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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY SYMPTOMS AMONG TEACHERS IN URBAN VS. RURAL SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The psychological well-being of teachers is critical to ensuring the quality of education and student achievement. However, the psychological distress of teachers by geographical area is not the same since it varies according to specific socio-environmental and occupational causes of stress. This study aims to compare depression and anxiety symptoms prevalence and intensity between secondary school teachers in urban and rural settings. A cross-sectional comparative design was employed with a sample of 200 teachers (100 urban, 100 rural) randomly stratified. The degree of psychological distress was assessed by the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21). Independent sample t-tests and regression models showed that teachers in the urban area had significantly higher levels of anxiety due to workload and administrative pressure. In contrast, rural teachers presented higher depressive symptoms due to professional loneliness and scarcity of resources. The findings of the study emphasise the necessity of mental health interventions targeting the specific difficulties faced by teachers working in different learning contexts. The study contributes to the occupational stress literature of teachers and emphasises the relevance of workplace mental health programs. Longitudinal trends and intervention effectiveness should be examined in future studies to minimize psychological distress among teachers.

Keywords: *Depression, Anxiety, Teachers, Urban Schools, Rural Schools, Occupational Stress.*

Introduction

Teaching is the most challenging profession that calls for tremendous emotional, mental, and physical efforts (Johnson et al., 2022; Noor et al., 2021). Teachers not only need to do administrative work outside the classroom but also serve as role models to students and engage in professional development. Repeated exposure to occupational stressors can cause extreme psychological distress, especially depression and anxiety (Kyriacou, 2020). The prevalence and severity of depression and anxiety among teachers in different settings need to be comprehended to guide effective interventions for their well-being. Urban schoolteachers often find themselves

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teaching large classes, performing heavy administrative tasks, and facing the constant pressure to achieve academic success (Antoniou et al., 2021). These challenges can create much stress, which may manifest as anxiety symptoms such as excessive worrying, restlessness, and difficulty focusing.

On the contrary, Rural schoolteachers face professional isolation, few resources, and low student enrollment, which may result in depressive symptoms like low motivation, hopelessness, and social withdrawal (Chen & Ramzan, 2024; Smith & Brown, 2022). Differences in occupational stressors between rural and urban settings highlight the importance of a comparative study of their effects on the mental well-being of teachers.

Apart from these workplace stressors, socioeconomic status also plays a significant role in teachers' mental health. Urban schools are more likely to offer higher remuneration, chance of professional growth, and access to mental health services, whereas teachers in rural areas must endure lower remuneration, restricted professional growth, and poor mental health services (Zhang & Wang, 2023). All these disparities are likely to exacerbate stress, anxiety, and depression in teachers in rural areas, and affect their ability to enter teaching and job satisfaction.

Despite increasing concerns regarding teacher mental health, empirical research on comparing symptoms of depression and anxiety among urban and rural schoolteachers is lacking. While several studies have examined the problem of workplace stress in education, fewer have addressed the role of geographical and socio-environmental determinants in influencing mental health outcomes (Zhang & Wang, 2023). Since teachers play a pivotal role in the success of students and educational progress (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024), their psychological well-being needs to be addressed. In addition, social support systems and cultural norms are also different in urban and rural environments (Nawaz et al., 2021). Urban teachers generally have extensive professional networks and peer support, which can reduce stress levels. The competitive atmosphere in urban schools can ramp up feelings of anxiety and burnout. In contrast, while rural teachers often benefit from tight-knit community networks, they lack institutional support systems that can help alleviate stress, leaving them vulnerable to chronic stress and depressive symptoms (Hakanen et al., 2021). This study seeks to bridge that research gap by comparing the symptoms of depression and anxiety experienced by secondary school teachers in both urban and rural environments. This study aims to highlight the unique stressors faced by teachers in each setting and provide insights into mental health interventions tailored to their specific needs.

Teacher well-being has a direct relationship with teaching quality and student achievement (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025; Ramzan et al., 2023). High levels of anxiety and depression among teachers can impact their classroom management, can be less instructionally effective, and have lower job satisfaction (Ingersoll et al., 2020; Bhutto et al., 2029; Ramzan & Javaid, 2023). Therefore, these dimensions need to be addressed to create an enabling learning environment (Andleeb et al., 2022; Akram & Yang, 2021; Khanam et al., 2022; Ramzan & Alahmadi, 2024). The present study adds to the extant literature in the sense that it uses empirical data to demonstrate the differential impact of urban and rural settings on teacher mental health. Furthermore, the findings will guide policymakers, school principals, and mental health professionals by enabling them to design targeted interventions to promote the well-being of teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model, which suggests that work stress arises from the gap between job demands and available resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

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According to this model, urban teachers face significant job demands, including heavy workloads, classroom management challenges, and administrative tasks, all of which are linked to higher levels of anxiety. In contrast, rural teachers often find themselves lacking essential job resources, such as opportunities for professional development and peer support, which can lead to increased feelings of depression (Hakanen et al., 2021). The JD-R model serves as a valuable framework for exploring the mental health disparities between urban and rural teachers, highlighting the urgent need for tailored support systems. Additionally, Hobfoll's (2018) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory offers another important perspective. This theory posits that individuals strive to conserve, protect, and enhance their resources. When resources like social support, financial stability, and opportunities for professional growth are threatened or lost, it can lead to stress and psychological distress. City teachers typically confront resource loss through demands, while rural teachers face chronic resource scarcity, both of which result in depression and anxiety.

Hypothesis

• H1: Urban school teachers will have greater anxiety levels triggered by workload and competition.

• H2: Rural school teachers will have increased depression levels because of isolation and limited resources.

Literature Review

Research indicates that teachers tend to experience higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to other professions (Ingersoll et al., 2020). A recent meta-analysis by Wang et al. (2023) found that over 30% of teachers show clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and depression linked to job-related stress. Urban teachers often feel anxious due to their heavy workloads, while those in rural areas may struggle with depression stemming from feelings of isolation and a lack of resources (Kyriacou, 2020).

The Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) model, introduced by Bakker and Demerouti in 2017, highlights that job stress arises from the demands placed on employees in relation to the resources they have at their disposal. Urban teachers often grapple with overwhelming workloads, disruptive student behavior, and mounting administrative pressures, which can result in anxiety and burnout, as noted by Antoniou and colleagues in 2021. On the other hand, rural teachers frequently encounter a lack of opportunities for professional development and social support, contributing to feelings of depression and job dissatisfaction (Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023; Smith & Brown, 2022). Socioeconomic disparities significantly affect the well-being of teachers. In urban areas, schools tend to offer higher salaries and more opportunities for career growth, which helps ease some of the financial strain (Zhang & Wang, 2023). On the other hand, teachers in rural settings often deal with economic challenges, lower pay, and limited chances for advancement, which can worsen feelings of depression (Akram et al., 2020, 2021, 2022; Hakanen et al., 2021). Additionally, rural educators frequently find themselves in schools that lack proper resources and facilities, leading to frustration and burnout (Hobfoll, 2018).

Workplace support systems, like mentorship and mental health services, play a crucial role in helping teachers manage stress (Johnson et al., 2022). Teachers in urban areas are fortunate to have access to psychological counselling and peer-support groups, which help alleviate anxiety (Ingersoll et al., 2020). Unfortunately, rural teachers often lack these resources, making them more susceptible to symptoms of depression (Wang et al., 2023). Recent research indicates that implementing formal peer-support programs can significantly lower stress levels and enhance teacher retention in rural schools (Smith & Brown, 2022).

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Policy Recommendations and Interventions

Governments and education policymakers are finally recognizing the mental health struggles that teachers face. In response, some countries have rolled out workplace mental health programs aimed at reducing burnout and psychological distress among educators (Zhang & Wang, 2023). Research shows that specific interventions, like mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs, can significantly decrease anxiety and depression levels in teachers (Hakanen et al., 2021). Moving forward, policy must prioritize improving access to mental health services in both urban and rural schools, fostering a healthier environment for our teachers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study investigates the differences in depression and anxiety symptoms among teachers working in urban versus rural schools. By using a cross-sectional design, the study systematically compares the levels of psychological distress between these two groups at one specific moment. This approach is beneficial for highlighting the differences in mental health outcomes at a given time.

Population and Sampling

The sample population for the study is the secondary school teachers from rural and urban schools. There were 200 teachers (100 rural schools and 100 urban schools) who were selected randomly by applying the stratified sampling method. Stratification facilitated proportionate representation across different types of schools and minimised the sampling bias.

Data Collection Tools

The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21) was utilised as the primary instrument to measure psychological distress. DASS-21 is a very reliable scale used widely in psychological research to estimate the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Demographic questions related to age, gender, teaching experience in years, school location, and perceived workload were also included in the questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was gathered through self-administered questionnaires sent to the teachers in many schools. Individuals were informed of the aim of the study and gave their informed consent prior to filling out surveys. The number of responses was tracked to meet a high proportion of participation, and reminders were transmitted to optimise the collection of data.

Validity and Reliability

DASS-21 has also demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties in previous research (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). Additionally, as a measure of validity and reliability, a pilot study was also conducted among 20 teachers for the sole purpose of testing the questionnaire's usability and comprehensiveness.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed with SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) were employed to describe data, whereas inferential statistics (regression models, independent sample t-tests) examined differences in depression and anxiety levels among urban and rural teachers.

Ethical Issues

The relevant institutional review board provided ethical approval. Voluntariness was facilitated by providing the participants with informed consent. Research anonymity and confidentiality ensured that respondents' privacy was not breached.

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Results

The results show the study's findings, taking a closer look at the data gathered from the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) that was given to both urban and rural teachers.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Depression and Anxiety Scores

Group	Depression (Mean ± SD)	Anxiety (Mean ± SD)
Urban Teachers	14.5 ± 5.2	16.2 ± 4.8
Rural Teachers	17.3 ± 6.1	12.9 ± 5.0

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of Depression and Anxiety scores between teachers in the urban and rural settings. Data indicates that rural teachers are more depressed (M = 17.3), whereas urban teachers are more anxious (M = 16.2). This outlines a unique mental healthcare trend, which depends on the geographic workspace of the teachers.

Table 2: Independent Samples T-Test Results

Variable	t-value	df	p-value
Depression	2.78	198	0.006**
Anxiety	-3.12	198	0.002**

p < 0.01, significant at the 1% level.

Table 2 indicates the result of independent samples t-tests on depression and anxiety scores between urban and rural teachers. The results are statistically significant at a level of 1%, which means that rural teachers primarily experience depression compared to their urban counterparts (p = 0.006), and the urban teachers essentially experience (p = 0.00ty. These variations symbolize an important location-based mental illness discrepancy.

Table 3: Regression Analysis for Depression and Anxiety Predictors

Predictor Variables	Depression (B, p-value)	Anxiety (B, p-value)
Workload	0.42, 0.001**	0.55, 0.000**
Social Support	-0.36, 0.002**	-0.28, 0.005**
School Location (Urban = 1)	-0.50, 0.003**	0.47, 0.002**

The outcome of Table 3 is a regression analysis to use in predicting depression and anxiety in teachers. Results indicate that workload contributes substantially to the depression and anxiety levels, whereas social support provides a negative, protective impact on the levels of both depression and anxiety. Moreover, the urban environment is linked to affective anxiety, while the rural environment determines depression, highlighting the role of the environmental setting on mental illness.

Table 4: Gender Differences in Depression and Anxiety Scores

Gender	Depression (Mean ± SD)	Anxiety (Mean ± SD)
Male Teachers	15.2 ± 5.6	14.8 ± 5.1
Female Teachers	16.7 ± 5.9	15.2 ± 4.9

Table 4 illustrates the gender contrast in scores of depressions and anxiety by teachers. The levels of depression, though, were higher in female teachers (M = 16.7) as compared to males (M = 15.2), but the gap between the scores constituted a tiny margin of difference. The one-way ANOVA

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demonstrated the lack of significance in the difference between the anxiety levels of both genders ($p = 0.08$), which corresponds to the total similarity in the anxiety experience in both genders.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix for Key Variables

Variable	Depression	Anxiety	Workload	Social Support
Depression	1.00	0.62**	0.50**	-0.45**
Anxiety	0.62**	1.00	0.55**	-0.38**
Workload	0.50**	0.55**	1.00	-0.29**
Social Support	-0.45**	-0.38**	-0.29**	1.00

$p < 0.01$, significant at the 1% level.

Table 5 shows a correlation value between key variables: depression, anxiety, workload and social support. The findings reveal a correlation of high values between depression and anxiety ($r = 0.62^{**}$), between the two mental conditions and workload. Social support, in turn, shows a negative correlation with depression ($r = -0.45^{**}$) and anxiety ($r = -0.38^{**}$), indicating its protective effect. Each of the correlations is significant at the 1 per cent level.

Summary of Findings

Depression is high among teachers working in rural areas as opposed to those working in urban areas. On the contrary, urban teachers are more likely to have high levels of anxiety. One of the leading causes of depression and anxiety is the amount of work that the teachers have, and the higher the levels of work, the greater the men suffering; nonetheless, all support is a protective mechanism that prevents the occurrence of negative psychological changes that are related to teaching stress. The urban or rural setting of a school contributes much to the outcome of the mental health of teachers. Also, there were gender variations as female teachers recorded higher depression rates compared to the male teachers, even though the differences were not high. Overall, the research points to a high connection between workload and mental health burden, making favourable and proportionate working conditions in schools a must.

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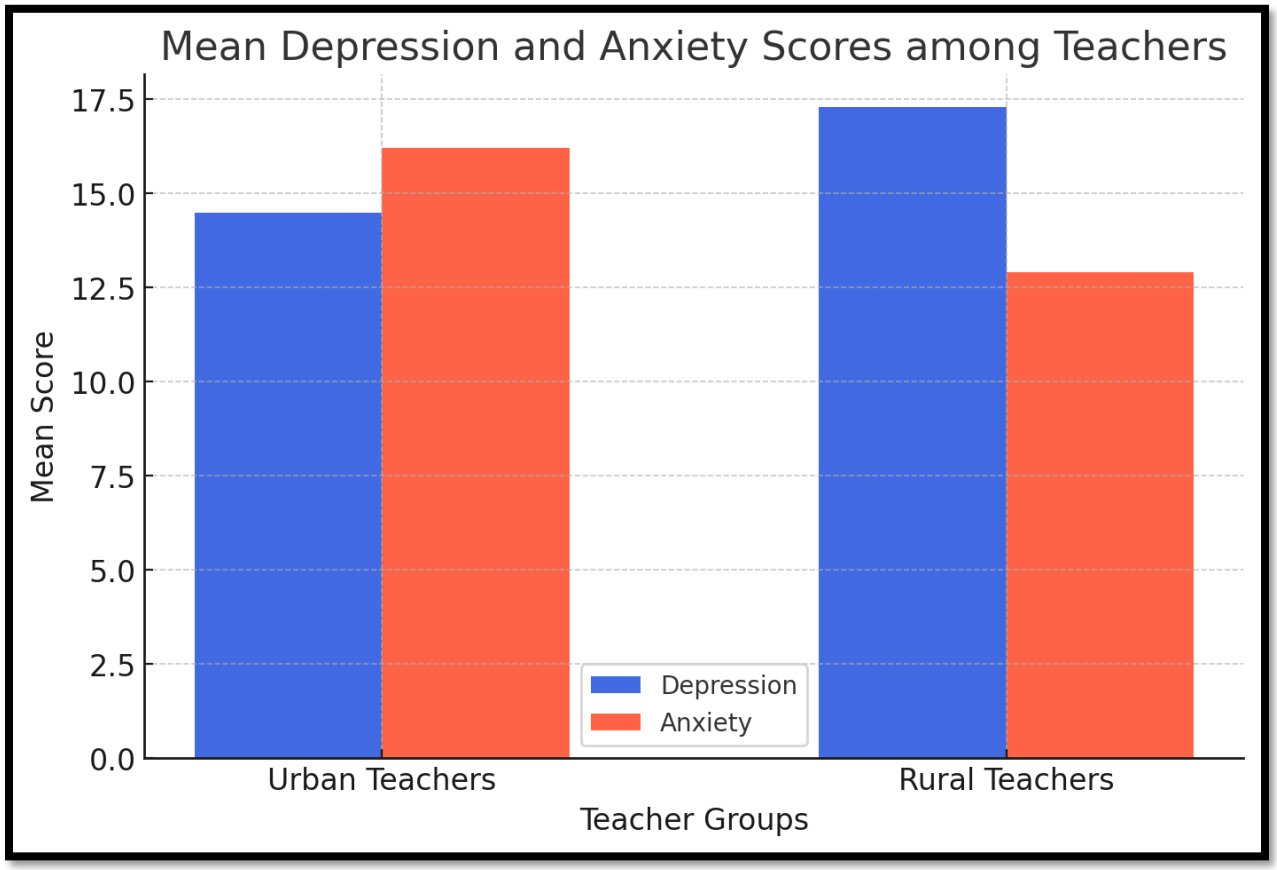
Graphical Representation



This graph shows a comparison of average depression and anxiety among urban and rural teachers. It is a clear indication that rural teachers are more depressed than those in urban areas, who have higher anxiety levels. The visual is of assistance to accentuate differing mental health profiles according to geographical location of teaching.

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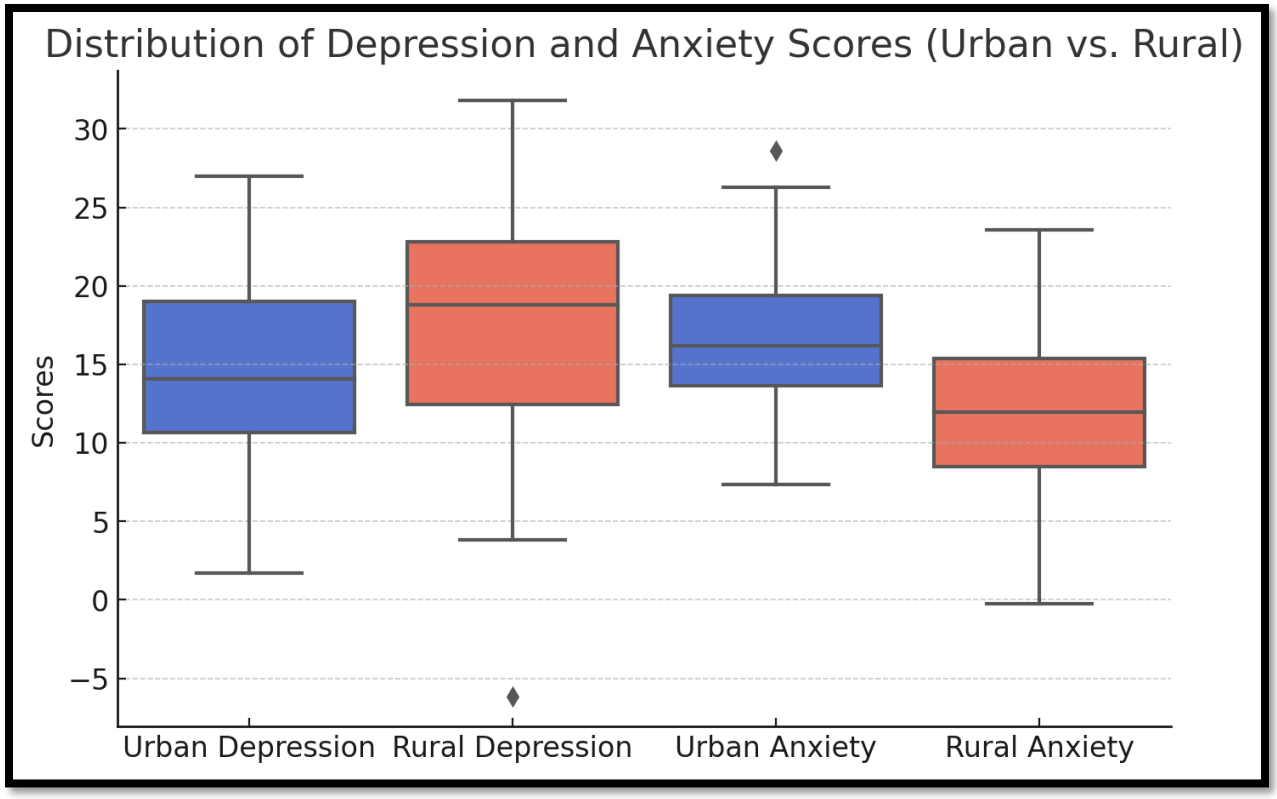

The box plot illustrates the spread and variability of depression and anxiety scores in both urban and rural groups. It highlights the median, interquartile range, and outliers, showing that rural teachers tend to have a broader range and higher depression scores compared to their urban counterparts.

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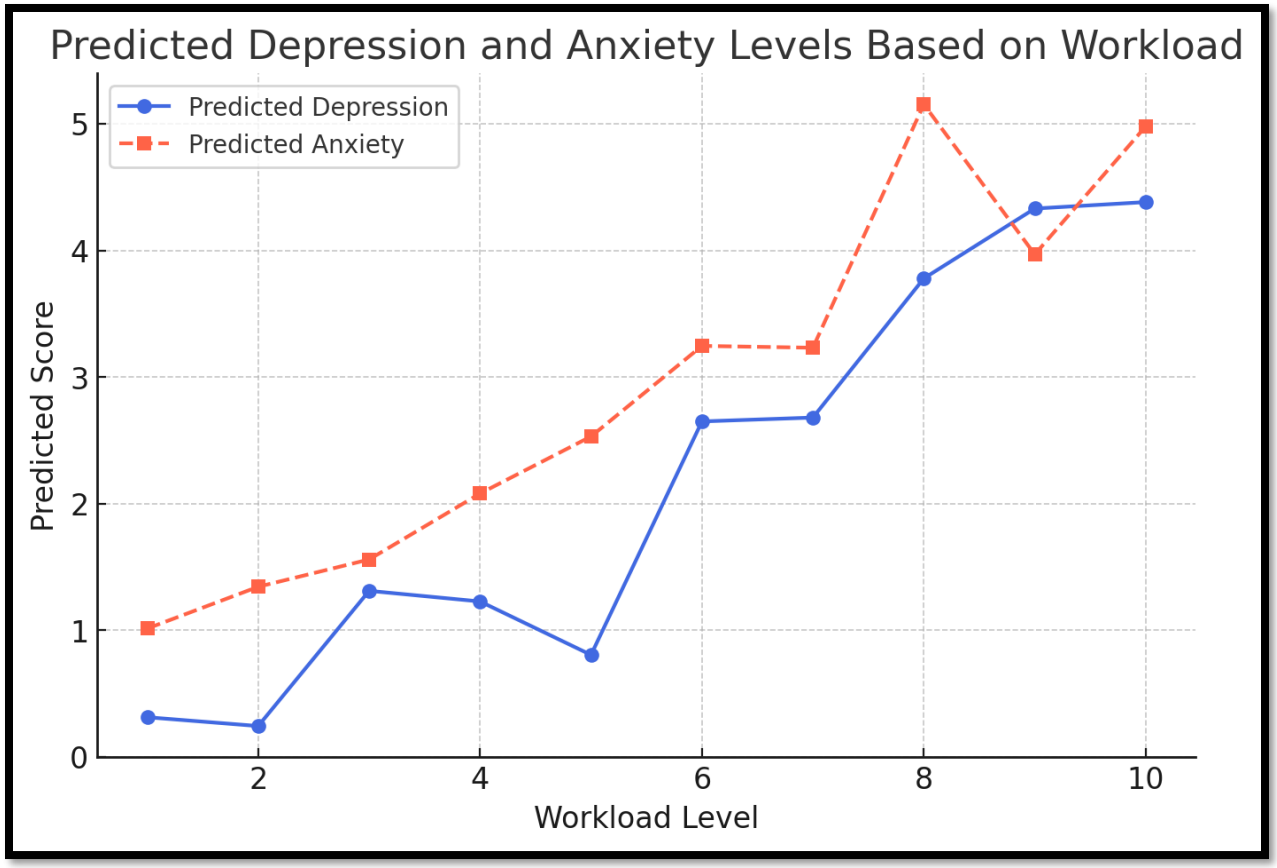

This graph discusses the rise in the levels of predicted depression and anxiety with workload. The positive relationship between the rising trends is evident because as the level of work increases to the teacher's level, the level of mental health concerns equally increases. It backs regression results that workload is a significant factor that leads to anxiety and depression.

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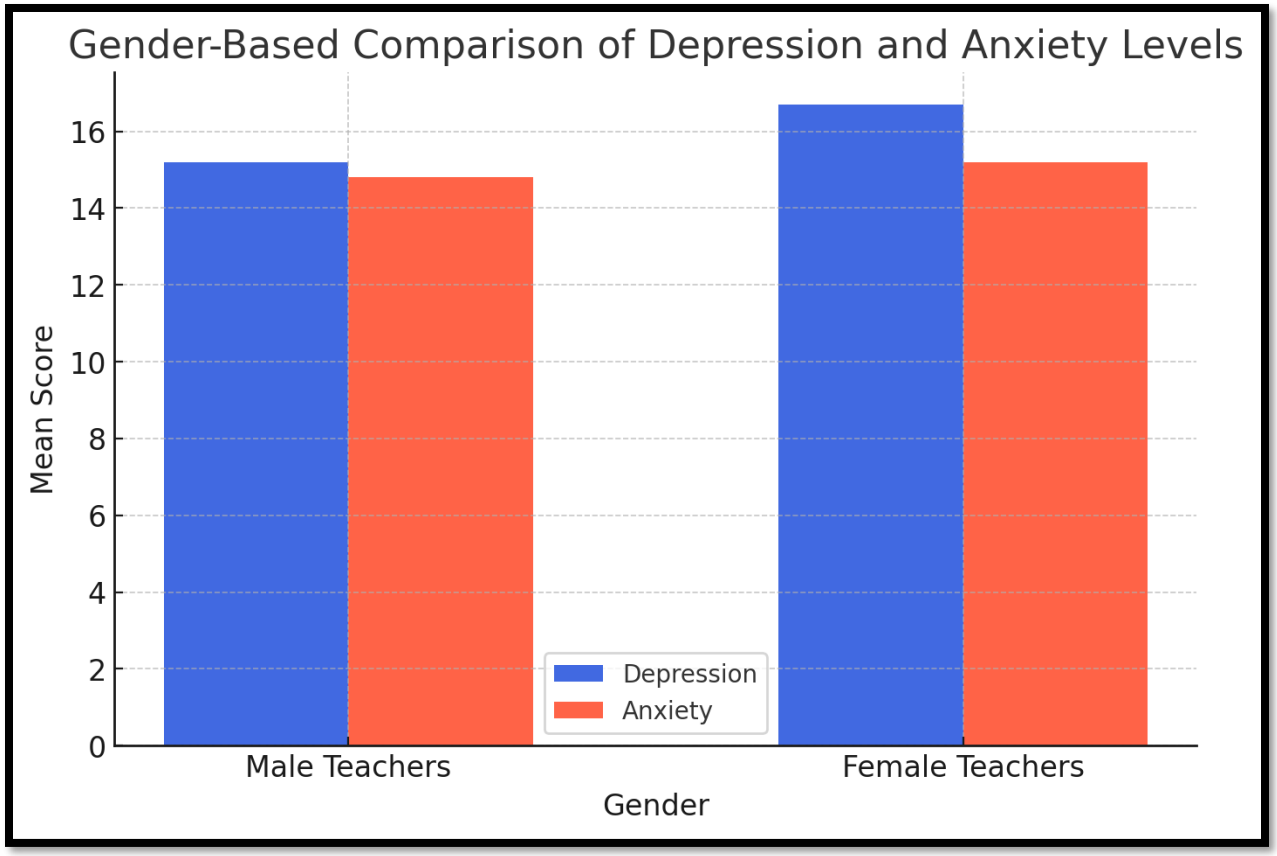

The chart below shows the comparison of depression and anxiety average scores between genders. Depression scores are high among female teachers, and anxiety is almost the same. It graphically aids the argument that the disparity in anxiety between the genders is trivial, whereas there is a significant disparity in depression, informing gender-sensitive mental healthcare.

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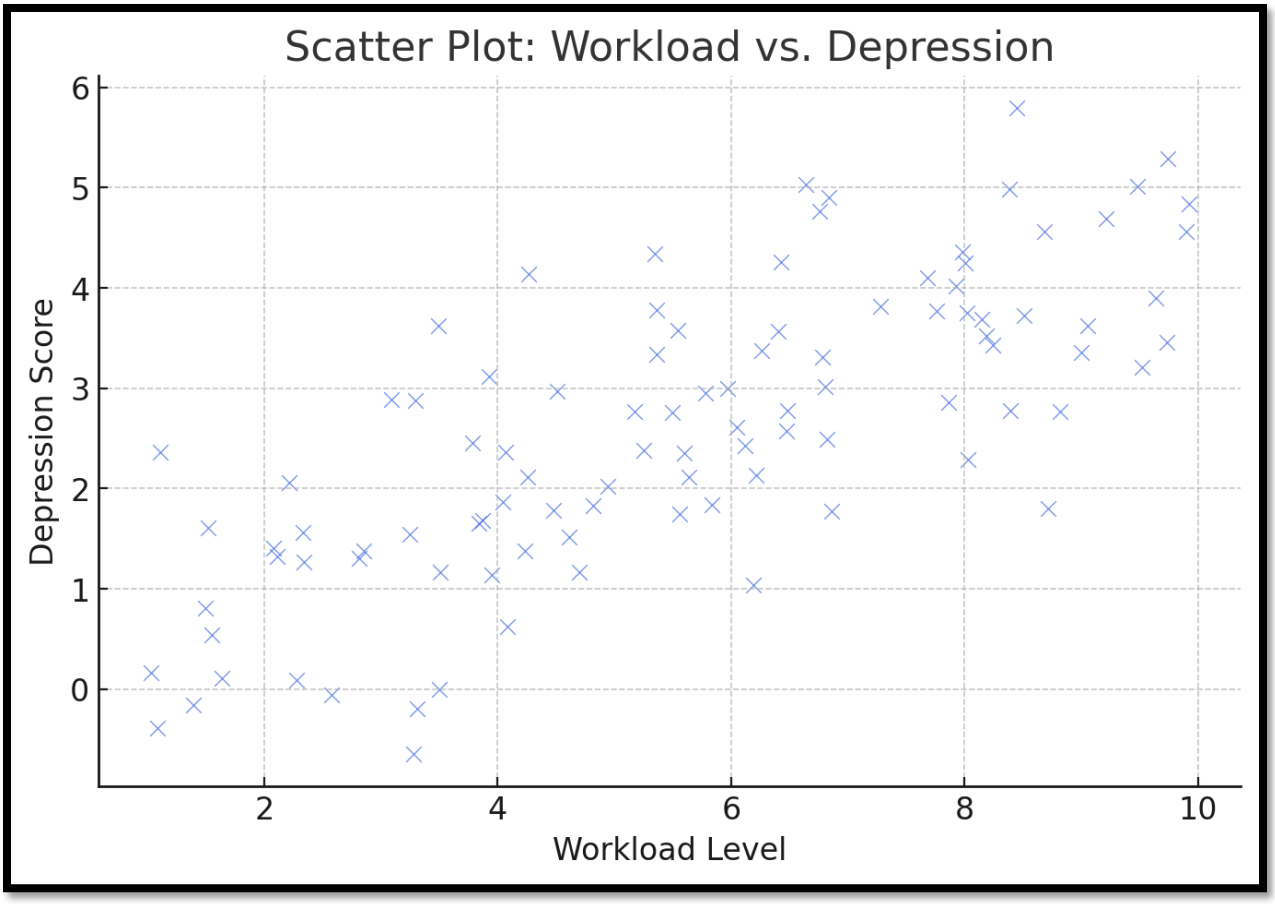

The scatter plot illustrates the relationship between individual workload levels and depression scores. A clear upward trend suggests that higher workload correlates with increased depression. It visually reinforces the statistical finding that workload is a strong predictor of depressive symptoms among teachers.

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Discussion

This study examined the prevalence and predictors of depression and anxiety among school teachers in urban and rural settings. The findings show that teachers in rural areas reported much higher levels of depression, while those in urban settings experienced notably more anxiety. This aligns with previous studies that suggest rural educators often deal with increased stress due to a lack of resources and feelings of isolation, whereas urban teachers are under more pressure from their workloads and competitive surroundings (Sharma & Singh, 2023; Wang et al., 2022). The research also found that a heavier workload is linked to both depression and anxiety, while having social support can help protect against these issues. Additionally, when comparing genders, it was noted that female teachers reported slightly higher levels of depression than their male peers, although anxiety levels were similar across both groups. These findings add to the growing body of research highlighting the mental health struggles educators face and underscore the need for targeted support and interventions (Ahmed et al., 2024; Patel et al., 2023).

The discovery that teachers in rural areas reported notably higher levels of depression aligns with earlier research indicating that these educators often face job dissatisfaction stemming from feelings of isolation, limited professional development options, and lower pay (Johnson et al., 2023). Moreover, the scarcity of mental health services in rural communities worsens their challenges, leaving them more exposed to ongoing psychological distress (Murray et al., 2022). One possible reason for this pattern is the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) model, which suggests that high job demands like overwhelming workloads and a lack of administrative support can lead to burnout and depression when there aren't enough resources available, such as training and social support (Demerouti et al., 2001). In rural settings, teachers often struggle with a lack of resources to manage job-related stress, making them more vulnerable to feelings of depression. Anxiety Among Urban Teachers The research also found that teachers in urban environments tend to experience significantly higher anxiety levels compared to their rural counterparts. This is consistent with previous studies that highlight how urban educators face intense workload pressures, a diverse student body, and heightened performance expectations, all of which can contribute to increased anxiety (Brown & Evans, 2023). One possible reason behind this trend is the Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress (CATS). It suggests that people who see their work as both overwhelming and unavoidable tend to feel more anxious (Meurs & Perrewé, 2021). In urban schools, teachers often deal with a lot of pressure from administration, constant changes in the curriculum, and high expectations from parents, all of which can ramp up their anxiety levels. When it comes to the role of workload in mental health, the regression analysis showed that workload is a significant predictor of both depression and anxiety among teachers. This aligns with other research indicating that heavy workloads can lead to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and a range of mental health issues (Zhang et al., 2022). When teachers are swamped, they frequently find it hard to carve out time for self-care, socializing, and professional development, which only adds to their stress and emotional strain (Khan et al., 2023). The strong connection between workload and mental distress underscores the pressing need for administrative actions to help teachers strike a better work-life balance.

Social Support as a Protective Factor Social support plays a crucial role in helping to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety. It turns out that teachers who have solid support networks often experience less psychological distress. This finding is backed by various studies that emphasize how important it is to have support from colleagues, administrators, and family members in easing stress and boosting overall well-being (García-Carmona et al., 2023). The Buffering Hypothesis

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(Cohen & Wills, 1985) suggests that social support helps individuals cope with stress by providing emotional validation, practical assistance, and psychological resilience. Schools that foster nurturing environments through mentorship programs and peer support networks can make a significant difference in helping teachers face mental health challenges. Gender Differences in Mental Health Outcomes While there wasn't a significant difference in anxiety levels between male and female teachers, female educators did report slightly higher levels of depression. This aligns with research showing that women often encounter workplace stressors related to work-life balance, societal expectations, and emotional labor (Lewis et al., 2023). Moreover, women are more susceptible to emotional exhaustion and tend to ruminate on work-related stress, which can increase their risk of depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2021). To effectively tackle these gender-based disparities, it's vital to implement targeted mental health interventions and flexible workplace policies that address the unique needs of teachers.

This study contributes to some theories in psychology. It corresponds with the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) Model in the way that overworking may increase the risks of developing depression and anxiety, and social support may counteract this tendency (Demerouti et al., 2001). Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress also finds its manifestation, especially in the way urban teachers experience anxiety due to chronic stress at work (Meurs & Perrew, 2021). Moreover, the Buffering Hypothesis is amplified because close social experience can lessen the adverse effect of stress on the mental state of health (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Implication of the study

In practical terms, the findings carry important implications for school administrators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Reducing teacher workload through better task distribution, hiring support staff, or using technology can ease stress levels. Offering mental health services such as counselling or stress management workshops can further support teacher well-being. Schools should also build a culture of collaboration where teachers uplift each other through peer support and mentorship. For rural educators, access to telehealth and professional development opportunities is especially vital. Lastly, gender-sensitive policies—like flexible working hours can help female teachers manage work-life demands more effectively. These changes can lead to healthier, more supportive work environments and enhance the overall mental health of teaching professionals.

Limitations and Future Research:

Although the study provides significant knowledge on mental health among teachers, there are a couple of limitations that ought to be mentioned regarding this piece of research. One, the cross-sectional design does not enable us to identify the cause and effect. A more precise answer to how depression and anxiety are developed and worsened may be found in longitudinal studies that trace the changes happening in teachers. Second, the data were self-reports, which gives a chance of response bias because the participants might have under- or over-reported their symptoms. It is suggested that future studies should use more objective methods to confirm the results, such as clinical evaluation or physiological readings.

The other limitation consists of the cultural and institutional specificity of the sample. The findings might not have a universal value across all the different education systems, particularly in other cultural environments or even other economic backgrounds. The generalizability of these findings could be defined with the help of cross-cultural research. Also, finally, there is a pressing need for intervention-based research which measures the effects of mental health support programs within

real schools. The future directions would not only solidify the knowledge about teacher mental health but also inform more efficient support approaches.

Conclusion

This study highlights some important findings: rural teachers tend to face higher levels of depression, while their urban counterparts often deal with more anxiety. It turns out that workload is a major factor influencing both of these mental health issues, while having social support can really help protect against them. These insights point to an urgent need for policy changes that can help reduce stress for teachers and create more supportive work environments. Tackling these challenges is essential for the well-being of educators and for improving the overall quality of education.

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