

## **A study on stress among ESL teachers at Departments of English Language Teaching and English Language Teaching Units at four state universities in Sri Lanka**

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This study investigates the factors that cause stress to ESL teachers and the coping strategies that they follow to reduce stress. Researchers (Kyriacou, 2000, 2001; Al-Fudail & Mellar, 2008) have labeled the profession of teaching as highly stressful. The sample consisted of seventy five ESL teachers from four state universities. Focus group discussions were conducted to formulate the questionnaire. The questionnaire included both open ended and close ended questions. The qualitative data was thematically coded. The study revealed low motivation of students, low achievement level and disruptive behavior of students to be the main stress factors. Moreover, teaching differently abled students was a cause for stress among ESL teachers. Teaching mixed ability classes too caused stress as disclosed from the findings. Additionally, it was revealed that technical issues caused stress for online tutors. All ESL teachers from all four universities experience a low stress level regarding going to a new class with new students. Neglecting domestic chores, being moody, irritated and health issues like headaches and problems in the relationship with coworkers were experienced by ESL teachers in their personal and professional life. This study disclosed that female ESL teachers experience a higher stress level than male ESL teachers. It was found that singing songs, getting consolation from religion, assurance that someone is there to share and understand the problem to be common coping strategies among female ESL teachers. In contrast, some coping strategies common to male teachers were planning ahead and prioritizing work, creating jokes and making others laugh and forgetting incidents that happened at university. It was observed that a considerable number of ESL teachers engage in meditation as a coping strategy. It is recommended that solutions are found to reduce stress among ESL teachers. An equal balance in participation and work allocation is recommended among male and female teachers.

***Keywords:*** *coping strategies, ESL teacher stress, meditation, work overload*