

Stress Coping Strategies : Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Several researchers have proposed different postulation for establishing the mode of coping adopted by individuals by experimental means. The following are some of the coping strategies explained by the experts based on their cognitive orientations.

Keywords: Job Stress, Job Stressors, Coping Skills, Secondary Level

When individuals experience stress or face demanding situations, they adopt different ways of dealing with it as they cannot remain in a continual state of tension. This is called coping. The word 'coping' has been used with two meanings- ways of dealing with stress and the effort to master the conditions of harm, threat and challenge. Thus, when the stress on an individual tax or exceed his adjustive resources, he must resort to some form of coping in order to maintain equilibrium. Hamburg and Adam (1967) defined coping as a process of seeking and utilizing information Pearlin and Schooler (1978) conceptualized coping as any response to stimulations life stressor that serves to prevent, avoid or control emotional distress.² Folkman and Lazarus (1980) define coping "as all cognitive and behavioural effects to master reduce, or tolerate demands". Adding to this definition,³ Matheny (1986), defined coping as "any effort, healthy or unhealthy, conscious or unconscious, to prevent, eliminate or weaken stressors or to tolerate their effects in the least hurtful manner".

Types of coping strategies:

Several researchers have proposed different postulation for establishing the mode of coping adopted by individuals by experimental means. The following are some of the coping strategies explained by the experts based on their cognitive orientations.

Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused Coping

Two general coping strategies have been distinguished; problem-solving focused strategies are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances; whereas emotion-focused coping strategies involve efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful

events.⁴ Research indicates that people use both types of strategies to combat most stressful events. The predominance of one type of strategy over another is determined, in part, by personal styles (e.g. some people cope more actively than others) and also by the type of stressful event; for example, people typically employ problem-focused coping to deal with potential controllable problems such as work-related problems and family-related problems; whereas stressors perceived as less controllable such as certain kinds of physical health problems, more emotion-focused coping called for.

Active and Avoidant Coping:

An additional distinction that is often made in the coping literature is between active and avoidant coping strategies. Active coping strategies are either behavioural or psychological responses designed to change the nature of the stressors itself or how one thinks about it; whereas Avoidant coping strategies lead people into activities (such as alcohol use) or mental states (such as withdrawal) that keep them from directly addressing stressful events. Generally speaking, active coping strategies, whether behavioural or emotional, are thought to be better ways to deal with stressful events, and avoidant coping strategies appear to be a psychological risk factor or marker for adverse response to stressful life events.⁵

On reviewing studies relating stress/stressors and coping strategies of teachers quite a good number of valid information have emerged. Teachers experiencing health based stress made use of unique coping strategies. The emotion focused strategies of seeking emotional support was associated with health problems. However when stress level and gender

were controlled no relation found to exist between problem focused strategies and health related stress of teachers (Eva Torkelson, et al, 2004).⁶ Believing one could control one's negative moods was associated with more adaptive outcomes of teachers. Higher stress on job did indeed predict greater burnout and distress. Additionally stronger Negative Mood Regulation expectancies predict more active coping (Jack Mearns et al, (2003)).⁷

In certain schools teachers' stress was due to low achievement of students, apathy of parents towards parent teachers meetings, lack of concern for weaker students and inadequate educational facilities. In such situations teachers cope with the stress by teaching effectively with teaching aids, enabling parents to face and interact with the teachers and their wards in the school premises, organizing extra classes and providing special coaching to weaker classes and by urging the school head and the management to fulfill the infrastructure requirements in phases. It is also reported that teachers having lower stress level were higher in performance and vice versa. Male and female teachers, teachers with different years of experience and teachers teaching at primary, secondary and higher secondary levels were almost the same in stress experience and coping (Ravel, G. P, 2003).⁸ Not effective teachers have higher level stress than effective teachers, but both found to adopt similar coping strategies (Vaz Adelaide, F, (1994)).⁹

By factor analysis it was shown that three key stressors related to the domains—working conditions, workload and organizational problems—caused stress to special education teachers. A number of coping mechanisms ranging from breathing exercises to mental switch off, and seeking social support to problem focused strategies were used by them (Stamatios, 2009).¹⁰ The elementary school principals as in the case of teachers reported moderate to high level of job stress. Urban school principals recorded the highest mean of stress. More experienced teachers showed lower stress. No distinct difference was noted in the coping strategies (Lori Boyland, (2011)).¹¹

Other category of teachers including the college/university faculty were distinct in their stress and coping. The African—American faculties seem to suffer due to racial factors. They adopted group specific coping strategies. Specifically they coped by creating

safe space for students, using assertive actions to establish authority, questioning students thinking and focusing on learning of students (Chavella, (2010)).¹² The degree college teachers reported that interference of organizational responsibilities, lack of participation in decision making and interpersonal relational factors were responsible for their stress. Age and gender had impact over stress and coping. Active coping, taking rest, avoiding strenuous works, using sleeping pills and hot water therapy were the coping strategies practiced by them (Nayak, Jayashree, (2008)).¹³ Job security is the prime cause of stress for substitute teachers. They used both problem - centered and avoidance - centered coping strategies (Mathew. S, (2011)).¹⁴

In the case of extension agents the group experiencing stress to the detrimental level was 'Sandwich Generation' which include employees aged between 35–54 who find their careers sandwiched between raising children and caring for parents. Their coping strategies included prioritizing, planning and building a strong social support system (Joseph Richard Jr, (2009)).¹⁵ Women employees such as those in civil services were very much affected by unmanageable workload inspite of practicing very many coping strategies (Adeoye, (2005)).¹⁶ Likewise 63% of nurses recorded severe job stress with 37% reporting at moderate level. Majority of nurses employed active coping strategies and a few relied on avoidance coping. With increase in their active coping, there was decrease in their stress (Sudhakar Christopher, (2010)).¹⁷

Since a mine of information have been dugged out regarding stress/stressors and coping of adults working as teachers of different cadres and categories, as nurses and other employees the researcher turned her attention towards students population. Students moved to other countries for higher education or for other specializations suffer due to acculturative stress which they manage by adopting religious coping. That is college students enjoying higher level spiritual wellbeing reported to have lower level acculturative stress (Chau—Winniewing—Yi, (2006)).¹⁸ Management and science university students attributed their stress to financial limitations, family problems, and physical and mental strains. Their important coping strategies were exercise, sleep, and spending time with friends (Sami, (2008)).¹⁹ However for

medical students the important sources of stress were worry about future, frequency of examinations, vastness of syllabus, lack of time for studies, and lack of time for entertainment. They relied on reframing, planning, accepting, active coping, self-distraction and emotional support to lessen the impact of stress Sree Rama Reddy. T, (2008).²⁰ For assessing the coping strategies adopted by teachers and other employees, some of the data collecting instruments were prepared in the form of checklist, or ranking the stated list of strategies, and questionnaires Griffith Jayne et.al, 2010²¹.

Sahu and Mishra (1995)²² explored the life stress and coping styles in teachers. The sample consisted of 120 male and 120 female teachers. The results revealed that males used emotion-focused coping as well as problem-focused coping while females used only emotion-focused coping.

Khan et al., (2005)²³ conducted a study on coping strategies among male and female teachers with high and low job strain. The results of the study indicated that both male and female teachers used the same strategies to cope with job strain. Significant difference was not found to exist between the male and female teachers on different types of coping strategies except use of humour. Teachers have adopted a range of coping strategies most tend to be functional or active and some are dysfunctional or passive (i.e. self-distraction and use of humour).

Singh and Singh (2006)²⁴ studied the coping strategies of 50 middle-aged female school teachers selected randomly from 15 government recognised girl's schools of Varanasi city. The results revealed that 66% of middle-aged female school teachers use avoidance coping, whereas, 24% and 10% had behavioural approach and cognitive behavioural approach of coping respectively. They further stated that avoidance coping approach may develop depression in women.

Chaturvedi and Purushothaman (2009)²⁵ investigated the role of certain demographic variables in determining stress-coping behaviour of female teachers. The sample consisted of 150 female teachers was selected by stratified sampling method from various schools of Bhopal. Stress-coping behaviour was measured with the help of a subscale of 'The Occupational Stress Indicator' (Wendy Lord, 1993) consisting of 28 items encompassing six dimensions

of coping strategies i.e. Logics, Involvement, Social Support, Task Strategies, Time Management and Home and Work Relations. The scores of the subjects were compared in terms of marital status, age, and level of teaching with the help of 'T' test and 'F' test was used for comparing experience. The results revealed that marital status, age, and experience were found to be significant determinants of stress-coping, whereas the scores did not differ significantly on the basis of level of teaching. Married teachers in the age range of 40-60 years, with higher experience can cope better with the job stress than their counterparts.

Singh (2010)²⁶ conducted a study in Jammu City by using incidental sampling technique, a sample of 153 male and female teachers, arts, science and commerce teachers from 16 Senior Secondary Schools participated in the study. Ways of coping Questionnaire by Folkman and Lazarus (1988) were used to collect data. Data were analyzed by using stepwise multiple regression analysis. The results revealed the maximum use of 'Distancing Coping Strategy' by the teachers to combat stress.

From above discussion it is obvious that a plethora of research work have been done dealing with various aspects of coping strategies. These works have paved the base for further research in this field.

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