

**Stress and Coping among Dental Educators –
Does Gender Matter?***

By

**Paula E. Nesbitt, Meharry Medical College,
Marita Rohr Inglehart, University of Michigan &
Jeanne C. Sinkford, American Dental Education Association**

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ABSTRACT

High stress levels correlate with poorer health and quality of life. Objectives: The objectives are to investigate whether female and male dental educators differ in (a) their stress levels, (b) the sources of stress, and (c) their coping. Methods: 870 members of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) responded to a mailed survey (response rate: 40%). Results: Female faculty reported more stress than male faculty. Compared to men, women were more affected by time pressure, heavy teaching loads, conflicting family responsibilities, and too much to do. Women reported less support by a spouse, and by secretaries, but more support from a relative, friend, or housekeeper than men. Women had received less advice about promotion/tenure, and felt more often excluded from informal networks in departments /divisions. Conclusions: The findings suggest gender differences in stress and coping in professional settings.

BACKGROUND

Gender specific workplace experiences of academic faculty in the USA are well documented.¹⁻¹² In particular, this research found that the professional climate at universities in the USA was “chilly” for female faculty members. This study explores whether this situation may result in different stress levels for male and female faculty, and whether this stress results from different sources.

Additionally, it will be investigated whether gender specific coping mechanisms are found. In 2000, Taylor and her colleagues¹³ suggested that women may use a “tend- and-befriend” strategy when coping with stress, while men are more likely to use a “fight-or-flight” response. This research implies that female faculty may be more likely to look for social support networks than male faculty when coping with stress.

The impending shortage of faculty in US dental schools¹⁴⁻¹⁶ might make an analysis of factors that impair job satisfaction and result in high drop out rates of faculty a useful endeavor, because the findings may point to concrete interventions aimed at increasing faculty members’ job satisfaction, and thus the retention of dental educators.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to investigate whether female and male dental educators differ in

- the level of stress they experience,
- the sources of their stress, and
- the ways they cope with stress.

METHODS

RESPONDENTS: The sample consisted of 2203 dental faculty members who were identified with the help of the 2001 membership roster of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA). 870 faculty members responded (response rate: 40%); 34.8 % of these respondents were women and 65.1% were men. 17.9% of the female respondents were dental hygienists.

PROCEDURE: A questionnaire was mailed to the ADEA members in US dental schools in May 2001. No follow up mailing was conducted.

MATERIALS: The "Full-time Dental Educator Work Environment" survey (see Appendix) was developed based on a review of the literature in the areas of perceptions of academic work environment and career development¹⁻¹¹. Survey items obtained from the literature were complemented with additional items that were formulated by the primary author based on conversations with other female dental faculty members about issues that were important to these women faculty. The survey was pre-tested with five male and five female faculty members for clarity and brevity.

RESULTS

Did female faculty report more stress than male faculty?

As can be seen in Table 1, 50.5% of the female faculty and 39.2% of the male faculty agreed that their job "took too much out of them" ($p=.001$). 54.8% of female faculty vs. 44.7% of male faculty agreed that stress had decreased their desire to stay in academia ($p=.003$).

Are the sources of stress different for male and female faculty?

As can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, female faculty indicated that their health was more affected by stress, and that balancing professional and personal life was a greater challenge than male faculty. Men and women differed in the sources of their stress with women being more strongly affected than men by time pressure, heavy teaching loads, conflicting family responsibilities, and having too much to do.

Do men and women differ in the coping resources available to them? Women and men differed in the types of support they had. Compared to men, women reported less support by a spouse or a secretary, but more support from a relative, friend, or housekeeper than men. Compared to men, women reported less advice about criteria for promotion/tenure, more exclusion from informal networks in departments/divisions based on gender, and more sexual advances by a superior or colleague.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

These findings suggest that female dental faculty members experience more stress in their professional lives than male faculty members. Additionally, the results show that male and female faculty members differ in what causes them stress, with time pressure and lack of support systems being major concerns. On the whole, women seem to rely on different support systems than men.

These findings can be used as a basis to reflect on potential changes in dental school environments that would assure that the quality of professional life is not a function of gender. The ultimate goal would be to create a culture in a dental school that provides resources that allow all faculty members to live up to their potentials and have a positive professional situation.

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Table 1:
Percentages of Male and Female Respondents'
Agreement with Items Concerning Stress

	FEMALE FACULTY	MALE FACULTY	p
"My job takes too much out of me".	50.5%	39.2%	p=.001
"Stress has decreased my desire to stay in academia".	54.8%	44.7%	p=.003

Table 2:
Average Agreement of Male and Female Respondents with Statements Concerning Sources of Stress

	FEMALE FACULTY	MALE FACULTY	p
“My health was affected by stress”.	3.71	3.18	.000
Balancing professional and personal life.	3.77	3.30	.000
Meetings at 7 am, 5 pm, or on weekends.	3.60	3.21	.000
Rigid promotion guidelines	3.25	2.98	.004
Lack of emergency child care for urgent situations.	2.73	2.30	.000
Absence of part-time tenure track positions.	2.83	2.45	.001
Absence of on-site child care.	2.47	2.15	.001
Absence of a formal parental leave policy.	2.48	2.20	.004

Legend: * The answers were given on 5 point rating scales ranging from 1 = “disagree strongly” to 5 = “agree strongly”.

Table 3:
Percentages of Male and Female Respondents'
Sources of Stress

	FEMALE FACULTY	MALE FACULTY	p
Time pressure	63.0%	50.4%	.000
Heavy teaching loads	52.7%	44.9%	.028
Conflicting family responsibilities	40.0%	36.9%	.029
Lack of creative time	62.2%	55.8%	.039
Adverse work-place relations	25.6%	18.4%	.011

Table 4:
Percentages of Male and Female Respondents'
Support Systems

Support by:	Women	Men	p
spouse	74%	90%	.000
relative	41%	19%	.000
friend	58%	48%	.005
housekeeper	14%	2%	.000

secretaries	76%	85%	.001
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Table 5:
Average Responses of Male and Female Respondents to Items Concerning Obstacles to Coping

	Women	Men	p
Received advice about promotion / tenure	1.97*	2.22	p=.01
Having been systematically excluded from informal networks in departments	2.48	1.53	p=.001
Encountered unwanted sexual advances by a superior or colleague	2.45	1.30	p=.000

Legend: * The answers were given on 5 point rating scales ranging from 1 = “disagree strongly” to 5 = “agree strongly”.

APPENDIX: SURVEY FULL-TIME DENTAL EDUCATORS AND THEIR WORK ENVIRONMENT

This survey will address full-time dental faculty perceptions of their workplace environment in the dental school. The survey’s purpose is to identify factors that affect career satisfaction, perceptions and experiences with career advancement / success, career stressors and potential support systems. This data will be used to gain a better understanding of full time faculty’s concerns and the factors that affect job satisfaction and success. Based on these findings, the ADEA will develop recommendations for the recruitment and retention of fulltime dental educators.
Your answers will be given anonymously, and the results will be only presented on aggregate levels.

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Please, indicate your age: I am _____years old.

2. Please, indicate your gender: Female Male
3. Please, indicate your race / ethnicity:
- A. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - B. Asian/Pacific Islander/East Indian
 - C. Black or African American
 - D. Hispanic/Latino
 - E. White, non-Hispanic
 - F. Not Listed/ Other please, specify: _____
4. Please, indicate your current marital status:
- A. Part of a couple
 - B. Single (divorced, separated, widowed, never married)
5. If you are part of a couple, please, indicate whether your dental faculty income is higher or lower than your partner's income:
- A. Higher
 - B. Lower
6. How many children do you have? I have ____ children.
 If you have children: How many of these children still live at home? ____ live at home.
 How old are they? _____

EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY

7. What degrees do you hold?
- DDS, DMD
 - Bachelors
 - Certificate
 - MS in Dentistry
 - MS
 - MD
 - Other if other: please, specify: _____
8. Please, indicate your primary discipline and/or field of interest
- General Dentistry
 - Endodontics
 - Operative Dentistry
 - Oral/maxillofacial Surgery
 - Dental Public Health
 - Oral Pathology
 - Orthodontics
 - Pediatric Dentistry
 - Periodontics
 - Prosthodontics
 - Other
 - If other, please, specify _____
9. Please, give the name of the dental school at which you have your primary appointment:
 I am employed at _____

10. I have been employed full-time in academic dentistry for _____ years

11. Please, indicate your academic rank:

Instructor Assistant professor Associate professor
Professor Other If other, please, specify: _____

12. I have been in my present academic rank for _____ years

13. Do you or did you have a mentor:

Currently, I have a mentor I do not have a mentor
I had a mentor in the past I never had a mentor

14. The gender of my mentor is / was male female .

Please, give your answers to the following items on the answer scale ranging from

- | | 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| | strongly disagree | | | | | strongly agree |
| 15. Mentoring relationships are beneficial because mentor's are influential as career advisors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 16. Mentoring relationships are more difficult between a faculty member and trainee of different genders than of the same gender. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. My mentor used my work to advance his/her own career, rather than my career. | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. My mentor facilitated my participation or has been beneficial in my opportunity to | | | | | | |
| - CHAIR A COMMITTEE | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| - PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| - ADVANCE MY CAREER | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| - PARTICIPATE IN EXTERN PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| - OTHER | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| If other, please, specify: _____ | | | | | | |
| 19. I am a successful academician | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 20. I enjoy my profession as an academician | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 21. I expect a promotion in rank due to my conscientiousness / adherence to my school's mission | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |

22. A promotion in rank will be hard to achieve given the limited amount of time I have to pursue scholarly activity and publications, despite my conscientiousness and adherence to my school's mission.

	1	2	3	4	5
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23. Please, indicate how much you agree / disagree for each of the following factors with the statement:

This factor has INCREASED my desire to stay in academia.

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. I feel welcome | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| B. Advancement opportunities | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| C. Supportive collegial atmosphere | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| D. I enjoy student contact | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| E. Non stressful and flexible work environment | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| F. Salary and benefits package competitive | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| G. Adequate teaching, clinical, research, & staff support | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| H. Adequate creative time | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| I. Admire my colleagues | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| J. Fringe benefits | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| K. Challenging work environment | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| L. Vacation periods are flexible | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| M. Tuition remission for children | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| N. Work agrees with partner's career | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| O. Opportunity for post-graduate study | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| P. Satisfactory reward system | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Q. Positive student feedback | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| R. Supportive administration | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| S. I have no desire to stay in academia | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| T. Other, please, specify: _____ | | | | | | | |

24. Please, indicate how much you agree / disagree for each of the following factors with the statement:

This factor has DECREASED my desire to stay in academia.

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. Sense of isolation | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| B. No advancement opportunity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| C. Unsupportive collegial atmosphere | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| D. I no longer enjoy student contact | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| E. Stressful/Emotionally difficult | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| F. Uncompetitive salary | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| G. Insufficient teaching, clinical, research, & staff support | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| H. Inadequate creative time | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |

I.	Dislike my colleagues		1	2	3	4	5	
J.	Student loan debt	1	2	3	4	5		
K.	I'm not using my skills		1	2	3	4	5	
L.	Parenting and/or family responsibilities		1	2	3	4	5	
M.	Gender, racial, religious, ethnic discrimination			1	2	3	4	5
N.	Gender based salary inequity	1	2	3	4	5		
O.	Need a change	1	2	3	4	5		
P.	Incompetent supervisor		1	2	3	4	5	
Q.	Inefficient job completion due to other people or red tape	1	2	3	4	5		
R.	Administration has unrealistic expectations	1	2	3	4	5		
S.	I have no desire to leave academia		1	2	3	4	5	
T.	Other, please, specify: _____							

25. How much do you agree / disagree with the following statements:

The following factors are detrimental to my career satisfaction:

A.	Meetings at 7am		1	2	3	4	5	
B.	Meetings after 5pm	1	2	3	4	5		
C.	Meetings on weekends		1	2	3	4	5	
D.	Rigid promotion guidelines	1	2	3	4	5		
E.	Lack of emergency child care for urgent situations	1	2	3	4	5		
F.	Absence of part-time tenure track	1	2	3	4	5		
G.	Absence of on-site child care		1	2	3	4	5	
H.	Absence of a formal parental leave policy		1	2	3	4	5	

YOUR WORK PLACE ENVIRONMENT

- 25. How many faculty members are in your department? _____
- 26. How many female faculty members are in your department? _____
- 27. How many underrepresented minority faculty members are in your department? _____

How much do you agree / disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree?

28.	I feel like a welcomed member of my dental school scientific community.		1	2	3	4	5	
29.	My colleagues seek out my opinion as a dentist and/or scientist.	1	2	3	4	5		
30.	I feel like a full and equal participant in informal problem solving and decision making.		1	2	3	4	5	
31.	I have experienced sexual remarks, covert physical contact, and/or blatant sexual propositions in my work environment.		1	2	3	4	5	

32. When I request consultation for patients, I am more likely to consult a clinician of the same sex as I am.	1	2	3	4	5	
33. There is a condescending attitude toward female faculty in the dental school.		1	2	3	4	5
34. Professional, collegial relationships are more difficult between faculty of different sexes.	1	2	3	4	5	
35. The availability of female faculty as mentors for female students is important.		1	2	3	4	5
36. Equal pay for male and female faculty is no longer an issue.		1	2	3	4	5
37. Female faculty are appropriately represented among tenured faculty and in senior administrative positions.	1	2	3	4	5	
38. Female faculty are overly-sensitive about women's issues as they apply to the dental school work environment.		1	2	3	4	5
39. I believe that female faculty members have different issues or concerns in their work environment than male faculty members.		1	2	3	4	5
40. There is a perception that female faculty have an advantage over male faculty.		1	2	3	4	5
41. There is an atmosphere that encourages female faculty to fully participate in teaching, administrative and/or research activities.	1	2	3	4	5	
42. The work climate in my department and/or division is less supportive of female than of male faculty.		1	2	3	4	5
43. Female faculty are recommended for promotion later than male faculty of comparable accomplishments and time of rank.		1	2	3	4	5
44. Male faculty are more likely to be sought for collaborative research, given comparable scientific expertise.		1	2	3	4	5
44. In my department and/or division, there are equal opportunities for faculty members of both sexes to hold leadership positions and serve on committees.		1	2	3	4	5
45. Sexist remarks are heard on the clinic floor and/or in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	
46. Racist remarks are heard on the clinic floor and/or in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	
47. Male faculty have difficulty taking careers of female faculty seriously and accepting females as colleagues.		1	2	3	4	5
48. The "old boy's network" systematically excludes faculty on the basis of gender.		1	2	3	4	5

YOUR HEALTH

49. Stress in my workplace comes from: (please check all that apply)

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Not being appreciated | <input type="checkbox"/> | Having too much to do | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of administrative support | <input type="checkbox"/> | Discrimination | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The job takes too much out of me (burn out) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Adverse work-place relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Problems with colleagues | <input type="checkbox"/> | Making less money than I deserve | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | please, specify: _____ | |

50. I have the following health problem(s): (Please Check All That Apply)

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Allergies | <input type="checkbox"/> | Anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> | Atopic Dermatitis | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Chronic Fatigue Syndrome | <input type="checkbox"/> | Chronic Pain | <input type="checkbox"/> | Depression | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Diabetes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fibromyalgia | <input type="checkbox"/> | Gastro-intestinal problems | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hearing | <input type="checkbox"/> | Hypertension | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rheumatoid arthritis | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Visual | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | please, specify: _____ | |

51. I believe that the stress in my work environment affects my health. 1 2 3 4 5

YOUR FAMILY AND PERSONAL SITUATION

52. My partner's attitude towards my profession is a major threat to my success. 1 2 3 4 5

53. My partner's occupation has influenced my decision to remain in academia. 1 2 3 4 5

54. My occupation has influenced my partner's decision to remain in his/her present career. 1 2 3 4 5

55. The most important external support system(s) during my academic life has been:

Please check all that apply:

- | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|--------|--------------------------|
| Religion | <input type="checkbox"/> | Spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> | Relative | <input type="checkbox"/> | Friend | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Housekeeper | <input type="checkbox"/> | Child-care worker | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

56. Please, rank the following factors by the order of their importance for your professional life:

1= the most important factor.

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| Strong sense of worth | Rank: _____ |
| Academic & scientific adventure | Rank: _____ |
| Competitive quest for knowledge despite obstacles | Rank: _____ |
| Aggressiveness | Rank: _____ |
| Well organized | Rank: _____ |
| Sense of power | Rank: _____ |
| Self-discipline | Rank: _____ |

Passion for my work

Rank: _____

Other

Rank: _____ please, specify: _____

58. During my professional school and/or specialty training, I was encouraged to quit school by

A. My spouse B. a relative C. A professor

D. Other please, specify: _____

E. No one discouraged me to quit school

56. Did you take a leave of absence from your academic career?

Yes No

If yes, please check the reason(s) for this leave:

A. Child rearing
B. Family illness
C. Family problems
D. Financial problems
E. Maternity/paternity leave
F. Personal illness
G. Postdoctoral Training
H. Other

57. Combining child rearing and professional work has been easy because of the help of my partner and/or others. 1 2 3 4 5

58. As a single parent, combining child rearing and professional work has been easy because of the help of my estranged spouse and/or significant other, and/or others. 1 2 3 4 5

59. Female faculty are uniquely disadvantaged when they take time out for child bearing and rearing. 1 2 3 4 5

60. One of the greatest challenges for my academic advancement in dentistry has been the balance of my role of personal responsibility versus institutional and societal responsibility. 1 2 3 4 5

61. I have cited the benefits of academia to students in an attempt to encourage them to choose a career in academic dentistry. 1 2 3 4 5

64. Please estimate the number of hours per week you spend performing the following activities
(Please write in Box Below)

Leisure time activities with children	
Childcare including helping child with homework	
Cleaning your home	
Cooking	
Laundry	
Grocery shopping	
Running Errands	
Volunteer work and/or community involvement	
Home maintenance (including yard work, home repairs, etc)	
Hobbies and/ or exercise	
Beauty salon or barber shop	
Other	

62. Please rank the following from order of importance to non-importance (1 is *not important* to 13 is *most important*)

Balancing work and family obligations	
Financial well being	
Personal/leisure time	
Tenure and promotion	
Household help and/or childcare	
Salary equity	
Career satisfaction	
Student loan forgiveness	
Maternity and/or family leave	
Academic work pressures	
Research participation	
Private practice	
Flexible tenure path	
Other:	

86. How do you think faculty could be recruited more successfully for dental schools?

87. How do you think faculty could be kept from leaving their dental school jobs?

88. What do you believe has been the underlying reason for the under-representation of female educators/scientists in dentistry?