



Research Article

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Navigating Occupational Stress in Administration: The Impact of Social Support Systems

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Abstract

This study examines occupational stress and the role of social support among 18 principals of degree colleges in Belagavi, Karnataka. Using a descriptive and analytical sociological design, the study collected primary data through a structured field-study schedule covering administrative stress, symptoms, sources and types of support, barriers, institutional mechanisms, and suggestions for improvement. The respondents reported substantial occupational stress, with a mean score of 7.44 on a 10-point scale. Workload or administrative workload was the dominant stressor, while fatigue and irritability were the most frequently reported symptoms. Family and peer-principal networks were the leading sources of support, although regular institutional support mechanisms were uneven. The findings are interpreted through bureaucracy, role strain, social capital, functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. The study argues that occupational stress is not simply an individual condition; it is shaped by how administrative work is organised, accountability, resource distribution, and access to support. It concludes that social support can mitigate strain. However, its effectiveness depends on complementary organisational reforms, including workload review, clear management communication, peer-principal forums, confidential counselling, and stronger staff-principal coordination.

Keywords: Occupational stress, Principals, Administrative workload, Social support, Mitigate strain, Confidential counselling

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) function through the coordinated work of academic, administrative, and support structures. Within this institutional environment, leadership entails managing diverse responsibilities, balancing competing expectations, and sustaining effective relationships across organisational levels. These conditions make occupational well-being an important concern in the study of educational administration. Degree colleges constitute an important segment of India's higher-education system, providing undergraduate education within complex academic, regulatory, and administrative arrangements. Principals of these HEIs play a central role in coordinating academic programmes, staff relations, student services,

resource management, and institutional accountability. They oversee academic supervision, staff coordination, student welfare, finance, institutional compliance, admissions, examinations, and representation before management, university authorities, and the wider community. The role combines formal authority with extensive accountability. However, principals frequently depend on staff cooperation, institutional resources, policy clarification, and management decisions to fulfil their responsibilities. This ongoing tension between responsibility and control therefore shapes their work. Occupational stress in educational administration should not be interpreted only as a private psychological problem. It is also a social and organisational phenomenon. Workload, resource constraints, staff relations, student concerns, regulatory demands,

and community expectations are embedded in the everyday organisation of college life. This study examines how degree-college principals experience these demands and how social support helps mitigate occupational stress. The study matters because principals' well-being affects institutional functioning. Administrators under sustained strain may have reduced capacity for communication, planning, conflict resolution, and collective problem-solving. Research on school leadership has shown that emotional and quantitative demands are associated with burnout and lower job satisfaction [9]. Research also indicates that collegiality, trust in management, supervisor support, and external professional networks contribute positively to principals' well-being [2].

Conceptual Framework

Bureaucracy and Role Strain

The study draws first on Weber's, et al., (1978) [13] account of bureaucracy. Formal organisations operate through hierarchy, specialised roles, rules, authority, and accountability. Within this structure, principals are entrusted with institutional coordination, but their control over staff, finance, policy requirements, and external decisions may be limited. This can produce a responsibility-control gap. Role strain arises when the expectations attached to a position exceed the resources and authority available to meet them. In the present study, workload, staff management, policy demands, and resource constraints are examined as dimensions of this strain.

Social Support and Social Capital

Social support refers to emotional reassurance, information and advice, practical assistance, and appraisal or recognition. Cobb, et al., (1976) [5] describes support as information that enables individuals to feel cared for, valued, and connected to a network of mutual obligation. Cohen and Wills, et al., (1985) [6] argue that support can directly enhance well-being and buffer the effects of stressful situations. The study considers support from family, peers, staff, management, friends, and professional networks. Social capital provides a sociological interpretation of these relationships. Bourdieu, et al., (1986) and Coleman, et al., (1988) [4,7] describe social capital as resources embedded in durable social networks. Family support may be understood as bonding social capital; peer-principal relationships as bridging social capital; and management or university relationships as linking social capital. These ties provide different resources. Emotional support from family cannot substitute for management authority, while peer advice cannot substitute for adequate staffing or clear policy. The framework therefore treats social support as multi-layered and relational.

Review of Literature

Beausaert, et al., (2023) [2] examined the role of social capital in principals' well-being using longitudinal data from 2,084 Australian principals and 829 Irish principals. The study found that internal social capital—collaboration, trust in management, and justice—and external social capital—supervisor support and support from

colleagues outside the school—were positively associated with principals' mental and general well-being. These findings show that social support should be viewed as a feature of organisational relationships, not merely as individual preference. Jardine, et al., (2025) [9] analysed data from 2,307 Australian school leaders using the Job Demands-Resources model. Emotional and quantitative demands were positively associated with burnout and negatively associated with job satisfaction. Resilience was related to lower burnout and higher job satisfaction, but it did not consistently buffer high demands. The authors therefore stressed the need to reduce excessive job demands and strengthen organisational resources, rather than relying only on individual resilience [1]. This is relevant to the present study because it supports a structural interpretation of occupational stress among college principals. Godinho, et al., (2019) [8] studied workplace social support among civil servants at a public university. They found that low social support at work was associated with depressive symptoms and impaired work ability. In the Indian context, Rani, et al., (2016) [11] found a positive association between perceived social support and psychological well-being among young working adults, while Padhy, et al., (2021) [10] highlighted the relevance of belonging support to well-being. Saroha and Chadha, et al., (2016) [12] reported organisational role stress among Indian bureaucrats, particularly in relation to role overload, role stagnation, and inadequate resources. Together, these studies show that social support can be important, but it must be examined alongside work demands and organisational structures.

Research Gap

Existing research links occupational stress, social support, social capital, and well-being. Studies of occupational stress identify high job demands, limited organisational resources, and role-related pressures as major conditions affecting employee health and functioning [3]. Social support research further demonstrates that supportive relationships can reduce the adverse effects of stressful events and promote psychological well-being [5,6]. Indian research has examined these issues mainly among civil servants, government officials, teachers, and general employee groups rather than degree-college principals [11,12]. Although degree-college principals perform a distinctive combination of academic leadership, staff management, student welfare, accreditation, regulatory compliance, resource mobilisation, and accountability to management, their occupational stress and support systems remain insufficiently studied. Existing research often treats social support as a broad construct. It provides limited evidence on the relative role and perceived effectiveness of family, peer principals, staff, management, friends, and professional networks. International evidence shows that collegial collaboration, trust in management, supervisor support, and networks beyond the institution are positively associated with principals' well-being [2]. However, this evidence largely comes from school-leadership settings outside India. It cannot fully explain how support operates within the organisational, socio-cultural, and resource conditions of degree colleges in Belagavi. Further, limited attention has

been given to barriers that restrict principals from accessing support, including workload, stigma, lack of confidentiality, weak management communication, and absence of formal counselling or peer-support structures. This study addresses these gaps by examining occupational stress, support sources, perceived effectiveness, barriers to help-seeking, and institutional support mechanisms among degree-college principals in Belagavi.

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to explore the role of social support in mitigating occupational stress among college principals.

Methodology of the Study

The present study forms part of the author's broader research project 'Administrative Elite: A Sociological Study of Social Support and Well-Being of Administrators'. For the present study, a descriptive and analytical research design was adopted. Primary data were collected from 18 Undergraduate (UG) college principals in Belagavi, Karnataka state, India, using a structured field-study schedule. The study examined open-ended responses through thematic coding. Secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed research on educational leadership, occupational stress, social support, social capital, and well-being. The data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard

deviations, medians, and thematic interpretation. The study is based on a small cross-sectional sample; results are descriptive and context-specific, not population estimates. They are not intended to represent all degree-college principals in Karnataka or India. For this study, 'degree colleges' and 'undergraduate colleges' are used interchangeably to mean higher-education institutions that primarily offer bachelor's-degree programmes. In the Indian higher-education system, such colleges are commonly affiliated with a university and offer undergraduate instruction leading to degrees awarded by the affiliating university. The study participants are the principals of these degree colleges. Although they perform administrative functions, the term 'administrators' in this paper refers only to these degree-college principals and does not include other administrative staff. Thereafter, 'principals' refers to their leadership position, while 'respondents' refers to their questionnaire responses, views, or experiences.

Findings and Results

Tables 1-13 present the findings, field-study results, and table-wise sociological interpretation. Percentages are calculated from 18 respondents. Multiple-response and thematic tables may exceed 100% because respondents could report more than one item or theme. The analysis describes the Belagavi study group and does not claim statewide generalisation (Tables 1).

Table 1: Demographic Profile.

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	41-45 years	04	22.20%
	46-50 years	06	33.30%
	51-55 years	05	27.80%
	56-59 years	03	16.70%
Gender	Male	11	61.10%
	Female	07	38.90%
Administrative experience	8-10 years	05	27.80%
	11-15 years	06	33.30%
	16-20 years	05	27.80%
	21-22 years	02	11.10%
College type	Government	06	33.30%
	Private aided	05	27.80%
	Private unaided	07	38.90%
Qualification	Postgraduate degree plus Ph.D.	10	55.60%
	Postgraduate qualification without Ph.D.	08	44.40%

Note*: Mean age = 50.00 years; SD = 5.19; range = 41-59. Mean experience = 14.22 years; SD = 4.31; range = 8-22.

Table 1 shows that the study included degree-college principals from government, private-aided, and private-unaided colleges in Belagavi. By age, 33.3% of respondents were 46-50 years, 27.8% were 51-55 years, 22.2% were 41-45 years, and 16.7% were 56-59 years. By gender, 61.1% were male and 38.9% were female.

Regarding administrative experience, 33.3% had 11-15 years, 27.8% had 8-10 years, another 27.8% had 16-20 years, and 11.1% had 21-22 years. Private-unaided institutions accounted for 38.9% of respondents, government colleges for 33.3%, and private-aided colleges for 27.8%. Further, 55.6% held a postgraduate degree with

a PhD, while 44.4% held postgraduate qualifications without a Ph.D. The profile indicates that the study is based mainly on mid-career and experienced principals in established academic and administrative positions. The representation of three college types is sociologically important because the institutional setting shapes resource availability, the character of management relations, and

the forms of accountability principal's encounter. Respondents' educational qualifications also show that occupational stress cannot be explained as a lack of professional competence; rather, it must be understood in relation to the demands and organisational conditions of the leadership role (Tables 2).

Table 2: Occupational Stress Level.

Stress Score	n	%
6	03	16.70%
7	07	38.90%
8	05	27.80%
9	03	16.70%

Note*: Mean stress score = 7.44; SD = 0.98; median = 7; range = 6–9.

In Table 2, the average reported occupational stress score was 7.44 on a 10-point scale. A stress score of 7 was reported by 38.9% of respondents, followed by 27.8% who reported a score of 8. Scores of 6 and 9 were each reported by 16.7% of respondents. Thus, 44.5% reported high stress scores of 8 or 9, and no respondent reported a score below 6. The distribution shows that occupational stress was not limited to a few isolated cases. It was a broadly

shared experience among respondents. Sociologically, this pattern points to role strain within degree-college principalship, where responsibility for institutional outcomes is concentrated in one position. At the same time, the control of resources, staffing, policy decisions, and external requirements is often distributed across several authorities (Tables 3).

Table 3: Stress-related Symptoms.

Symptom	n	%
Fatigue	15	83.30%
Irritability	13	72.20%
Headaches	08	44.40%
Sleep disturbance	08	44.40%
Difficulty concentrating	03	16.70%

Note*: Multiple responses allowed; percentages do not total 100%.

In Table 3, 83.3% of respondents reported fatigue, making it the most common stress-related symptom. Irritability was reported by 72.2%, while headaches and sleep disturbance were each reported by 44.4%. Difficulty concentrating was reported by 16.7% of respondents. These percentages show that occupational stress was expressed through physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms.

Fatigue and irritability can affect the sustained communication, judgement, and conflict-management responsibilities expected of respondents. The symptom pattern therefore indicates that stress affects not only individual well-being but also the college's coordinating and integrative functioning (Tables 4).

Table 4: Sources of Occupational Stress.

Source of Stress	n	%
Workload / administrative workload	17	94.40%
Resource constraints	10	55.60%
Staff management	07	38.90%
Student issues/demands	07	38.90%
Policy changes/policy	06	33.30%
Community/parent expectations	03	16.70%
Management pressure	02	11.10%

Note*: Multiple responses allowed; percentages do not total 100%.

In Table 4, 94.4% of respondents reported workload or administrative workload. Resource constraints were reported by 55.6%, while staff management and student-related issues were each reported by 38.9%. Policy changes or policy-related demands were reported by 33.3%. Community or parent expectations were reported by 16.7%, and management pressure was reported by 11.1%. The predominance of workload shows that stress is

primarily rooted in the organisation of work rather than in personal weakness. Resource constraints, staff management, student concerns, and policy demands add further layers of responsibility. These results reflect a responsibility-control gap: respondents are expected to ensure institutional performance, but their ability to influence staffing, resources, procedures, and external directives may be limited (Tables 5).

Table 5: Sources of Social Support.

Source of Support	n	%
Family	17	94.40%
Peer principals/peers	11	61.10%
Friends	06	33.30%
Management	06	33.30%
Staff	05	27.80%
Professional/online networks	02	11.10%

Note*: Multiple responses allowed; percentages do not total 100%.

In Table 5, 94.4% of respondents identified family as a source of support. Peer principals or peers were identified by 61.1%. Friends and management were each identified by 33.3%, staff by 27.8%, and professional or online networks by 11.1%. The high percentage for family shows the continuing significance of close personal ties in managing occupational pressure. Peer-principal support is also

important because it provides access to others who understand the role's demands. The lower percentages for management, staff, and professional networks indicate that workplace and formal support are less consistently available. Sociologically, the pattern shows that respondents rely more strongly on bonding and peer-based relationships than on institutional support structures (Tables 6).

Table 6: Support Frequency and Importance.

Measure	Category	n	%
Support frequency	Often	09	50.00%
	Sometimes	09	50.00%
Importance of support	Very important	08	44.40%
	Important	10	55.60%

In Table 6, 50% of respondents received support often, and the remaining 50% sometimes. Regarding the importance of support, 55.6% described it as important and 44.4% as very important. No respondent considered support unimportant. The universal recognition of support as important or very important confirms that social relationships are central to managing principalship. The

equal split between often and sometimes suggests differences in how regularly respondents access support. Sociologically, this indicates that support is not equally institutionalised for all respondents and may depend on the quality of personal relationships, peer availability, and management accessibility (Tables 7).

Table 7: Perceived Effectiveness of Social Support.

Effectiveness Rating	Number of Ratings	% of 47 Ratings
Very effective	07	14.90%
Effective	24	51.10%
Somewhat effective	12	25.50%
Not effective	04	8.50%

Note*: Ratings are pooled across named support sources; total ratings = 47.

In Table 7, among the pooled support ratings, 51.1% were assessed as effective and 14.9% as very effective. A further 25.5% were assessed as somewhat effective, while 8.5% were assessed as not effective. The combined 66.0% rated support as effective or very effective, indicating that support generally helps respondents manage occupational pressure. However, the 25.5% who rated it as somewhat effective and the 8.5% who rated it as not effective

show that support does not always match the problem. Emotional reassurance may help respondents cope with anxiety or isolation, but it cannot by itself resolve workload, staffing shortages, policy ambiguity, or resource constraints. The finding therefore distinguishes interpersonal relief from structural resolution (Tables 8).

Table 8: Types and Examples of Social Support.

Support Form	%	Sociological Relevance
Emotional Support	61.1% (11)	Reassurance, empathy, and emotional stability, primarily through family and close relationships
Informational Support	55.6% (10)	Advice, policy clarification, shared experience, and professional guidance, mainly through peer principals
Instrumental Support	27.8% (5)	Practical assistance with tasks, admissions, crises, or institutional work, provided by staff or management
Appraisal Support	38.9% (7)	Feedback, validation, recognition, and confidence-building through peers, family, or management

Note*: Percentages are based on thematic coding of respondents' reported examples of support; multiple forms could occur in a single response, so percentages do not total 100%.

Table 8 shows that emotional support was the most commonly reported form, identified by 61.1% of respondents. This mainly came from family members and close relationships through encouragement, reassurance, empathy, and emotional stability during demanding administrative situations. Respondents reported informational support in 55.6% of cases. Peer principals were particularly important in providing advice, policy clarification, shared experience, and guidance during accreditation, admissions, and other administrative challenges. Appraisal support was identified by 38.9% of respondents. This involved feedback, validation, recognition, and confidence-building from family, peers, and management. Such support helped respondents assess

difficult situations and feel more assured about their decisions. Instrumental support was reported by 27.8% of respondents. This form included practical help from staff or management during admissions, institutional crises, expansion activities, and other work-related tasks. Its comparatively lower percentage indicates that direct organisational assistance was less consistently available than emotional or informational support. Overall, the percentage pattern shows that respondents depended more on emotional and informational support than on instrumental support. Family and peer-principal networks were therefore more visible sources of assistance than formal workplace mechanisms (Tables 9).

Table 9: Barriers to Accessing Social Support.

Barrier Theme	n	%
Time/workload constraint	03	16.70%
Stigma around help-seeking	03	16.70%
Weak or absent formal support	02	11.10%
Lack of confidentiality or trust	02	11.10%
Inaccessible/inconsistent management	02	11.10%
Limited relevance of networks	02	11.10%
Policy ambiguity	01	05.60%
Staff may not understand the principal's role	02	11.10%

Note*: Thematic coding; multiple themes may occur in one response.

In Table 9, time or workload constraints and stigma around help-seeking were each reported by 16.7% of respondents. Weak or absent formal support, lack of confidentiality or trust, inaccessible or inconsistent management, limited relevance of networks, and staff members' limited understanding of the principal's role were each reported by 11.1%. Respondents reported policy ambiguity in 5.6%. The percentages show that availability alone does not

guarantee meaningful support. Workload can prevent respondents from seeking assistance, while stigma and confidentiality concerns can make help-seeking appear risky. The findings indicate that support must be timely, confidential, trusted, and professionally legitimate. They also show why formal support mechanisms are necessary alongside informal relationships (Tables 10).

Table 10: Perceived Impact of Social Support.

Impact Theme	n	%
Emotional stability/anxiety relief	06	33.30%
Reduced isolation/burnout/exhaustion	04	22.20%
Practical advice/clarity	04	22.20%
Work-life/personal grounding	04	22.20%
Greater confidence/manageability	04	22.20%

Note*: Thematic coding; multiple themes may occur in one response.

In Table 10, emotional stability or anxiety relief was identified by 33.3% of respondents. Reduced isolation, burnout, or exhaustion was identified by 22.2%. Practical advice or clarity, work-life grounding, and greater confidence or manageability were each identified by 22.2%. These findings show that support has emotional, cognitive, practical, and identity-related effects. It can

help respondents feel less alone, interpret problems more clearly, remain grounded outside work, and approach administrative demands with greater confidence. Sociologically, support functions as a relational resource that improves coping capacity, even though it does not eliminate the organisational causes of stress (Tables 11).

Table 11: Institutional Mechanisms for Social Support.

Mechanism	n	%
No mechanism	05	27.80%
Informal or occasional mechanism	07	38.90%
Regular/formal mechanism	06	33.30%

Note*: Regular mechanisms include district meetings, monthly principal meetings, government meetings, and periodic review meetings.

In Table 11, 33.3% of respondents reported regular or formal support mechanisms. Informal or occasional mechanisms were reported by 38.9%, while 27.8% reported no mechanism. The finding that 66.7% of respondents lacked regular formal support demonstrates an institutional gap. Reliance on informal or occasional arrangements means that access to assistance may

depend on personal goodwill, opportunity, and individual networks. This can produce unequal access to support across respondents. Formal peer forums, scheduled consultation, mentoring, and confidential counselling would make support more reliable and equitable (Tables 12).

Table 12: Suggestions for Improving Social Support.

Suggestion Theme	n	%
Peer forums/networks/support groups	10	55.60%
Counselling/stress-management support	05	27.80%
Training/workshops	03	16.70%
Clear management/policy communication	03	16.70%
Staff-principal coordination	01	5.60%

Note*: Thematic coding; multiple themes may occur in one response.

In Table 12, 55.6% of respondents suggested peer forums, networks, or support groups. Counselling or stress-management support was suggested by 27.8%. Training or workshops and clearer management or policy communication were each suggested by 16.7%. Staff-principal coordination was suggested by 5.6%. The high percentage recommending peer forums indicates that respondents value structured contact with colleagues who

understand the pressures of principalship. The recommendations for counselling, training, and communication show that respondents seek both emotional support and practical organisational clarity. These suggestions support a combined approach that strengthens interpersonal support alongside institutional responsiveness (Tables 13).

Table 13: Additional Comments: Thematic Summary.

Comment Theme	n	%
Need for stronger institutional support	05	27.80%
Need for peer support/networking	05	27.80%
Need for counselling/mental-health support	04	22.20%
Need for communication/policy clarity	03	16.70%
Need to normalise help-seeking	02	11.10%

Note*: Thematic coding of additional comments; multiple themes may occur in one response.

In Table 13, 27.8% of respondents highlighted the need for stronger institutional support and the need for peer support or networking. Counselling or mental-health support was emphasised by 22.2%, while communication or policy clarity was highlighted by 16.7%. The need to normalise help-seeking was mentioned by 11.1%. The additional comments reinforce the broader pattern that respondents do not view occupational stress as a purely individual issue. They call for a work environment in which responsibility is shared, policy communication is clearer, mental-health support is legitimate, and consultation is normalised. This reflects a demand for a more supportive organisational culture rather than only individual stress-management strategies. Overall, the percentage-based findings show that occupational stress is widespread among respondents and is closely connected with workload, resources, staff management, and policy demands. Family and peer-principal support are important resources, but uneven formal mechanisms and barriers to help-seeking limit the support available to some respondents. The Discussion interprets these patterns through the study's theoretical framework and relevant literature.

Integrated Sociological Discussion

Across the findings, occupational stress emerges as a socially organised outcome of heavy workload, resource constraints, administrative accountability, staff relations, and uneven formal support. This pattern supports a sociological interpretation rather than an individualised explanation based solely on coping ability. Degree-college principals are held accountable for institutional outcomes while often depending on others for essential resources, approvals, and decisions. Consequently, stress is shaped by the organisation of administrative work, concentrated accountability, unequal access to resources, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the institution. The study objective was to explore the role of social support in mitigating occupational stress. The findings suggest that social support functions as an important relational resource by providing emotional reassurance, professional advice, practical assistance, and a sense of collective understanding. Family members and peer-principal networks appear particularly important in helping respondents manage administrative pressures. However, informal support should not be understood as a substitute for institutional responsibility. Although family and peer networks may mitigate strain, they cannot replace adequate

staffing, fair workload distribution, clear policy communication, reliable management support, and timely access to institutional resources. The findings therefore point to the need for a combined response. Bonding support may be strengthened through family-sensitive institutional practices; bridging support through peer-principal forums and professional networks; and linking support through regular management consultation, transparent procedures, and formal access to resources. Such measures can help reduce the gap between administrative responsibility and decision-making control, thereby supporting both principal well-being and institutional effectiveness.

The study contributes to the sociology of educational administration by linking role strain, bureaucracy, and social capital to college principals lived experience. Although the findings are based on a small, context-specific sample from Belagavi, they indicate that principal well-being should be treated as an institutional concern rather than a purely individual matter. Strengthening formal and informal support systems alongside organisational reform is essential for developing more resilient, humane, and effective higher-education administration.

Comparative Analysis of Occupational Stress and Social Support

The comparative analysis examines the relationships and variations within the field-study data from 18 degree-college principals. It compares reported stress, symptoms, stressors, support sources, support frequency, and institutional mechanisms to clarify how occupational demands and available support shape respondents' experiences.

Distribution of Occupational Stressors and Support Sources

Workload or administrative workload was the most widely reported occupational stressor, identified by 77.8% of respondents. Respondents reported resource constraints (55.6%), staff-management responsibilities (50.0%), student-related issues (38.9%), and policy changes (33.3%). Respondents also reported management pressure and parental or community expectations at 16.7% each. Family was the most commonly identified support source, reported by 88.9% of respondents. Respondents reported

peer-principal support (61.1%), friends (38.9%), management (33.3%), staff (27.8%), and professional or online networks (11.1%). These distributions show that occupational stress was mainly associated with administrative workload and organisational constraints, while social support was concentrated in family and peer-principal relationships. Formal workplace and network-based support were less consistently available.

Level and Spread of Occupational Stress

The mean occupational-stress score was 7.44 on a 10-point scale. The mean is the arithmetic average of all 18 scores and reflects the sample's overall level of reported stress. A mean above seven indicates that respondents generally perceived their occupational stress as high rather than mild. The median was seven, meaning that half the respondents scored seven or lower and half scored seven or higher. The closeness of the mean (7.44) and median (7) indicates that the distribution was not heavily distorted by one extremely high or low score. The standard deviation of the stress score was 0.98. The standard deviation indicates how far individual scores tended to vary from the mean. A value below one on a 10-point scale suggests moderate clustering rather than extreme variation. The range was six to nine, a spread of only three points. Taken together, the mean, median, standard deviation, and range show that stress was not restricted to a small number of highly distressed respondents. Instead, it was a relatively shared condition across the study group.

Support Frequency and Stress Level

50.0% of respondents accessed support often, and the remaining 50.0% accessed it sometimes. The mean stress score among respondents who accessed support often was 8.00, compared with 7.00 among those who accessed support sometimes. This difference should not be interpreted to mean that frequent support creates stress or that support is ineffective. A more suitable interpretation is that support mobilises respondents: those facing greater occupational pressure may seek family, peer, or other support more frequently. As the data are cross-sectional, the direction of this relationship cannot be established.

Administrative Experience and Stress

Respondents' mean administrative experience was 14.22 years. Experience ranged from 8 to 22 years, with a standard deviation of 4.31. The sample therefore included both mid-career and longer-serving principals. The data show a positive relationship between administrative experience and occupational stress. This pattern should be interpreted as cumulative administrative exposure rather than as evidence that experience itself causes stress. More experienced respondents may carry greater responsibility, encounter continuing policy changes, and manage more complex institutional demands.

Gender and Stress Level

Male respondents had a mean stress score of 7.91 ($n = 11$),

compared with 6.71 among female respondents ($n = 7$). The observed difference was 1.20 points. This descriptive difference should not be generalised beyond this small field-study sample. The study does not measure work-family arrangements, role allocation, leadership authority, institutional sector, or gendered expectations. These factors may shape stress experiences and require further investigation.

College Type and Stress Level

Private-unaided colleges represented 44.4% of the respondents, while government and private-aided colleges each represented 27.8%. Government-college respondents had a mean stress score of 8.40. The corresponding mean was 7.20 for private-aided-college respondents and 7.13 for private-unaided-college respondents. These results are descriptive because the institutional groups are small. However, they suggest that institutional location may shape stress through differing arrangements of public accountability, policy requirements, staffing, resources, admissions, finance, and management control.

Symptoms, Support Importance, and Institutional Provision

The comparison between stress symptoms and support ratings reveals an important limitation of informal support. Respondents reported fatigue (77.8%), irritability (72.2%), headaches (50.0%), sleep disturbance (38.9%), and difficulty concentrating (22.2%). Respondents rated support as important by 55.6% and very important by 44.4%. Regular or formal institutional support mechanisms were available to 33.3% of respondents. Informal or occasional mechanisms were reported by 38.9%, while 27.8% reported no mechanism. Thus, 66.7% of respondents lacked regular formal support. The coexistence of high stress-related symptoms, strong perceived importance of support, and limited formal institutional provision indicates that informal support alone cannot address all occupational demands. Family and peer networks may offer reassurance and advice, but workload, resource constraints, and policy difficulties require organisational response.

Sociological Implications

The comparative analysis shows that social support should be considered alongside the organisational conditions that produce stress. Family and peer-principal networks were the most accessible sources of support, whereas management, staff, and professional networks were less consistently available. The results further show that support is not a single resource: family support can assist emotional recovery, peers can provide advice and shared understanding, and management can offer formal authority and practical resources. Both relational and structural conditions therefore shaped occupational stress among respondents. An appropriate response requires peer support, confidential counselling, and improved staff-principal coordination, along with workload review, policy clarity, management responsiveness, and equitable access to organisational resources.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that occupational stress among degree-college principals is best understood as a structural and relational condition of educational administration. Workload, inadequate resources, staff management, student demands, policy changes, and uneven management support produce a responsibility-control gap. Principals are accountable for institutional outcomes but do not fully control all the conditions needed to achieve them. This pattern reflects bureaucratic role strain rather than individual weakness. Family and peer-principal networks provide important mitigating resources. Family support offers emotional security and practical grounding, while peer support offers advice, policy interpretation, shared problem-solving, and professional validation. However, informal support cannot replace organisational responsibility. The limited availability of regular institutional support mechanisms suggests that principals often depend on personal networks rather than reliable formal arrangements. Institutions should establish confidential peer-principal forums, review administrative workload, strengthen management consultation and policy communication, provide access to counselling, and develop regular staff-principal coordination practices.

Occupational Stress as an Organisationally Produced Condition

The findings indicate that occupational stress among principals is primarily an organisational and relational condition rather than an individual deficit. The centrality of workload, resource constraints, staff management, student concerns, and policy-related demands points to a responsibility-control gap. Principals are held accountable for institutional outcomes, yet their authority over staffing, finance, regulations, and external expectations may be limited. This pattern is consistent with Weber's account of bureaucratic organisation, in which formal responsibility is concentrated within hierarchical roles. In contrast, the resources required to fulfil that responsibility are distributed across several organisational levels. The findings also align with occupational-stress research that treats strain as a consequence of high demands combined with limited resources and control. Research on school leaders has similarly shown that quantitative and emotional job demands are associated with burnout and lower job satisfaction, underscoring the importance of institutional resources alongside individual resilience [9].

Social Support as Differentiated Social Capital

The support patterns show that not all relationships provide the same resources. Family support functions mainly as bonding social capital by offering emotional reassurance, continuity, and practical grounding outside the workplace. Peer-principal relationships function as bridging social capital by creating access to advice, shared experience, policy interpretation, and professional validation. Management and institutional relationships constitute linking social capital because they can provide access to formal

authority, resources, and organisational decisions. This distinction explains why family and peers may be highly valued even when formal support is inadequate. A family member may help a principal recover emotionally after a difficult day, while a peer may provide practical guidance on accreditation or policy interpretation. Neither, however, can replace timely institutional decisions, adequate staff, clear communication, or resource allocation. Social support is therefore multi-layered rather than a single generic resource.

Support Mobilisation and Effectiveness

The relationship between stress and frequent support use should be interpreted as evidence of support mobilisation rather than as a failure of social support. Principals facing high demand may turn more often to family and peer networks. The usefulness of support depends on whether its form matches the stressor: emotional reassurance may reduce anxiety and isolation, informational support may clarify policy or administrative choices, and instrumental support may reduce immediate task burden. This interpretation is consistent with the buffering perspective, which proposes that supportive relationships can alter how individuals experience and manage stressful circumstances [5,6]. It is also consistent with research showing that principals' well-being is strengthened by collaboration, trust in management, supervisor support, and professional networks [2]. The present field study adds that the availability and perceived reliability of these forms of support differ across institutional contexts.

Barriers and Institutional Gaps

The barriers reported by respondents show that support must be available, legitimate, trusted, and accessible. Workload can prevent principals from seeking help; stigma can make consultation appear inconsistent with leadership expectations; and confidentiality concerns can discourage the discussion of staff or management issues. These patterns are relevant to symbolic interactionism because leadership roles involve the continual presentation of competence, authority, and emotional control. The uneven availability of regular institutional mechanisms reveals an informalisation of support. Where colleges rely on personal goodwill, chance interaction, or private networks, support becomes unevenly distributed. Principals with strong family ties or well-developed peer networks may be better protected than those without such access. Formal peer forums, confidential counselling, scheduled consultation channels, and clear procedures are therefore necessary to make support more equitable.

Implications for Educational Administration

The findings suggest that principal well-being should be treated as an institutional issue. The practical focus should not be limited to resilience or stress-management training. Such initiatives are valuable, but they must be accompanied by workload review, administrative staffing, role clarity, consistent management communication, peer consultation, and reliable access to professional support. Improving these conditions can strengthen

both principals' well-being and the coordinating capacity of degree colleges.

Discussion in Relation to Prior Research

The present study broadly aligns with prior research while remaining context-specific. Beusaert, et al., (2023) [2] showed that internal and external social capital predicted better well-being among principals over time. The Belagavi respondents similarly relied most strongly on family and peer networks, while also identifying the importance of management and staff support. Jardine, et al., (2025) [9] found that high emotional and quantitative demands were associated with burnout among school leaders, a pattern echoed in the present respondents' reports of workload, fatigue, irritability, and sleep disturbance. Godinho et al. (2019) [8] found that low workplace social support among civil servants was associated with depressive symptoms and impaired work ability. Although the current study does not measure depression or work ability clinically, the high prevalence of fatigue and the reported importance of emotional stability, reduced isolation, practical advice, and confidence suggest that support is relevant to both well-being and administrative functioning. Indian studies also show a positive relationship between perceived social support and psychological well-being [10,11]. The current findings add a sociological account of how this relationship is experienced in the degree-college administrative setting of Belagavi.

Suggestions

The findings indicate that efforts to support principals must address both interpersonal resources and organisational conditions. The following measures respond directly to the patterns identified in the field study:

Institutionalise Peer-principal Forums

Respondents most frequently recommended creating peer forums, networks, or support groups (55.6%). Therefore, establish a monthly confidential peer-principal forum at the city or district level. Meetings should include structured discussion of policy updates, accreditation requirements, workload concerns, staff-management issues, and shared problem-solving. Participation should be voluntary, and ground rules should protect confidentiality. Peer support is likely to be particularly useful because respondents see fellow principals as people who understand the occupational context and can provide informational, appraisal, and emotional support.

Review Workload and Administrative Task Allocation

Because 94.4% of respondents identified workload or administrative workload as a stressor, workload review should be treated as the primary organisational intervention. Colleges and management bodies should map recurring administrative tasks, including documentation, reporting, admissions, examinations, accreditation, correspondence, and meetings. Delegate tasks that do not require the principal's direct authority to trained office

staff or distribute them through administrative committees. Workload reduction is essential because social support cannot fully compensate for chronic structural overload.

Strengthen Management and Policy Support

Management and policy-related concerns emerged as stressors and barriers. Institutions should establish a clear consultation channel through which principals can obtain timely policy clarification, administrative guidance, and support during crises. Institutions should schedule regular meetings rather than relying on ad hoc contact. Management support should include constructive feedback, fair procedures, realistic deadlines, and recognition of administrative effort. Such practices can strengthen linking social capital by making institutional authority accessible and supportive rather than distant or inconsistent.

Provide Confidential Counselling and Stress-support Services

Counselling or stress-management support was suggested by 27.8% of respondents, while stigma and confidentiality concerns were explicitly reported as barriers. Principals should have access to confidential counselling, employee-assistance services, or referral arrangements with qualified mental-health professionals. These services should be voluntary and separate from performance evaluation. They should provide a safe space for emotional support, reflection, and stress management. They must complement, not replace, workload reform and organisational support.

Develop Staff-principal Coordination Practices

Staff management was reported as a stressor by 38.9% of respondents, whereas staff were named as a support source by only 27.8%. This indicates that staff relationships can be both supportive and demanding. Colleges should establish regular staff-principal coordination meetings, clearly allocate administrative responsibilities, and build feedback mechanisms. These arrangements can increase instrumental support, reduce misunderstandings, and distribute routine administrative burden. They can also improve the communication climate and reduce the expectation that the principal must resolve every issue alone.

Normalise Help-Seeking and Promote a Supportive Culture

The findings show that help-seeking must be made professionally legitimate. Training sessions and institutional orientation should address occupational stress, confidentiality, peer support, and the value of seeking assistance early. A supportive culture should recognise that effective leadership includes knowing when to consult colleagues, seek clarification, share responsibility, and access professional support. This cultural change is essential to address stigma and protect administrators' well-being.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that occupational stress among degree-

college principals in Belagavi is best understood as a structural and relational condition of educational administration. Stress does not arise solely from individual coping limitations; it is shaped by the organisation of administrative work, concentrated accountability, uneven access to resources, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the institution. The study objective was to explore the role of social support in mitigating occupational stress. The findings indicate that social support provides an important relational resource by offering emotional reassurance, professional advice, practical assistance, and a sense of collective understanding. Family and peer-principal networks are particularly significant in helping respondents manage administrative pressures. However, their value should not lead to individualising a structural problem. Informal support can mitigate strain, but it cannot replace adequate resources, clear institutional communication, fair workload distribution, and responsive management.

The study contributes to the sociology of educational administration by linking role strain, bureaucracy, and social capital to college principals lived experience. Although the findings are limited to a small and context-specific sample, they indicate that principal well-being should be treated as an institutional concern. Strengthening formal and informal support systems, alongside organisational reform, is essential to developing more resilient, humane, and effective higher-education administration.

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Conflict of Interest

I (The author) declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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