

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS AMONG WORKING WOMEN AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

Kheireddine Benrabah¹, Mohamed Ben Nadja¹, Fayçal Kharoubi Mohamed¹,
Redouan Benssassi¹, Amine Baroudi Med¹

¹University of Tissemsilt, Algeria

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the differences in psychological stress and self-esteem between working women in education (teachers) and working women in healthcare (nurses). Additionally, it sought to understand the relationship between psychological stress and self-esteem among working women. A questionnaire was developed by the researchers to measure psychological stress, alongside a self-esteem questionnaire prepared by Abdel Raouf Ahmed Suleiman Talal in 2009. The sample size consisted of 78 teachers and 52 nurses. After verifying the scientific foundations of the research tools and conducting appropriate statistical analyses, significant statistical differences were found between working women in education (teachers) and those in healthcare (nurses) in terms of psychological stress, favoring the working women in education (teachers). Furthermore, significant statistical differences were also identified in self-esteem, favoring the working women in healthcare (nurses). Additionally, a statistically significant inverse correlation was found between psychological stress and self-esteem among working women in both education (teachers) and healthcare (nurses).

Key words: Psychological stress, self-esteem, teachers, nurses

Corresponding author
Kheireddine Benrabah
benrabah.kheiredine@univ-tissemsilt.dz

INTRODUCTION

Psychological stress is a fundamental component of modern life, as advancements in civilization in various aspects have significantly contributed to its presence. While this, progress is generally viewed positively as it aims to enhance human life, it is accompanied by various problems, disturbances, tensions, anxieties, and fears, which represent a negative perspective. Psychological stress according to Abdel Aziz Abdel Majid Muhammad (2000) can be understood as “conditions associated with pressure, tension, and strain resulting from demands or changes that necessitate a type of individual readjustment, along with the physical or psychological consequences that result” (Abdel Aziz Abdel Majid Muhammad, 2000, p 18).

The level of psychological stress varies among individuals and groups, depending on their environment and interactions. Stress also refers to diverse conditions triggered by powerful external influences.” Stress occurs as a result of external factors such as the abundance of information leading to emotional exhaustion, threats, and dangers. Stress results in changes in cognitive processes, emotional transformations, a shifting motivational structure for activity, and limited verbal and physical behavior” (Farouk Al-Sayed Osman, 2001, p. 19). It is noteworthy that the workplace stress is manifested in various forms, with Ali Iskar (2003) stating, “Today’s individuals live in an era characterized by fatigue, exhaustion, and work beyond their capacity, facing numerous pressure-laden demands. Stress produces diverse phenomena that require greater efforts to adapt to their renewed requirements, making them pressure factors with varying impacts on individuals and groups in society, which has consequently led to life pressures becoming more common and widespread, drawing the attention of researchers and scholars” (Ali Iskar, 2003, p. 13). Ibrahim Abdel Sattar (1990) confirms that “stress is linked to daily life events, and we are all, without exception, exposed daily to various external sources of stress, including family pressures, work stress, health issues, financial problems, and various crises. We also face internal sources of stress daily, such as organic and psychological disorders resulting from our behavioral mistakes” (Ibrahim Abdel Sattar, 1998, p. 3). On another note, we recognize that an individual working in any sector performs their job with a significant degree of responsibility and achievement if they possess psychological characteristics such as self-confidence and motivation, which contribute to a high and positive self-esteem.

Self-esteem is effective in determining what an individual can do behaviorally and their ability to persevere. According to Bandura (1977) person who lacks self-esteem and effectiveness focuses excessively on their weaknesses and shortcomings, feels personally incompetent, and exhibits exaggeration and unrealistic evaluations of the problems they face, leading to failures in accomplishing the tasks they aspire to. (Bandura, A. 1977, p.191). This increases their likelihood of experiencing frustration and feelings of inferiority” (Rola Jamil Yaqub, 2013, p. 2). Amjad Ghunaim (2010) asserts that “self-esteem is an emotional necessity. Without a certain level of self-esteem, life can become quite arduous and painful” (Amjad Ghunaim, 2010, p. 31). In light of this, when we turn our attention to working women in Algeria, we find that they live in varied circumstances and environments that may differ depending

on their jobs, ranging from primary education teachers to healthcare professionals such as nurses, among other occupations that women have increasingly embraced. These jobs generate a range of psychological stress, which Langford (1987) affirms by stating, "The most stress-inducing work areas are those characterized by direct interaction with people, where individuals dedicate themselves to serving others. Nurses, doctors, teachers, and social workers are more prone to stress than others" (Shweitar Khira, 2017, p. 8). The trend among working women is now defined by the jobs and professions they choose based on their capabilities and psychological makeup. Some professions witness a significant female presence, with many schools having a predominantly female teaching staff, leading to a predominance of women over men in education. Additionally, we must not overlook the other roles they play, such as motherhood, which comes with its own responsibilities, fatigue, and exhaustion, resulting in difficulties in balancing work and family conditions. The nursing profession has also gained the interest of women, as observed in most national hospitals, where it ranks first in female participation, despite the associated challenges and pressures. This is supported by Joudah Yahya (2003), who states that "the nursing profession is one of the most stressful jobs, with numerous sources of stress that make some nurses dissatisfied and insecure in their profession, leading to negative impacts on their self-efficacy and psychological and professional adjustment" (Joudah Yahya Abdul Jawad, 2003, p. 3).

Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine whether the level of psychological stress among working women in education and healthcare affects their self-esteem.

Consequently, the study proposes the following hypothesis: There exists a statistically significant relationship between occupational stress levels and self-esteem among female teachers and nurses.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Due to the nature of the topic and the research problem we are addressing, we adopted a descriptive methodology. This approach allows for organized information gathering and analysis to better understand social and psychological phenomena.

Sample of Participants

The research population includes working women in the Tiaret region. A random sample was selected, which is considered a part of the study population. This sample consists of a group of individuals that represents the original research community. Our research sample included 52 nurses from public hospitals and 78 teachers from 12 elementary schools located in Souguer, accounting for over 25% of the target population.

Questionnaire on Psychological Stress Among Working Women

Through a review of various previous studies addressing the issue of psychological stress among women, we adopted the scale developed by Badriya Kamal Ahmed, which consists of 66 items distributed across five dimensions. The scale uses a three-point response format. We modified some items to align with the Algerian context and subsequently presented it to a panel of judges for necessary adjustments. Following these procedures, we maintained the same number of dimensions as in the original scale, while the number of items after modification totaled 48, distributed as follows:

- **Family Dimension:** Related to personal life, consisting of 14 items.
- **Professional Dimension:** Pertaining to relationships with colleagues and superiors, consisting of 12 items.
- **Health Dimension:** Concerning physical symptoms the woman may experience due to psychological stress, consisting of 10 items.
- **Dimension of Inability to Enjoy Life's Pleasures:** Inability to enjoy activities such as outings and exercise, which increases her suffering, consisting of 6 items.
- **Emergency Events Dimension:** Includes events that have caused her a certain level of stress, consisting of 6 items.

After completing the questionnaire, scores are calculated as follows:

- (Yes = 2, No = 0, Uncertain = 1)

Self-Esteem Questionnaire for Working Women

We relied on the questionnaire prepared by Abdel Raouf Ahmed Suleiman Attalah (2009), which consists of 30 items. Responses are provided according to a five-point scale, divided as follows:

- **Positive Statements:** 1, 2, 5, 8, 13, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30
- **Negative Statements:** 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27 (Abdel Raouf Ahmed, 2009, p. 11)

Evaluation Method for the Questionnaire

After completing the questionnaire, scores are calculated as follows:

- **Positive Evaluation:** Very Low = 1, Low = 2, Moderate = 3, Very High = 4, Very High = 5
- **Negative Evaluation:** Very Low = 5, Low = 4, Moderate = 3, Very High = 2, Very High = 1

Exploratory Study

- **Purpose of the Study:** We conducted the exploratory study to assess the relevance of the target sample to the questionnaire items and to ensure scientific foundations related to validity and reliability.
- **Sample of the Exploratory Study:** The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 12 individuals, divided into 6 teachers and 6 nurses, chosen randomly from the public hospital in Souk Ahras and the primary school in Bel-Fadl, also located in Souk Ahras. This sample was excluded from the main study sample.

Psychometric Properties of the Research Tools

- **Reliability of the Psychological Stress Questionnaire and Self-Esteem Questionnaire for Working Women:** Reliability of the test is defined as: “the degree of accuracy or consistency or stability of its results when applied to a sample of individuals on two different occasions” (Mouad Abdel Hafiz, 1997, p. 56). It also means “if the test is reapplied to the same sample under the same conditions, it yields significant results, indicating a high correlation coefficient between test results” (Marwan Abdel Majid Ibrahim, 1999, p. 70). The researchers used the “split-half” method to calculate the reliability of the test, and to measure the correlation coefficient between the two groups, we relied on the Spearman-Brown formula (Dr. Saad Abdel Rahman, 2003).

Table 2. Values of Reliability Coefficients

Variables	Psychological Stress Questionnaire	Self-Esteem Questionnaire
Correlation Coefficient	0.650	0.710
Reliability Coefficient	0.787	0.830
Significance Level	0.05	
Critical Value	0.576	

From the table above (Table 2), we found that the reliability coefficients for all variables indicate a high degree of reliability. Thus, we conclude that both the Psychological Stress Questionnaire and the Self-Esteem Questionnaire for working women exhibit a high level of reliability.

Validity: Validity is defined as “the extent to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure and refers to the degree to which the test can provide relevant information for the decisions to be made based on it” (Sawsan Shakir Majid, 2013, p. 93). In our study, we utilized self-validity for both questionnaires used.

Table 3. Self-validity coefficients for the variables under study

Variables	Psychological Stress	Self-Esteem
Reliability Coefficient	0.787	0.830
Self-Validity Coefficient	0.887	

Statistical Analysis

Mean Scores the average scores of psychological stress for both groups will be calculated to assess the overall levels of stress. Standard Deviations this will indicate the variability of stress levels within each group. Independent Sample t-test this test will be employed to evaluate the differences in psychological stress levels between the two groups, considering the significance level to determine if the differences are statistically meaningful.

RESULTS

The results of this analysis can inform policymakers and organizational leaders in both sectors to implement appropriate support systems and interventions aimed at reducing psychological stress among female workers.

Table 4. Comparative analysis of psychological stress measurements across occupational groups using t-tests

Study Variables	Group Type	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size	Calculated t
Family Aspect	Teacher	21.35	3.21	78	10.73
	Nurse	16.22	1.67	52	
Professional Aspect	Teacher	17.45	2.11	78	7.52
	Nurse	14.80	1.79	52	
Health Aspect	Teacher	12.23	1.75	78	7.24
	Nurse	10.18	1.33	52	
Inability to Enjoy Life's Pleasures	Teacher	7.51	2.22	78	4.98
	Nurse	5.63	1.98	52	
Emergency Events	Teacher	6.78	1.86	78	5.56
	Nurse	5.11	1.41	52	
Total Score of the Questionnaire	Teacher	65.33	10.53	78	7.78
	Nurse	51.94	8.33	52	

The tabulated t-critical value is 1.98 ($\alpha = 0.05$, $df = 128$, two-tailed)

Table 5. Comparison of Self-Esteem Levels Between Female Teachers and Nurses
Using t-Tests

Study Variables	Group Type	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Sample Size (N)	Calculated t Value
Self Esteem	Teacher	62.19	9.39	78	3.93
	Nurse	68.53	8.66	52	

The tabulated t-critical value is 1.98 ($\alpha = 0.05$, $df = 128$, two-tailed)

Correlation Analysis of Psychological Stress and Self-Esteem

Table 6. the Correlation Between Psychological Stress and Self-Esteem Among Female Teachers and Nurses

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (Teachers)	Correlation Coefficient (Nurses)	Significance Level	Relationship Type	Statistical Significance
Total Psychological Stress Score (Teachers)	-0.45		0.05	Inverse	Significant
Total Psychological Stress Score (Nurses)		-0.39		Direct	

DISCUSSION

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that the teaching profession is challenging for working women, requiring diverse physical and mental efforts during work hours and even at home, through preparation that often goes unrecognized but is exhausting. In contrast, nursing is often confined within the institution, facing its own challenges related to work volume and managing children’s behavior in classrooms, along with lower financial compensation. As noted by Salem Lakhdar (2019), the school environment is a microcosm of human society, where teachers experience unique issues related to their profession. These results confirm our initial hypothesis that There exists a statistically significant relationship between occupational stress levels and self-esteem among female teachers and nurses.

Teaching is described as one of the most service-oriented professions suffering from stress, which, if prolonged, may lead to burnout as a negative response to occupational pressures and challenging surrounding conditions. (Salem Lakhdar, 2019, p. 487). This is supported by the findings of Eva Tsai et al. (2006), who identified workload and time management issues as significant sources of pressure for teachers,

with physical and psychological fatigue being prominent indicators of stress (Tsai, E., & Fung, L., 2006, pp. 364-370). Additionally, a study by Alfred Champion (2013) highlighted that many teachers suffer from income shortages, work burdens, and increased student loads (Champion, A., & Ncube, Thembinkosi, 2013, pp. 15-23). While comparing the levels of psychological pressure between teachers and nurses, it is important to acknowledge that nurses also experience a degree of psychological stress. However, the significant differences found favoring teachers indicate that the level of psychological pressures is higher among teachers. The findings presented in Table 5 suggest that nurses perceive their roles as fulfilling and beneficial to others, which contributes to a higher self-esteem compared to teachers. Teachers, on the other hand, may experience an internal conflict between their professional responsibilities and their roles within their families. Additionally, parental pressures regarding student performance can negatively affect teachers' performance and, subsequently, their self-esteem. The work environment significantly influences self-perception. As noted by Ben Abd Al-Rahman Belkacem and Zouaq Mohamed (2019), experiences shape an individual's self-concept. They state, "Self-concept is the image or idea and viewpoint an individual has of themselves across various physical, psychological, emotional, and social dimensions, which results from experiences during different developmental stages" (Ben Abd Al-Rahman Belkacem & Zouaq Mohamed, 2019, p. 137). The results of our study align with Reynolds (1999), who found that nurses with high self-concept levels are more capable of coping with life's challenges and stressors compared to those with lower self-concept levels. Similarly, findings are consistent with Norman (1986), which indicated that individuals with low self-efficacy and self-esteem exhibit symptoms of depression and experience feelings of loneliness and psychological stress. This phenomenon appears to be reflected among teachers. However, our findings contradict Boubaker Dabbabi (2016), whose study on the self-esteem levels of primary school teachers revealed a high self-esteem level among the majority (95.49%), a result that aligns with several Western studies. The findings indicate a significant negative correlation between psychological stress and self-esteem for both teachers and nurses, although it is statistically significant only for teachers. The results align with previous research by Reynolds (1999), which found a similar inverse relationship between self-esteem and work-related stress among healthcare professionals. Psychological stress impacts various aspects of an individual's personality and performance. As noted by Samira Mohamed Khalil Ibrahim (1999), individuals experiencing psychological stress often exhibit emotional symptoms such as increased physiological tension, heightened anxiety, personality changes, and diminished self-affirmation. This stress can lead to negative perceptions of oneself, resulting in feelings of inadequacy among both teachers and nurses. The study's outcomes corroborate findings by Fadia Kamel (2010), which highlighted a negative correlation between psychological alienation and self-esteem among working graduates. In contrast, the results diverge from Boubaker Dabbabi (2016), which reported a high self-esteem level among primary school teachers, suggesting potential differences in context or methodology.

The study reveals that working women in education and healthcare sectors experience psychological difficulties, which may stem from their work environment, managerial relationships, or familial challenges.

CONCLUSION

The statistical analysis reveals significant differences in psychological stress levels and self-esteem between working women in education and healthcare sectors. Teachers exhibit higher psychological stress levels compared to nurses, which negatively impacts their self-esteem. Conversely, nurses demonstrate higher self-esteem levels than teachers. Implementing guidance and recreational programs aimed at reducing psychological stress could enhance self-esteem for both groups. Awareness programs should focus on balancing work and family life, promoting physical activity to foster a healthy community. Future research should investigate additional variables affecting psychological stress and self-esteem, such as educational qualifications, age, and family size, and explore relationships with other factors like self-confidence and mental resilience.

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Received on 30.04.2025.

Accepted on 19.06.2025.