



Exploring Connection of Occupational Stress to Severance Intention: Evidence from Public-School Teachers in Cebu City, Philippines

Mercy P. Robles^{1*}, Mark Anthony N. Polinar²

¹Department of Education, Division of Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines, ²Cebu Institute of Technology University, Cebu, Philippines.

*Email: mercy.robles@deped.gov.ph

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ABSTRACT

Occupational stress has become a growing concern in the teaching profession, particularly in public-school settings where educators face increasing demands and limited resources. This study examined the relationship between occupational stress and intention to sever among public school teachers in Cebu City, Philippines. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design, data were collected from licensed public-school teachers through a structured survey questionnaire measuring five domains of occupational stress: workload, role conflict, administrative support, classroom management, and work–life imbalance, along with severance intention. Descriptive results revealed that teachers generally agreed that all five domains contributed to their occupational stress, with administrative support, classroom management, and workload showing relatively higher mean scores. Spearman’s rank-order correlation analysis indicated that workload ($\rho = 0.306, P < 0.001$), role conflict ($\rho = 0.353, P < 0.001$), and work–life imbalance ($\rho = 0.347, P < 0.001$) were positively and significantly associated with severance intention, while administrative support ($\rho = -0.294, P < 0.001$) was negatively and significantly related to severance intention. Classroom management was not significantly associated with severance intention ($\rho = 0.140, P = 0.088$). The findings suggest that organizational and psychosocial stressors play a significant role in shaping teachers’ intentions to leave the profession, whereas perceived administrative support serves as a protective factor. To inform policy and intervention strategies, it is essential to translate these findings into actionable recommendations for school administrators and policymakers to improve teacher retention and well-being in the public school system.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Stress, Severance Intention, Public School Teachers, Cebu City, Workload, Work-Life Imbalance

JEL Classifications: J24, I24, H52

1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is becoming increasingly common across many fields, but it is especially prevalent in education. Stress is a normal part of life, especially at work, where people must handle many tasks and responsibilities at once. Job stress, work-related stress, or organizational stress are terms for the negative physical and mental effects that occur when an employee’s resources, needs, or skills do not align with the demands of their job (Mathew, 2023). The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines work-related stress as occupational stress. Similarly, the World Health

Organization (WHO) defines occupational stress as “a pattern of reactions that occurs when workers are presented with work demands not matched to their knowledge, skills, or abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.”

For educators at all levels and in all kinds of schools, occupational stress has grown to be a significant and dangerous issue. By its very nature, teaching demands a great deal of mental, physical, and emotional energy. This is made considerably worse by problems with institutions and structures. Unsatisfactory working conditions, workload, student conduct and attitudes, a lack of promotion and

opportunities, and poor relationships with coworkers are among the most frequently experienced stressors (Cooper and Travers, 1996). Long working hours, large class sizes, cramped classrooms, excessive administrative work, low salaries, lack of autonomy, and bureaucratic procedures are also contributing factors (Mathew, 2023).

The role of teachers has rapidly changed in the twenty-first century due to several factors, including government reforms, new technologies, and the increasing diversity of student needs brought about by globalization. While these advancements have improved classroom conditions, they have also made teaching more difficult. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2019), teachers today are expected to teach the curriculum, use digital tools, tailor lessons to each student's needs, meet performance standards, and support students' social and emotional needs. Stress at work has increased alongside rising demands; therefore, teachers' well-being is a critical issue worldwide. Teachers must continually acquire new skills, including creativity, critical thinking, and technological proficiency, in an ever-changing environment.

Occupational stress is increasingly associated with negative consequences like burnout, emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and most importantly, severance intention, or the deliberate decision to quit one's job. This study examines the connection between severance intention and occupational stress among public school teachers in Cebu City, Philippines. While the findings provide valuable insights into this specific context, caution should be exercised when generalizing results to other regions or educational levels. Nonetheless, teachers have a significant impact on the country's social, cultural, and economic future beyond their classroom work. Despite their vital contributions, educators still face numerous barriers in their work. As highlighted by Trazo et al. (2024), these challenges may lead to teacher turnover, which has wide-reaching implications for the educational system and society.

Given the limited empirical research on Philippine public-school contexts, particularly in Cebu City, which faces unique educational challenges and resource constraints, this study aims to fill that gap by examining how occupational stress affects public-school teachers' intentions to leave the profession. By identifying key stressors and assessing their impact within this specific regional context, the study aims to provide evidence-based insights to guide educational leaders and policymakers in developing targeted strategies to improve teacher retention and promote overall teacher well-being in Cebu City and similar settings.

1.1. Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the relationship between occupational stress and severance intention among public school teachers in Cebu City, Philippines. Specifically, it aims to investigate how various stress-related factors affect teachers' intention to leave the profession.

Specifically, the study intends to answer the following inquiries:

1. What is the level of occupational stress among public-school teachers in terms of
 - 1.1. Workload;
 - 1.2. Role Conflict
 - 1.3. Administrative Support
 - 1.4. Classroom Management, and
 - 1.5. Work-Life Imbalance?
2. What is the level of severance intention among public-school teachers?
3. Is there a significant relationship between each occupational stress factor and severance intention?
4. Which of the occupational stress factors significantly predict severance intention among public-school teachers?
5. Based on the study's results, what recommendations can be proposed to the key stakeholders?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concept of Occupational Stress among Filipino Public-School Teachers

The difficult and complex nature of teaching makes occupational stress a major concern in the education profession. In addition to teaching, teachers must manage student conduct, handle administrative tasks, adapt to policy changes, and support a wide range of learning needs. Occupational stress is a disruption of an individual's physiological and psychological homeostasis that forces them to deviate from their usual functioning in interactions with their job and work environment (Allen et al., 2000).

Public school teachers in the Philippines experience elevated levels of stress due to large class sizes, inadequate resources, heavy workloads, and low salaries. According to Jalagat (2017), many Filipino educators face unclear job roles, concerns about job stability, and limited opportunities for professional growth. Organizational stress, also called professional stress, is the interaction between working conditions and workers in environments where work demands exceed workers' skills (Ross and Altmaier, 1994).

2.2. Sources and Effects of Teacher Stress

The elements that cause stress in organizations are environmental factors and the behaviors formed under the pressure these factors exert on individuals (Amason et al., 1999). These factors may be monotony, change of technology, excessive work load, job security, ergonomics, management problems (Cooper and Davidson, 1987; Sutherland and Cooper, 1990), the hinderance of the drive of success, personal ambitions, the lack of harmony between person-role (Yeates, 1989) and individual characteristics (Quick and Quick, 1984), the feeling of insufficiency (Ivancevich et al, 1990). Shortly, organizational policies, organizational structure and climate, physical conditions, and processes are the basic factors contributing to stress in the organization (Luthans, 2020). In addition, cultural and geographical factors such as climate and religion may shape stressors (Cooper and Davidson, 1987).

Stress sources of teachers may be summarized as low motivation in students, discipline problems, the pressure of time and the workload, being assessed by others, colleague relationship, conflict and indefiniteness of roles, bad working conditions and self-respect, students' discipline problems, the inadequate support of colleagues, family and friends (Detert, et al, 2006; Kyriacou, 2001).

Persistent stress and burnout among educators are associated with higher absenteeism rates, diminished job performance, and a growing desire to exit the profession. Ingersoll (2001) noted that continuous work-related stress significantly reduces job satisfaction and increases employee turnover, especially in schools serving underprivileged communities.

2.3. Severance Intention among Educators

Teaching as a profession offers avenues for growth and advancement. Educators often see their careers as either enabling or limiting their personal development (Olango and Semela, 2000). In the field of education, the intention to leave one's position or career, also known as severance intention, has become a major concern. Globally, educational institutions are experiencing increased teacher turnover and attrition. When deciding whether to stay in the profession or leave, they weigh both social and financial factors. On the economic side, they consider the cost of living, job stability, benefits, and salary. Socially, they reflect on how they are treated, the impact they make on society, and how personally fulfilling the job feels. However, dissatisfaction can set in due to low pay, limited professional growth, and high levels of stress. As a result, some teachers are drawn to opportunities abroad where higher salaries outweigh the profession's local social value.

When educators mention having an "intention to leave," they are expressing a serious desire to leave the field entirely, transfer, or resign. This choice is frequently the result of constant, persistent stress. Teachers' health and work-life balance are constantly strained in densely populated areas like Cebu City due to overcrowded classrooms and inadequate administrative support. As a result of this pressure, many educators eventually question if it is time to leave.

2.4. Empirical Gaps in the Philippine Setting

In the Philippines, especially among public school teachers in Cebu City, there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of how work-related stress relates to the desire to leave the profession. While global studies have long shown how stress negatively impacts job performance and staff retention, similar localized research is limited. This gap makes it hard to create solutions that truly match the realities Filipino teachers face. Many teachers experience heavy stress due to overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and limited support. Closing this research gap could offer key insights into the mental and emotional pressures educators endure, helping shape policies and interventions that improve their work environment and reduce teacher turnover.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design. A descriptive-correlational design is appropriate for describing the level of occupational stress experienced by public-school teachers and for determining its relationship to their intention to sever. By utilizing correlation, the study examines whether higher levels of stress are associated with stronger intentions to resign or leave the teaching profession.

3.1. Respondents

The present study was conducted in selected public and secondary schools in Cebu City, Philippines, under the supervision of the Department of Education (DepEd) Cebu City Division. The respondents are selected to address the growing concerns about teachers' stress and attrition in the public school system in highly urbanized areas.

Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria:

The following are the inclusion-exclusion criteria formulated by the researcher:

1. Must be a licensed professional teacher employed in a public elementary or secondary school in Cebu City under the Department of Education (DepEd)
2. Must be actively teaching during the School Year 2025-2026 (handling classes at the time of data collection)
3. Must have at least 1 year of teaching experience in the public-school system to ensure familiarity with workload and organizational culture
4. Must be willing to participate and provide informed consent voluntarily.

Those who did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from the study.

3.2. Research Instruments

The primary tool used in this study was a structured survey questionnaire developed by the researcher and based on an existing, validated instrument that had undergone a reliability test. The tool consisted of three main parts. The first part gathered respondents' demographic and professional profiles, including: sex, age, civil status, educational attainment, years of service, employment status, teaching level, class size, and teaching load. The second part measured the respondents' occupational stress using a set of items adapted from the Teacher Stress Inventory and Job Stress Scale, covering five domains: workload, role conflict and ambiguity, administrative support, classroom management difficulty, and work-life balance. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating greater stress in the respective domain. The third part assessed severance intention using items adapted from the established Severance Intention Scale, which measures respondents' likelihood of leaving their current teaching position. These items were also rated on the same five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating a stronger intention to resign or transfer. To ensure the instrument's quality, its content validity was established through expert review by educators and research specialists. Furthermore, a pilot test involving 20 public school teachers not included in the main study was conducted, and the instrument's reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha. The pilot test revealed that the scale exhibited an outstanding level of reliability, with a coefficient alpha of .91. This confirms that, as DeVellis (2017) noted, a coefficient alpha exceeding 0.90 is considered excellent, underscoring the instrument's robustness. Consequently, the instrument can be confidently regarded as highly dependable for capturing the specific construct it aims to measure.

3.3. Data Gathering Procedures

The principal researcher submitted a letter to the dean of the College of Management, Business, and Accountancy (CMBA) at Cebu Institute of Technology – University, requesting permission to conduct this study. After the request was granted, the primary researcher sent a second letter to the schools/departments involved in the study, asking for authorization to conduct the research.

The principal researcher chose Google Forms as the primary platform for data collection because it offers several advantages well-suited to this study. The platform is accessible and user-friendly, allowing teachers to complete the survey at any time on their smartphones, laptops, or desktop computers. This also increases response rate, especially for busy teachers handling multiple tasks. This also promotes efficiency in data gathering, as responses are automatically recorded and organized in real time into a spreadsheet. The platform ensures cost-effectiveness and environmental sustainability by eliminating the need to print and distribute paper questionnaires. This also promotes confidentiality and anonymity by allowing responses to be collected without identifying information, which is critical for sensitive topics such as occupational stress and severance intention. Practically, the platform allows the researcher to gather data from a large sample (100-150 teachers), enabling a wider reach across schools in Cebu City without the logistical constraints of face-to-face administration.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical research standards to protect participants' rights and welfare. Prior to conducting the survey, approval was obtained from the Graduate School, the Department of Education, the Cebu City Division, and the participants. All respondents were provided with an informed consent form that explained the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by refraining from collecting personal identifiers, such as names or employee numbers, and by treating all responses with the utmost privacy and using them solely for academic purposes. As the study involved topics on occupational stress and severance intention, care was taken to avoid potential discomfort, and respondents were assured that their answers would not affect their professional standing in the department. The principles of respect, beneficence, and justice guided the entire research process, ensuring that the findings would not only be accurate and transparent but also provide insights that could help improve teacher welfare and retention policies.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the descriptive results, indicating that teachers who participated in the study perceive various aspects of their work environment as sources of stress. The mean scores for workload, role conflict, administrative support, classroom management, and work-life imbalance all fall within the "Agree" range, suggesting that these factors contribute to teachers' stress levels. Specifically, the teachers agree that workload and role conflict are major stressors, highlighting the challenges of managing heavy workloads and balancing multiple roles. Also, administrative

Table 1: Descriptive results of the variables of occupational stress

Occupational stress	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
Workload	2.65	0.467	Agree
Role Conflict	2.55	0.524	Agree
Administrative Support	2.89	0.569	Agree
Classroom Management	2.88	0.436	Agree
Worklife Imbalance	2.58	0.543	Agree

Strongly disagree; 1.76-2.50 disagree; 2.51-3.25 Agree; 3.26-4.0 strongly agree

support, while relatively high in agreement, suggests that teachers may need more effective support from school administration.

In addition, classroom management is also a key stressor, as teachers report significant challenges in managing student behavior and maintaining an effective learning environment. Additionally, work-life imbalance is noted as a contributing factor to occupational stress, suggesting that teachers struggle to maintain a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives. The implications of these findings suggest that addressing these stressors, particularly through workload management, clearer role definitions, enhanced administrative support, and improved work-life balance initiatives, could help alleviate teacher stress and reduce the likelihood of severance intentions.

The study found various studies that support the above findings. In particular, studies by Capagngan and Dioso (2023) and Kyriacou (2001) also identified workload and role or interpersonal conflict as the most consistent stressors for teachers across various educational contexts, while multiple studies proved that if educators feel the presence of administrative support in their schools it tends to reduce work-related stress and possible burnout, leading to high commitment towards their work and satisfied with their jobs (Aldosiry, 2020; Dong et al., 2019; Jentsch et al., 2022; Pressley and Ha, 2021). Additionally, the challenges of classroom management, such as student welfare responsibilities, time management, and a load of ancillary tasks, as highlighted by Reyes and Rogon (2025), align with this study's results, reinforcing the need for interventions that promote teacher well-being and retention. Moreover, as various studies have shown, poor work-life balance can significantly impair teaching quality and affect classroom management (Orena and Gamutan, 2025; Ragmaç and Labitad, 2025; Santiago, 2023; Tipan and Aguilar, 2025). Other studies suggest that there should be systemic support through well-balanced workload policies, social network support, and a healthy school culture for all stakeholders, especially teachers (Eloor and Menon, 2024; Nwoko et al., 2025).

Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis, in Table 2, revealed value of Spearman, p-value, and decision considering the alpha which is 0.05. In the result, it founds that the workload ($\rho = 0.306$, $P < 0.001$), role conflict ($\rho = 0.353$, $P < 0.001$), and work-life imbalance ($\rho = 0.347$, $P < 0.001$) were positively and significantly associated with turnover intention. This indicates that higher workload, greater role conflict, and greater work-life imbalance are associated with stronger intentions to leave. On the contrary, administrative support was significantly and negatively related to turnover intention ($\rho = -0.294$, $P < 0.001$), suggesting that greater

Table 2: Spearman correlations between independent variables and severance intention

Independent variable	Dependent variable	ρ (Spearman)	P-value	Decision ($\alpha=0.05$)
Workload	Severance Intention	0.306***	<0.001	Reject H_0
Role conflict		0.353***	<0.001	Reject H_0
Administrative support		-0.294***	<0.001	Reject H_0
Classroom management		0.140	0.088	Fail to reject H_0
Work-life imbalance		0.347***	<0.001	Reject H_0

ρ =Spearman's rho. P<0.05, ** P<0.01, *** P<0.001

perceived support is associated with lower turnover intention. However, classroom management was not significantly associated with turnover intention ($\rho = 0.140$, $P = 0.088$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected for all variables except classroom management.

The overall findings indicate that turnover (severance) intention is primarily influenced by organizational and psychosocial job stressors rather than task-specific challenges, such as challenging working conditions, adverse work experiences, and stress (Rahimi and Arnold, 2024). Specifically, workload, role conflict, and work-life imbalance emerged as significant positive predictors of turnover intention, while administrative support functioned as a protective factor. These results suggest that employees are more likely to consider leaving when they experience excessive job demands, unclear or conflicting role expectations, and difficulty balancing professional and personal responsibilities (Ganewatta and Hiroshima, 2023; Ketkaew et al., 2020; Wen et al., 2020). Conversely, when employees perceive strong administrative support, their likelihood of leaving decreases.

From a practical standpoint, organizations should prioritize reducing structural stressors by managing workloads, clarifying role delineation, and implementing policies that promote work-life balance. Equally important is cultivating supportive leadership practices, as administrative support appears to buffer the negative effects of job demands. Retention strategies should therefore adopt a systemic approach, targeting both the reduction of job demands and the enhancement of organizational resources. Addressing only surface-level or task-specific issues may be insufficient to reduce turnover intention meaningfully.

5. CONCLUSION

This study established that occupational stress is a significant factor influencing public school teachers' intention to leave the profession in Cebu City, Philippines. The findings revealed that high workload, role conflict, and work-life imbalance are positively and significantly associated with severance intention. At the same time, strong administrative support serves as a protective factor, reducing the likelihood of turnover. Classroom management, though a source of stress, was not a significant predictor of severance intention.

The results underscore the vital need for systemic interventions to reduce organizational and psychosocial stressors in the teaching environment. Strategies such as managing workloads, clarifying role expectations, promoting work-life balance, and enhancing administrative support are essential to improve teacher retention

and overall well-being. Addressing these areas can help create a more supportive and sustainable environment for educators, ultimately benefiting the educational system.

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