rural schools.

Working conditions have been found to impact on job satisfaction among principals in schools in literature. Accordingly the primary school principals were asked to indicate their perception of school facilities/resources across a range of items comparing them to other primary schools in the country (see Exhibit 4). Inadequacies were most frequently cited in the areas such as computing facilities, art and craft facilities, sports facilities, music facilities, playground, after-school facilities, and facilities for children with disabilities. The top areas where principals considered resources to be excellent included books/worksheets, number and condition of school building/classrooms. The top areas where principals considered resources to be poorest included after-school facilities, art and craft facilities, computing facilities, toilet facilities, music facilities and playground.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Books and worksheets	5.0	36.6	19.3	39.1
Number of classrooms	10.0	35.7	26.7	27.6
Condition of the school building, classrooms etc.	10.7	27.7	43.1	18.5
Playground	39.0	23.5	20.6	16.9
Sports facilities	36.4	26.5	21.8	15.3
Computing facilities	51.4	22.0	12.3	14.3
Number of teachers	5.6	27.2	54.8	12.4
Toilet facilities	41.4	30.0	17.3	11.3
Administrative support	27.3	33.0	28.6	11.1
Arts and crafts facilities	54.7	18.6	16.2	10.5
Staff room	35.7	24.0	33.7	10.0
Music facilities	41.0	37.3	13.6	8.1
Facilities for children with disabilities	34.2	27.0	31.0	7.8
Library/ media centre	20.4	27.3	31.2	6.9
After-school facilities	56.6	12.4	24.6	6.4

**Exhibit 4:** Adequacy of Resources to the Needs of the School - Perceptions of School Principals (figures are in percentages)

Analysis indicates that principals tend to be more satisfied with their jobs where they report school facilities as 'excellent' than when they perceive school facilities to be 'poor'. The exception related to playground facilities where the differences found are non-significant. Differences were notable in relation to staffing, with perceived adequacy in relation to the number of teachers, administrative support and learning support provision associated with higher satisfaction levels among principals (see Exhibit 5.)



**Exhibit 5**

*Job Stress among Primary School Principals*

Approximately 94 per cent of principals felt satisfied (either 'very' or 'fairly') with their job, whereas approximately 70 per cent of principals felt stressed (Exhibit 6).



**Exhibit 6**

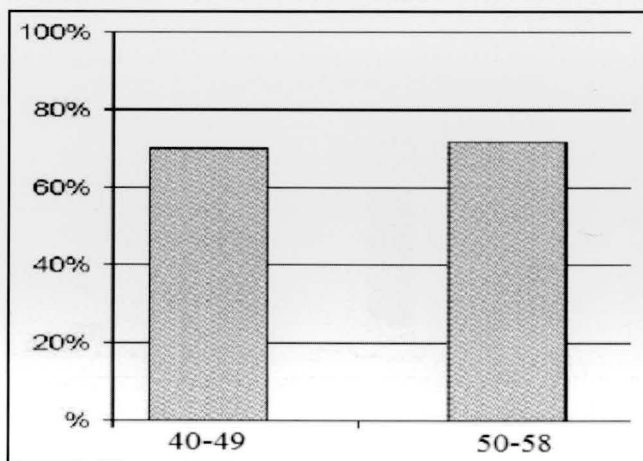
Job satisfaction and stress are related to each other, but in very complex ways. Exhibit 7 shows the cross-over between these two dimensions in case of primary school principals in Haryana, revealing four groups: those who are very satisfied with their job and not stressed; those who are very satisfied with their job but experiencing stress; those who are not very satisfied with their job and not stressed; and those who are not very satisfied with their job and feeling stressed. Those who are very satisfied with their jobs generally tend to report lower stress levels. However, a sizeable group (37% of principals) report high levels and feelings of stress.



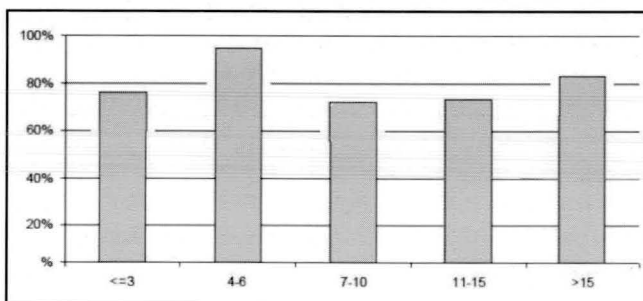
	Principals (%age)
Very satisfied, not stressed	10.3
Very satisfied but stressed	37.1
Not very satisfied, not stressed	9.6
Not very satisfied and stressed	43.0

**Exhibit 7:** Job Satisfaction and Occupational Stress among School Principals

No gender differences in principal stress levels could be traced. Among principals, there was little differentiation by age-group, with the exception of slightly (but not significantly) lower stress levels among those aged over 50 (Exhibit 8). Principal stress levels are lower for those 7 to 10 years in the job but are broadly stable over the remainder of the career (see Exhibit 9).



**Exhibit 8:** Principals' Self-Reported Stress by Age Group



**Exhibit 9:** Stressed Principals by Length of Service

Among primary school principals, those who had teaching responsibilities assigned or optional reported higher stress levels (64%), indicating challenges in combining the two roles. In contrast to the patterns found in relation to job satisfaction, there is no clear-cut relationship between school facilities and principal stress levels. The exception occurs for administrative support, where stress levels are highest for those who report 'poor' administrative support (76%) and lowest for those with 'good' or 'excellent' support (57-59%). Principal stress levels were lower where 'nearly all' teachers were open to new developments and challenges (69%) as perceived by principals.

#### 4. Conclusions and Implications for Policy and Practice

The association between job satisfaction and occupational stress have long been established by research studies. A considerable amount of literature has emerged in the context of schools and, in particular, teachers. However, these issues have not been investigated comprehensively in the context of primary schools principals. In view of changes in schools, curricula, political considerations and government assignments as well as the working conditions of teachers, identifying factors influencing job satisfaction and occupational stress is timely as the ability to cope with change has become increasingly important for principals.

While Principals play a critical part in creating and sustaining high performing schools, the areas of strongest dissatisfaction among school principals include the effect of the job on their personal life, supervision of work, adequacy of administrative support and intensity of work. These findings suggest that principal job satisfaction and stress may result from a combination of factors in the work context. Though the findings of this study indicate that overall, government primary school principals are satisfied with their jobs, the findings apparently appear pleasing because of "some other aspects of their job such as security, accruing pension, family welfare etc." Thus findings seem arguable and need to be compared in the setup of private school principals.

No link between job satisfaction and age of the principal was found. Principal's job satisfaction varied by the length of time in the school; satisfaction levels were highest among recently appointed principals and tended to fluctuate thereafter. Interestingly, it was found that while having previous experience as a

school principal at different location reduced stress levels, it is associated with lower levels of job satisfaction.

Another set of factors that have been found to impact on job satisfaction and occupational stress relate to the school, teacher and pupil/parent domains. No significant difference in stress levels in school principals serving urban, rural or mixed catchment areas could be traced.

Complacent with international research, adequate staff resources enhanced principal job satisfaction, while poor administrative support was associated with higher stress levels among school principals. Not surprisingly, principals who found school facilities wanting experienced lesser job satisfaction.

School climate was found to have a strong impact on principal's job satisfaction and occupational stress. In particular, the nature of the student intake (notably, behaviour difficulties among pupils) was seen to pose challenges for principals. This pattern points to the need to provide principals with behaviour management skills through initial and continuing teacher education and with appropriate professional development support in fostering a whole-school approach to dealing with pupil misbehaviour. Previous research has shown that the quality of relations in the school has a significant impact on a range of student outcomes, including engagement, retention and performance. This study highlights the importance of day-to-day interaction among the school partners - teachers, pupils, parents - in shaping principals' own experiences.

Job satisfaction and occupational stress were also associated with working conditions in the school in terms of job characteristics and adequate resources and facilities. At present, multi-grade classes are quite prevalent in Government primary schools but little is known about their effect on pupils or teachers. This study points to somewhat higher stress levels in multi-grade contexts among principals.

In addition, combining teaching with school

leadership poses considerable challenges not only for principals but also for classroom teachers in their school. This points to the need for professional development support for school principals but perhaps suggests more fundamental concerns about the long-term viability of this dual role.

Research has highlighted the importance of adequate staffing in schools. Here too it was found that having adequate administrative support was crucial in facilitating the principal's role. In addition, operating a school in an unsuitable building or one with poor facilities increases the challenges for school leaders, indicating the importance of school design in fostering positive outcomes. On the basis of this study, it is recommended that continued attention should be given to the design of new school buildings and retrospective refurbishment of older ones.

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