







# Stress and job performance of secondary teachers under the telework modality

*Estrés y desempeño laboral de los docentes de secundaria bajo la modalidad de teletrabajo*

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Received: 07/26/2021 Accepted: 10/15/2022 Published: 10/25/2022 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7512595>

## Abstract

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Changes are part of the future of the human being in its different contexts and these transformations are the product of the need to adapt them in the areas in which they are immersed. Undoubtedly, the pandemic caused by Covid-19 produced in human beings' uncertainties about the consequences it could generate. The purpose of this research was to analyze the levels of stress and work performance in teachers under the modality of telework, during the preventive isolation declared by the World Health Organization in the last 2 years. The current study used a quantitative descriptive method. A questionnaire was used to assess the levels of stress and it has a considered level of validity and reliability. The sample consisted of 94 of 120 teachers linked to the secondary educational institution of the public sector. As a conclusion of this study, most teachers suffer from stress, which significantly affects their work performance

**Keywords:** stress, teleworking, secondary teachers, covid -19

## Resumen

Los cambios hacen parte del devenir del ser humano en sus diferentes contextos y estas transformaciones son producto de la necesidad de adaptación de estos en los ámbitos en los que se está inmerso. Sin duda alguna la pandemia ocasionada por el Covid-19 produjo en el ser humano incertidumbres por la misma adversidad de las consecuencias que este podría generar. La investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar los niveles de estrés y el desempeño laboral en docentes bajo la modalidad teletrabajo, durante el aislamiento preventivo emitido por la organización mundial de la salud-OMS contra el covid - 19. Fue direccionado bajo la metodología cuantitativa, de tipo descriptiva, utilizando como instrumento un cuestionario con un nivel considerado de validez y confiabilidad para evaluar los niveles de estrés. La muestra estuvo conformada por 94 de 120 docentes vinculados a la institución educativa de secundaria del sector público. Con la investigación se logró concluir que los docentes en su gran mayoría sufren estrés, lo cual interviene significativamente en su desempeño laboral.

**Palabras claves:** estrés, teletrabajo, docente secundaria, covid -19.

Organizations as dynamic and complex systems are more than the sum of their parts, characterized by high levels of integration and complexity, which allow them to achieve the proposed objectives and in turn the permanence in the labor market, by strengthening and maintaining their internal and external processes. The pandemic era required organizations to rethink and reflect on how they were developing their processes, being forced to perform an organizational re-engineering to stay in a global and competitive environment under the impact of one of the biggest global crises of recent times. Currently the link through teleworking has allowed the possibility of continuing to achieve organizational objectives under a different methodology, characterized by the lack of need for the physical presence of workers in the organization, the supervision of work functions mediated by the use of technological tools, digital, and telecommunication methods<sup>1</sup>.

In that sense the telework as a strategy assumed for the exercise of the functions of each of the positions during the social isolation, allows the close articulation between work and life of employees, as it provides the possibility of being able to balance the work level and in turn achieve increased job satisfaction and commitment<sup>2</sup>

The Colombian federation of human management (ACRIP) in its latest report for the year 2020, states that, since March of the same year, as a result of the emergency caused worldwide by the pandemic (covid-19) 98% of companies decided to operate under the modality of remote work, also stating that 1 in 2 companies did not have policies for this type of work and that only 11.2% managed to implement strategies and accommodate their activities to telework<sup>3</sup>. Within this group of companies are those in the education sector, a population that in its great majority was not prepared to face this challenge and assume the remote modality in the development of their work, increasing the perception of stress level by the use of digital methods, the cognitive overload, Schmitt et al (2021), the decrease in work performance and increased stress affecting the personal and work life of the worker<sup>4</sup>.

For Garcia<sup>5</sup> the social isolation caused by covid-19 led to the suspension of classes under the face-to-face modality, requiring a rethinking of the new tasks in the teaching-learning process. It is precisely this change that gives way to the virtual modality, which besides being a strategy to continue the normal course of work, has become a source of stress at work, especially in organizations in the education sector. Job stress is considered as an imbalance between the professional demands and the different capacities that the person has to be able to perform it<sup>6</sup>, the above leads to the assumption of the existence of a latent and triggering factor in work stress, which is directly related to the cognitive and affective part of the individual, which in the particular case of teachers would lead to inefficient and/or unfavorable work performance.

According to the World Health Organization<sup>7</sup> Job stress is the reaction present in an individual to any pressure or demand at work, where the individual considers that his or her knowledge and coping skills are not sufficient to respond to the demand.

This manuscript is focused on the work environment with educators of a secondary education institution because it is considered a population with a high risk of contracting stress in the exercise of their daily tasks at the work level. In addition to the above, it can be said that stress in recent times has become a topic of interest in all sectors, because its symptomatology has increased, especially in labor contexts, thus considering it as one of the problems that threatens the physical and mental health of the members of non-clinical systems. On the other hand, the great influence that technologies have had on the world of work has increased the risk of suffering it and the most worrying thing is that it has left sequels that are difficult to overcome and that prevent the worker from getting used to the new demands in the business field, impacting directly on productivity and the development of the functions assigned to each one of them. According to<sup>8</sup> when the job has highly demanding requirements to cope with, it can produce stress reactions that are unavoidable to resist because of the large amount of work pressure it introduces.

Cannon<sup>9</sup> introduces the term to refer to any stimulus susceptible to cause a fight or flight reaction, in addition to making known certain factors of the environment where its influence demands an exaggerated effort and which is not usual in the regulation mechanisms of the individual. Other concepts are added to this definition where it is described as the reaction of human beings to the changes or demands of life<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, stress is seen as an adaptive response of the organism to an adverse situation, which can be directly related to the flight response, very similar to that generated by animals when they are threatened<sup>11</sup>.

On the other hand, stress can be considered as a condition where the subject highlights specific stressful events or experiences in his/her daily life that he/she cannot handle correctly<sup>12</sup>. In this sense, it is correct to think that stress in work contexts affects workers at a psychological level, involving their skills, knowledge, and abilities in a progressive manner. Some authors classify several types of stress, one of these classifications is episodic acute stress, which mentions people who are constantly close to one or more factors that cause stress, on the other hand, we find chronic stress that refers to the little possibility of opportunities to solve or find a way out of the stress they are experiencing<sup>13</sup>.

Stress is considered as a natural phenomenon that can be suffered by any individual, becoming a positive or negative response to specific stimuli<sup>14</sup>. In this sense, it cannot be ruled out that stress in work contexts is the first source of the emergence of pathologies in the subject, generating loss of productivity and lack of results in the organizational objectives proposed to be achieved<sup>15</sup>.

Some authors consider stress as the difficulty to adapt to environments. In the case of work stress, it would be directly related to work environments and its dynamics tends to be complex due to its very nature, and for being multidimensional such as work demands, coping strategies and social support, psychological and physiological responses generated by the consequences at the organizational and personal level<sup>16</sup>.

One of the sources of work stress is directly related to the work contexts and the way the assigned functions are developed, it is important to mention at this point of the article the meanings of telework, which is considered according to ILO<sup>17</sup> as a way to organize and at the same time perform the work through the use of ICT in a distant way and at the worker's home, a situation that has become very common to find in these times of pandemic. This modality has favorable aspects such as independence, development of creativity, flexibility of the schedule and as adverse aspects we can mention that not all employees adapt to this new way of performing the functions because they do not have the necessary skills and abilities, which may affect the expected results<sup>18</sup>.

On the other hand, it must be recognized that stress is present in our daily life and has been related to physical and mental fatigue, generated by situations of tension faced by individuals and groups of workers in the places where they work, causing states of anxiety and nervousness in the individual<sup>19</sup>.

## Methodology

The methodological process of the present article was directed under the quantitative paradigm, carrying out an exploratory descriptive study, with the objective of obtaining information on the levels of stress in teachers, under the modality of teleworking in times of pandemic. The instrument applied was a questionnaire designed and validated by expert judges in the area. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, with the intention of investigating the phenomenon to be studied, which included informed consent to ensure acceptance and guarantee participation in the study.

Bearing in mind the time lived in the year 2020 worldwide because of the pandemic, the instrument was applied online with the creation of the questionnaire in google forms, distributed by the WhatsApp groups of teachers of the institution. Before the explanation of the instrument, virtual meetings were held with the teachers to provide an explanation of the objective of the research development. The questionnaire was validated by experts in the organizational area, through the application of a pilot test with 10% of the teachers in the institution (120 in total) where the statistical analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.93. The sample consisted of 94 teachers who voluntarily decided to participate in the study, out of a total population of 120 teachers in the institution.

## Results

A total of 94 surveys were answered, for a percentage of 78.3% of the surveys delivered (120), thus obtaining a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. The following is a breakdown of the participants by sex.

**Table 1. Sex of Participants.**

Sex		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage available at	Percentage cumulative
Sex of Participants.	Man	57	60,0	60,6	60,6
	Woman	37	38,9	39,4	100,0
	Full	94	98,9	100,0	
Lost System		1	1,1		
Full		95	100,0		

With respect to the questions asked to the teachers whether they have ever felt exhausted by their work and whether they consider from their experience that the virtual work modality can be a generator of stress, the answers were as follows:

It can be observed in the table that 83.2% of the teachers have felt exhausted in the development of their activities, a figure considered high because it exceeds 50% of the population studied; the other 15.8%, on the other hand, stated that they have not felt any type of exhaustion.

In relation to the question whether the virtual modality was a stress generator, 73.7% gave an affirmative answer and the remaining 25.3% stated that the virtual modality is not an agent capable of producing stress, when asked about their level of stress 53.7% considered a high level, 17.9% medium, 13.7% low and the other 13.7% stated that they did not present stress levels. It is possible to analyze in the results the relationship of the answer where the level of exhaustion may be associated with the virtual modality in the exercise of the development of their functions as a teacher.

Regarding the question of whether the physical environment generates stress, 29.5% answered affirmatively and 69.5% considered the opposite. Regarding the question of whether the workplace provides tools to reduce stress, 61.1% said that the educational institution provides them, while 37.9% said that it has not done so. In relation to the question that if the workplace intervenes in stress, this will reduce the possibility of suffering it, 75.8% consider that it can be reduced and 23.2% do not consider it relevant.

**Table 2 Level of burnout, virtual modality as stress generator and stress level.**

		frequency	Percentage	Percentage available at	Percentage cumulative
Have you ever felt exhausted by your job?	Yes	79	83,2	84,0	84,0
	Not	15	15,8	16,0	100,0
	full	94	98,9	100,0	
In your experience, is virtual work a stress generator?	Yes	70	73,7	74,5	74,5
	Not	24	25,3	25,5	100,0
	Full	94	98,9	100,0	
How do you currently consider your stress level?	High	51	53,7	54,3	54,3
	Medium	17	17,9	18,1	72,3
	Low	13	13,7	13,8	86,2
	Does not represent	13	13,7	13,8	100,0
	Full	94	98,9	100,0	

**Table 3. Physical work environment, tools needed to reduce work stress, work stress intervention.**

		frequency	Percentage	Percentage available at	Percentage cumulative
Does the physical environment in which you are currently performing your duties create stress for you?	Yes	28	29,5	29,8	29,8
	Not	66	69,5	70,2	100,0
	Full	94	98,9	100,0	
Full		95	100,0		
Do you consider that your company provides the necessary tools to reduce work stress?	Yes	58	61,1	61,7	61,7
	Not	36	37,9	38,3	100,0
	Full	94	98,9	100,0	
Full		95	100,0		
Do you think that stress intervention in your workplace and your new working conditions would decrease the likelihood of stress?	Yes	72	75,8	76,6	76,6
	Not	22	23,2	23,4	100,0
	Full	94	98,9	100,0	
Full		95	100,0		

**Table 4. Exposure to risks such as noise, dusts. Consider boring routines, influence of stress on work performance.**

		frequency	Percentage	Percentage available at	Percentage cumulative
¿Considera que desde su puesto de trabajo está expuesto a riesgos laborales, ¿cómo el ruido, polvos, visuales?	Yes	37	38,9	39,4	39,4
	Not	57	60,0	60,6	100,0
	Full	94	98,9	100,0	
Full		95	100,0		
¿Considera que las actividades realizadas en su lugar de trabajo bajo la modalidad virtual son aburridas y rutinarias?	Yes	12	12,6	12,8	12,8
	Not	82	86,3	87,2	100,0
	Full	94	98,9	100,0	
Full		95	100,0		
¿Considera que el estrés influye en el desempeño de sus actividades laborales desde su lugar de trabajo?	Yes	55	57,9	58,5	58,5
	Not	39	41,1	41,5	100,0
	Full	94	98,9	100,0	
Full		95	100,0		

When asked about exposure to visual, noise and dust risks, 60% stated that they were not exposed to this type of risk and only 38.9% reported that they were present in their workplace. On the other hand, when asked if the type of work was considered boring, 86.3% said No and only 12.6% considered it boring. With respect to the question of whether stress influences the performance of work activities in the workplace, the following results were obtained: 57.9% of the teachers stated that stress interferes with work performance, while the rest of the sample (41.1% of the teachers) considered that stress does not have any influence on the performance of their duties.

## Discussion

The present investigation was developed with the objective of analyzing the levels of stress and work performance of educators in times of pandemic, in an educational institution of secondary education in the public sector. At this point, it is important to note that the new demands posed by the whole world to include the telework modality and thus be able to continue advancing and facing the devastating labor situation caused by the pandemic, required teachers to acquire greater skills in the use of technology and to adapt to the new ways of doing their work.

Todd<sup>20</sup> came to consider teaching as one of the most stressful careers, ranking it with the worst scores due to physical wear and tear, psychological uneasiness, and high levels of job complacency. For Wang<sup>21</sup>, the demands of work responsibilities lead to stress reactions, causing changes in the person who suffers from stress.

Teachers today under the new tensions of health that are experienced worldwide face new challenges, which requires the development of skills and mastery of technologies to better develop the classes and be in the new era of knowledge and computer connection<sup>22</sup>. On the other hand, it is relevant to mention that precisely the technological factors generate certain tension in teachers, leading them to suffer physical and mental exhaustion, which creates the need to develop strategies from the organizations that allow them to face stress in a better way<sup>23</sup>. With this last idea in mind, it is significant to highlight the role of educational institutions in developing strategies to reduce the risks of suffering work-related stress, as well as to develop policies to promote the physical and mental health of teachers to ensure their good performance at the work level, but above all to reduce any ailments in the body and at the mental level. It is important to mention that in stress, dysfunctional skills focused only on the practice to solve social problems are not enough, but it is necessary to affiliate the emotional aspects to be able to cope with an adverse situation<sup>24</sup>.

According to Karasek<sup>25</sup> and his theory of demand - control interaction, he provides an explanation of stress where he states that it is caused by the lack of control of the subjects at the moment of confronting high demands caused by the environment, in another sense stress is caused by the disturbance of the demands of the existing demands in the context where they develop. For the case of the present study the use of technology in the exercise of their academic functions becomes a risk factor for the researched population, generating work stress.

It is important to mention that the level of stress that teachers are suffering does not prevent them from maintaining control in the exercise of the assigned activities, nor from obtaining as a result a good level of work performance and the effective fulfillment of their functions. This may be the result of the level of autonomy in the position, and precisely autonomy becomes the subject's ability to decide on their own activities, with the help of decision making and being able to exercise control over their own activities<sup>26</sup>.

According to data found by Estrada<sup>27</sup> in his research on psychosomatic symptoms associated with stress in teachers, he found that 47.5% of them presented moderate levels of symptoms related to stress, 28.5% showed high levels of stress, figures that rectify the results found in the present research where 66% of the teachers investigated showed symptoms associated with occupational stress. In addition to this, the practice of teaching in times of pandemic as well as the practice of other professions involving the care of users presented high levels of stress, leading these professionals to suffer from burnout syndrome, threatening the quality of life at a personal and professional level<sup>28</sup>. On the other hand, being able to develop coping strategies may increase tolerance to the discomfort caused by work-related stress in times of pandemic<sup>29</sup>.

## Conclusions

The results showed that a large part of the population of teachers manifest to feel stress as a result of the modality of telework assumed in times of pandemic, determining also that stress interferes significantly in work performance.

With regard to the degrees of stress present in teachers, if not treated can become serious diseases of physical and mental health, probably due to the work overload involved in developing the assigned tasks and the high demands of work under the virtual mode, as well as the new challenges involved in adapting to the new mode of work. The development of classes from the home context became a source of labor exhaustion, so it is pertinent that the educational institution takes measures to mitigate the negative impact of stress directly impacting the welfare of teachers.

Acknowledgment: To the teachers at the high school of the municipality of Sincelejo. Sucre. Colombia.

Source of financing: This study was self-financed.

Conflict of interest: No personal, professional or any other type of conflict of interest is involved.

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