

# More than a Paycheck: The Relationship between Perceived Occupational Stress and Health Indicators

Santos, Amy

The complex hormonal mechanisms of the autonomic nervous system provide the physiological conditions necessary to cope with a sudden crisis or emergency. Chronically stressful conditions cause ongoing activation of the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal axis and have been linked to musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, and endocrine ailments. This research sought to identify statistically significant correlations between occupational stress and health indicators. Female teachers (N=51), aged 25-50, were administered Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (2000) and an experimental Occupational Stress Scale (OSS-16). Job reference information, medical history, exercise and sleep habit data were also collected. Participants were measured for waist circumference, systolic and diastolic blood pressure, VO<sub>2</sub>max, and short-term memory. Regression analyses indicated a strong correlation between the two stress scales ( $R=0.789$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). No significant correlations between perceived or occupational stress and blood pressure or VO<sub>2</sub>max were identified, disproving the hypothesis. Correlations between occupational stress and waist circumference ( $R=0.296$ ,  $p=0.035$ ) and perceived stress and short-term memory ( $R=-0.278$ ,  $p=0.049$ ) were identified in support of the hypothesis. Correlation between occupational stress and teaching experience ( $R=0.421$ ,  $p=0.002$ ) was identified, as were correlations between perceived and occupational stress and sleep quality ( $R=0.453$ ,  $p=0.0001$ ;  $R=0.402$ ,  $p=0.004$ ). High participant involvement in regular aerobic exercise programs could have reduced cardiovascular correlations. This research suggests the validity of OSS-16 as a stress measuring tool, which if used in longitudinal studies, could expose the progression of the long-term health effects of chronic occupational stress.