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Research Paper

Burnout and Coping among Mathematics Teachers in Kerala: The Role of Workload and Experience

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined burnout and coping strategies among mathematics teachers in Kerala, with particular emphasis on the role of workload and teaching experience. A sample of 200 mathematics teachers was selected using a stratified random sampling technique from government, aided, and private schools across Kerala. Burnout was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), while coping strategies were measured using the Brief COPE Inventory. The study employed a quantitative research design, and the collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, Pearson's correlation, and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed significant gender differences in burnout and coping, with female teachers reporting higher burnout and lower coping abilities compared to male teachers. Significant differences in burnout and coping were also observed across teaching experience, weekly working hours, administrative workload, and monthly income. Teachers with lower teaching experience, longer working hours, higher administrative responsibilities, and lower income demonstrated comparatively higher burnout and lower coping abilities. In contrast, experienced teachers reported better coping strategies and lower burnout levels. The study concludes that burnout among mathematics teachers is significantly shaped by workload-related demands and moderated by coping resources and professional experience. The findings emphasize the importance of institutional support, workload management, and coping-skills interventions to promote teacher well-being and sustainable educational practices.

Keywords: *Burnout, coping strategies, mathematics teachers, workload, teaching experience, occupational stress*

Teaching has evolved into a high-stakes profession characterized by sustained cognitive, emotional, and organizational demands, rendering educators particularly vulnerable to occupational stress. Within this context, mathematics teachers constitute a uniquely at-risk subgroup due to the convergence of rigorous performance accountability, abstract content delivery, and increasing societal expectations for academic achievement (Girija & Antony, 2025; Piscitella, 2016). In Kerala, where educational achievement and competitive examination performance are highly emphasized, mathematics teachers encounter intensified professional pressure arising from academic accountability, parental expectations, and institutional demands.

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A critical yet underexplored dimension of this burden is the interaction between teacher burnout and student mathematics anxiety. Emerging evidence suggests that elevated teacher stress may contribute to the transmission of anxiety to students, thereby reinforcing a cyclical pattern of declining student performance and heightened instructional pressure (Butler, 2026). This recursive feedback loop increases the likelihood of emotional strain among teachers and accelerates progression toward burnout.

Burnout is conceptualized as a multidimensional psychological syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; El Helou et al., 2016). Emotional exhaustion refers to the depletion of emotional and psychological resources, depersonalization reflects detached or negative attitudes toward students, and reduced personal accomplishment denotes diminished feelings of competence and professional efficacy. Previous studies have demonstrated that burnout adversely affects instructional quality, job satisfaction, teacher well-being, and retention, thereby posing a serious challenge to educational sustainability (Atoyebi et al., 2025).

In the contemporary educational environment, these pressures are further intensified by technostress, defined as the stress associated with the increasing integration of digital technologies into teaching practices. In digitally progressive regions such as Kerala, initiatives including the Hi-Tech School Project have expanded teacher responsibilities to include digital content creation, online assessment, and continuous adaptation to technological platforms. Within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, such digital expectations function as additional job demands that increase cognitive workload and contribute significantly to burnout (Hendricks & Okunlola, 2024).

The present study conceptualizes burnout not as a simple consequence of workload, but as a dynamic and resource-dependent process shaped by the interaction between job demands and individual coping capacities. This perspective is supported by three interrelated theoretical frameworks. First, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) explain stress as a subjective process in which individuals cognitively appraise whether environmental demands exceed their coping resources. Consequently, teachers experiencing similar workloads may exhibit different levels of stress and burnout depending on their coping mechanisms.

Second, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory proposes that individuals strive to obtain and preserve valued resources such as time, energy, resilience, and social support. Burnout emerges when these resources are continuously depleted under sustained occupational demands, resulting in resource loss spirals that intensify emotional exhaustion (Carson et al., 2012). Third, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model provides a structural explanation linking job demands, such as workload and technostress, with job resources, including coping strategies, resilience, and support systems. According to this model, excessive demands in the absence of adequate resources lead to burnout, whereas sufficient resources enhance engagement and psychological well-being (Hendricks & Okunlola, 2024).
Collectively, these theoretical perspectives suggest that burnout among mathematics teachers is influenced by both external occupational demands and internal psychological resources. Workload remains one of the strongest predictors of teacher stress, encompassing instructional duties, administrative responsibilities, evaluation tasks, and extracurricular commitments (Mohzana et al., 2023). In mathematics education specifically, these pressures are compounded by the need for conceptual clarity, differentiated instruction, and continuous reinforcement of foundational concepts. Additionally, contemporary teaching environments

require mathematics teachers to adapt to digital platforms, AI-assisted educational tools, and hybrid learning systems, thereby increasing cognitive and emotional demands.

Coping strategies therefore emerge as a central mediating factor in the stress–burnout relationship. Existing literature distinguishes between adaptive coping strategies, such as problem-solving, positive reappraisal, and seeking social support, and maladaptive coping strategies, including avoidance, self-blame, and emotional venting. Adaptive coping has been associated with lower emotional exhaustion and greater professional efficacy, whereas maladaptive coping significantly predicts increased depersonalization and burnout severity (Martínez Ramón, 2015; Martínez et al., 2020). Within the COR framework, active coping functions as a protective resource that interrupts resource depletion and reduces vulnerability to burnout (Carson et al., 2012).

Teaching experience also plays an important yet complex role in shaping burnout outcomes. Experienced teachers may possess greater instructional expertise and more effective coping mechanisms; however, prolonged exposure to occupational stress may also contribute to cumulative emotional exhaustion. Carson et al. (2012) identified experience as a potential protective resource, though its effects may vary across contexts. Furthermore, internal psychological resources such as hardiness and growth mindset significantly influence teachers' responses to stress. Mohzana et al. (2023) reported that hardiness, particularly commitment and challenge orientation, reduces stress levels, while Butler (2026) found that a growth mindset enables teachers to reinterpret professional challenges as opportunities for development, thereby reducing depersonalization and burnout.

Despite the growing global literature on teacher burnout, limited research has examined these factors within the Kerala educational context using an integrated framework. Existing studies often investigate workload, technostress, coping strategies, or burnout independently, without exploring their interactive relationships. Given Kerala's highly competitive academic environment, advanced digital integration, and strong societal emphasis on educational success, mathematics teachers face a unique combination of professional, technological, and socio-cultural pressures.

Therefore, the present study seeks to examine burnout and coping strategies among mathematics teachers in Kerala, with particular emphasis on the role of workload and teaching experience. By integrating established theoretical frameworks with emerging constructs such as technostress and mathematics anxiety, this study conceptualizes burnout as a dynamic and process-oriented phenomenon rather than a static outcome. The study aims to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical intervention by identifying the factors that intensify or mitigate burnout among mathematics teachers, thereby supporting strategies to enhance teacher well-being and educational sustainability.

Objectives of the study are

- To examine the relationship between burnout and coping among mathematics teachers in Kerala.
- To examine the significant differences in burnout and coping among mathematics teachers based on gender.
- To examine the significant differences in burnout and coping scores across selected occupational and demographic variables such as teaching experience, weekly working

hours, administrative workload, monthly income, and type of institution among mathematics teachers.

Research Design

The present study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine burnout and coping strategies among mathematics teachers in Kerala. The design is appropriate as it enables the assessment of relationships among key variables such as burnout, coping strategies, teaching experience, weekly working hours, administrative workload, and monthly income at a single point in time.

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of mathematics teachers working at the primary, high school, and higher secondary levels in Thrissur. A sample of 200 teachers was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation across teaching levels and types of institutions (government, aided, and private schools) from Kerala for the purpose of analysis, participants were categorized based on the following variables:

- Teaching Experience (in years): 0–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years, and above 15 years
- Weekly Working Hours: Up to 30 hours, 31–40 hours, 41–50 hours, and above 50 hours
- Administrative Workload: Low, Moderate, and High (based on self-reported workload levels)
- Monthly Income (in INR): Below ₹20,000, ₹20,001–₹50,000, and above ₹50,000

Inclusion Criteria

- Teachers currently teaching mathematics at primary, high school, or higher secondary level
- Minimum one year of teaching experience
- Teachers working in government, aided, or private institutions
- Willingness to participate and provide informed consent

Exclusion Criteria

- Teachers not teaching mathematics
- Teachers with less than one year of teaching experience
- Teachers on long-term leave during the period of data collection
- Incomplete or inconsistent responses in the questionnaire

Data collected using standardized questionnaires administered either in offline mode (paper-pencil) or online via Google Forms, with the support of school authorities. Informed consent obtained from all participants, and confidentiality of response are strictly maintained.

Measures

Burnout and coping among mathematics teachers were assessed using standardized self-report instruments. Coping was measured using the Brief COPE Inventory developed by Charles S. Carver (1997), a 28-item scale that evaluates a range of coping responses across dimensions such as problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidant coping. The instrument includes subcomponents like active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, emotional and instrumental support, self-distraction, denial, substance use, behavioral disengagement, venting, humor, religion, and self-blame. Responses are recorded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (I haven't been doing this at all) to 4 (I've been

doing this a lot), and scores are computed by summing items within each subscale, with higher scores indicating greater use of specific coping styles. The Brief COPE has demonstrated acceptable to good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.50 to 0.90, and established construct validity across diverse populations.

Burnout was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson (1981), one of the most widely used tools for measuring occupational burnout. The MBI conceptualizes burnout as a three-dimensional construct comprising Emotional Exhaustion (9 items), Depersonalization (5 items), and Personal Accomplishment (8 items), totalling 22 items. Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 6 (Every day). Scoring is conducted separately for each subscale, where higher scores on Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and lower scores on Personal Accomplishment indicate higher burnout. Based on normative data, burnout levels are categorized as low, moderate, or high. The MBI demonstrates strong psychometric properties, with internal consistency reliability coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.90, along with well-established construct, convergent, and discriminant validity across occupational groups, including educators.

Statistical Analysis

The data will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. Pearson's correlation analysis will be employed to examine the relationship between burnout and coping. To assess differences in burnout and coping across categorized groups of these variables (e.g., grouped teaching experience levels or income categories), One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will be used.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants after clearly explaining the purpose, nature, and voluntary nature of the study. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and anonymous, and no identifying information was collected or disclosed. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty.

The data collected were used strictly for academic and research purposes and were stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. Care was taken to ensure that the study caused no psychological harm or distress to participants, and they were free to skip any questions they felt uncomfortable answering. Permission from relevant school authorities in Thrissur was obtained prior to data collection. The study-maintained integrity, transparency, and respect for participants' rights throughout the research process.

RESULTS

Table 1 Sample characteristics

Variables	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	92	46
	Female	108	54
Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	58	29
	5–10 years	71	35.5
	Above 10 years	71	35.5
Type of Institution	Government School	76	38
	Aided School	68	34

Variables	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	Private School	56	28
Weekly Working Hours	Less than 30 hours	49	24.5
	30–40 hours	88	44
	Above 40 hours	63	31.5
Administrative Workload	Low	61	30.5
	Moderate	82	41
	High	57	28.5
Monthly Income	Below ₹30,000	54	27
	₹30,000–₹50,000	89	44.5
	Above ₹50,000	57	28.5

Table 1 shows sample characteristics of the study consisted of 200 mathematics teachers from Kerala representing different demographic and occupational categories. Among the participants, 54% were female teachers and 46% were male teachers, indicating slightly higher female representation in the sample. Regarding teaching experience, 29% of the teachers had less than five years of experience, while 35.5% each belonged to the 5–10 years and above 10 years categories, suggesting balanced representation across experience levels.

In terms of institutional type, the majority of participants were employed in government schools (38%), followed by aided schools (34%) and private schools (28%). Concerning weekly working hours, most teachers (44%) reported working between 30–40 hours per week, while 31.5% worked more than 40 hours weekly, indicating substantial occupational demands among the participants.

With respect to administrative workload, 41% of the teachers reported moderate administrative responsibilities, whereas 28.5% experienced high workload levels. Regarding monthly income, the majority of participants (44.5%) belonged to the ₹30,000–₹50,000 income category, followed by 28.5% earning above ₹50,000 and 27% earning below ₹30,000. Overall, the sample distribution reflects adequate representation across demographic and professional variables, thereby supporting the reliability and generalizability of the study findings

Table 2 Independent Samples t-Test Showing Gender Differences in Burnout and Coping Among Mathematics Teachers

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	T	P
Burnout	Male	59.18	10.84	-2.31	.022*
	Female	63.33	11.52		
Coping	Male	74.06	9.11	2.47	.014*
	Female	70.58	9.72		

Table 2 shows independent samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in burnout and coping among mathematics teachers. The findings revealed a significant difference in burnout scores between male and female teachers ($t = -2.31$, $p < .05$), with female teachers reporting comparatively higher burnout levels than male teachers. A significant gender difference was also observed in coping scores ($t = 2.47$, $p < .05$), indicating that male teachers demonstrated relatively higher coping abilities compared to female teachers. These findings suggest that gender may influence occupational stress experiences and coping responses among mathematics teachers.

Table 3 One-Way ANOVA Showing Mean Differences in Burnout and Coping Scores Across Selected Variables

Variable	Categories	Burnout Mean	Coping Mean	F	p
Teaching Experience	0–5 years	66.24	67.18	5.84	.004**
	6–10 years	61.37	71.42		
	11–15 years	58.63	74.58		
	Above 15 years	55.91	77.06	4.96	.008**
Weekly Working Hours	Up to 30 hours	56.82	76.11	6.91	.001**
	31–40 hours	61.48	72.54		
	41–50 hours	65.73	69.82		
	Above 50 hours	69.15	66.94	3.87	.023*
Administrative Workload	Low	55.46	76.34	8.27	.000***
	Moderate	61.29	71.88		
	High	68.42	67.53	5.18	.007**
Monthly Income	Below ₹20,000	67.18	66.82	3.12	.047*
	₹20,001–₹50,000	61.53	72.44		
	Above ₹50,000	57.46	75.63	3.41	.036*
Type of Institution	Government School	59.28	73.51	2.89	.058
	Aided School	61.94	71.88		
	Private School	63.41	70.26	2.14	.121

Table 3 One-Way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in burnout and coping scores across teaching experience, weekly working hours, administrative workload, monthly income, and type of institution among mathematics teachers. The findings revealed significant differences in burnout and coping scores across teaching experience. Teachers with 0–5 years of experience reported the highest burnout mean score (M = 66.24) and the lowest coping mean score (M = 67.18), whereas teachers with above 15 years of experience reported lower burnout (M = 55.91) and higher coping scores (M = 77.06). This indicates that professional experience contributes to better coping abilities and reduced burnout.

Significant differences were also observed across weekly working hours. Teachers working above 50 hours per week demonstrated the highest burnout mean (M = 69.15) and the lowest coping score (M = 66.94), while teachers working up to 30 hours reported lower burnout (M = 56.82) and higher coping abilities (M = 76.11). Similarly, teachers with high administrative workload showed higher burnout (M = 68.42) and lower coping (M = 67.53) compared to teachers with low workload levels.

Monthly income also showed significant differences in burnout and coping scores. Teachers earning below ₹20,000 reported higher burnout (M = 67.18) and lower coping (M = 66.82), whereas teachers earning above ₹50,000 demonstrated lower burnout (M = 57.46) and better coping abilities (M = 75.63). However, no statistically significant differences were observed across type of institution in either burnout or coping scores, suggesting that institutional category alone may not significantly influence occupational stress and coping among mathematics teachers.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined burnout and coping strategies among mathematics teachers in Kerala with particular focus on workload and teaching experience. The findings revealed significant gender differences in burnout and coping, with female teachers reporting comparatively higher burnout levels and lower coping abilities than male teachers. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that female teachers often experience greater emotional exhaustion due to the combined demands of professional responsibilities and socio-familial expectations (El Helou et al., 2016). Similarly, Mohzana et al. (2023) reported that occupational stress tends to be higher among female educators because of increased emotional involvement and workload burden. However, some studies have contradicted these findings by reporting minimal or non-significant gender differences in teacher burnout, suggesting that institutional support and work environment may mediate gender-related stress experiences (Piscitella, 2016). Nevertheless, the present findings indicate that gender may play an important role in shaping burnout experiences and coping responses among mathematics teachers.

The results further demonstrated significant differences in burnout and coping across teaching experience, weekly working hours, administrative workload, and monthly income. Teachers with lower teaching experience reported higher burnout and lower coping abilities, whereas experienced teachers demonstrated lower burnout and better coping skills. These findings support the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which proposes that individuals gradually develop psychological and professional resources that enable them to manage occupational stress more effectively over time (Carson et al., 2012). The findings are also consistent with Butler (2026), who found that experienced teachers possess stronger resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms that reduce emotional exhaustion. In addition, teachers working longer hours and those experiencing high administrative workload reported significantly greater burnout levels. This finding aligns with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which suggests that excessive job demands such as workload and administrative responsibilities contribute directly to occupational stress and burnout when adequate resources are lacking (Hendricks & Okunlola, 2024). Similar findings were reported by Mohzana et al. (2023), who identified workload as one of the strongest predictors of teacher burnout. However, some previous studies have suggested that experienced teachers may also experience burnout due to prolonged exposure to occupational demands and chronic emotional fatigue (Piscitella, 2016), indicating that burnout may vary depending on contextual and institutional factors.

The study also revealed that teachers with lower monthly income experienced higher burnout and lower coping abilities compared to teachers with higher income levels. This finding supports earlier literature indicating that financial stress negatively affects occupational well-being and psychological adjustment among educators (Mohzana et al., 2023). Furthermore, the absence of significant differences across type of institution suggests that burnout and coping among mathematics teachers may be influenced more strongly by workload-related demands and personal coping resources than by institutional category alone. Overall, the findings support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which emphasizes that stress outcomes are determined not only by environmental demands but also by an individual's appraisal and coping capacity. The present study therefore concludes that burnout among mathematics teachers is a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon shaped by the interaction between occupational demands, professional experience, financial conditions, and coping resources within the educational environment.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that burnout among mathematics teachers in Kerala is significantly influenced by workload-related factors such as teaching experience, weekly working hours, administrative workload, gender, and monthly income. Teachers with lower experience, excessive working hours, higher administrative responsibilities, and lower income demonstrated comparatively higher levels of burnout and lower coping abilities. In contrast, experienced teachers exhibited better coping strategies and lower burnout, suggesting that professional experience contributes to psychological resilience and adaptive stress management. The findings further revealed that effective coping strategies play an important protective role in reducing occupational stress and emotional exhaustion among mathematics teachers. Overall, the study highlights that burnout is a dynamic phenomenon resulting from the interaction between occupational demands and individual coping resources, emphasizing the need for supportive institutional practices to enhance teacher well-being and professional sustainability.

Limitations

The study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research relied on self-report measures, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and subjective interpretation of burnout and coping experiences. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between workload variables, coping strategies, and burnout. The study was also confined to mathematics teachers in Kerala, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to teachers from other subjects or geographical regions. Additionally, factors such as organizational climate, personality traits, and social support were not examined in the present study, though they may significantly influence burnout and coping.

Suggestions

Future research may adopt longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to better understand the progression of burnout and the long-term effectiveness of coping strategies among teachers. Further studies could include additional psychological and organizational variables such as resilience, job satisfaction, institutional support, technostress, and work-life balance to develop a more comprehensive understanding of teacher burnout. Educational institutions may also implement stress management programs, counseling services, workload reduction strategies, and professional development initiatives to strengthen coping abilities and reduce burnout among mathematics teachers. Expanding research to different subjects, educational systems, and cultural contexts would further improve the comparative and practical value of the findings.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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