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### Coping with Occupational Stress, Burnout and the Moderating Effect of Social Support on Teachers' Stress

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#### Abstract

The present study aimed to assess occupational stress, burnout, coping strategies adopted by female teachers to address occupational stress, and the moderating effect of social support. The study adopted quantitative cross-sectional design. The sample was collected from 1,386 teachers at 86 private schools. The data was analysed using SPSS 22.0. The stepwise multiple regression, linear regression, Pearson correlation, and two-way ANOVA were used, and a p-value of 0.05 was significant. The study evaluated the moderating variable social support effect and found a significant correlation between social support, burnout, and coping strategies ( $p = 0.01$ ). The results of the study revealed that teachers were found to use dysfunctional and emotional coping strategies most often; however, the coping strategies were significantly correlated with burnout ( $p = 0.003$ ). Based on the results, the higher level of occupational stress and a moderate level of burnout were validated. Teachers are physically tired, and they have more to do at work than they can do in the time they have or with the skills they have. The study concluded that there is a dire need to promote a healthy working environment for better teacher performance.

**Keywords:** Occupational stress, teachers, burnout, coping, social support

#### Introduction

The teaching profession is one of the most important and highly impactful professions as it is directly associated with the personality development of children; and is reflected in the nation-building profession (Khurshid, 2011). Teachers significantly affect students' developing brains and transform them into a unique form (Sangeeta & Singh, 2017). Teachers' attitude toward students are the key aspect of the learning and personality development of the pupil. However, in the situation where the economic condition of teachers is not up to the mark to enjoy their social well-being, it is difficult to focus on the development of students (Khatti, Munshi & Mirza, 2011). Teacher's mental health is least studied subject, though teachers' performance is highly associated with teachers' physical and mental health and well-being. A satisfied teacher performs her duty with her maximum potential and positivity (Sangeeta & Singh, 2017). The higher level of occupational stress or burnout harms teachers and students and negatively influences educational institutions' objectives (Rana & Soodan, 2019).

## Literature Review

The world health organization (WHO) defines occupational stress as the response of an individual exhibited when the work-related demand, as well as pressures, do not match the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of people, and it challenges the abilities of individuals to cope with it (WHO, 2001). On the other hand, Beehr & Newman (1979) defined occupational stress as a condition when the factors related to the job and the employees interact with each other to change a worker's psychological and physiological state. As a result, employees are forced to depart from normal functioning. Occupational stress is also referred to as a deviation from normal functioning (psychological or physiological) caused by demands on the individual due to the immediate work environment (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983). Burnout is a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, loss of a sense of self-accomplishment, and depersonalization among working populations (Maslach & Leiter, 2006; 2008). Burnout occurs when individuals are confronted with situations like access to work, lack of control over the workplace environment, lack of fair distribution of tasks, uneven or even no rewards or no appreciation at work, and absence of good community or social support within the school.

### *Coping strategies*

Coping is the constant change in cognitive and behavioural efforts of a person to address the internal and external demands placed on him; often, these demands are beyond the capabilities of the person or found difficult for an individual to be fulfilled (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman, 2010). Coping is further classified into problem-focused, emotion- focused and dysfunctional coping strategies, each of them has further sub classes. Utilizing coping strategies is highly associated with gender, as men and women utilize coping strategies differently (Jendle & Wallnas, 2017; Shah, Channa & Talpur, 2020). It is commonly observed among women to utilize emotion-focused coping strategies directed toward addressing feelings resulting from the stressor, rather than focusing on dealing with the stressor itself (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). The theoretical tend and befriend model suggested regarding women's behaviour to seek social support is quite usual. According to the approach of this theory and looking at the previous research in a similar context, women appear to be more susceptible to seeking social support during stressful encounters when compared to men (Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002).

### *Social support*

Social support is a coping response when an individual is confronted with stressful encounters. Therefore, they try to find social support for mainly two reasons, i.e. (i) instrumental reason and (ii) emotional reason. Instrumental reasons work as a need for advice, assistance or information about the stressor; this is referred as a problem-focused approach (Lazarus, 1991). Whereas, when people seek social support for emotional reasons such as sympathy, moral support, or understanding, it falls under an emotion-focused coping strategy (Folkman, 2013). Further, the authors stated that both functions of social support are distinguished conceptually and often co-occur. It is often assumed to be a double-edged sword but seems functional in many ways. For example, if a person is anxious due to a stressful event can be calmed down after getting emotional support which encourages the stressed person to utilize problem-focused coping (Jendle & Wallnas, 2017). The support sometimes becomes a source of ventilation of stressed feelings, and most of the time, the head of social support is family, friends, co-workers or significant others (Taylor, 2011).

In most cases, it is observed that the teachers who have social support in their schools are more satisfied and productive (Akhtar, Hashmi & Naqvi, 2010). When social support is received from administrators, heads of schools are more effective and support teachers' mental and physical health while buffering the harmful effect of various stressors (Jendle & Wallnas, 2017). Thus, in the present study, social support is a moderating variable to analyze *if social support affects the coping process to promote effective coping*. The study analyzed the effect of social support on teachers. Based on the literature presented, social support helps teachers ease their stress as an identified source of support for the teachers to buffer the stress effects.

## Methodology

The present study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional design. The teachers working in private schools were selected according to the selection criteria of the study; teachers were invited to take part and based on their willingness to take part in the study, they were included. The research locale was Hyderabad city, the sample size was 1,386 private school teachers. The probability sampling technique was used as the researcher has set criteria for sample selection. Further, a random sampling method was used where the investigator invited teachers who were selected according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Female teachers working in private schools were included in the study. Married, unmarried junior and senior teachers were included. Teachers from junior and secondary both sections were included in the study.

## Research instrument and data analysis

The study focused on the prevalence of occupational stress, burnout, and coping strategies of female teachers working in private schools. The moderating effect of social support was analysed. Therefore, Oldenburg inventory (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008) was used to measure burnout. Teachers Stress Inventory was used to measure occupational stress and Brief COPE inventory (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989) was used to measure coping strategies. For measuring social support subscale was taken from Cope inventory (the original version of Brief COPE). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics for windows, version 22.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp) was used for data analysis. The data was presented as frequency distribution with the number and percentage of respondents responding to each category; a p-value <0.05 was significant.

## Research objectives

To analyze the most adapted coping strategies of female private school teachers for coping with stress effectively or they are burned out

## Hypothesis

H<sub>0</sub>: No statistically significant relationship exists between coping strategies adapted by female private school teachers and burnout.

H<sub>0</sub>: No statistically significant relationship exists between social support, burnout and coping strategies utilized by the teachers working

H<sub>0</sub>: No statistically significant relationship exists between occupational stress among private school teachers and burnout.

## Result

### *Prevalence of occupational stress and burnout*

Overall, occupational stress was classified into three levels i.e., lower level of stress, a moderate level of stress and a higher level of stress. Based on the results obtained from the descriptive statistics (cut-off ratio) of overall stress, the highest number of respondents (n=586, 42.3%) were experiencing a higher level of stress, followed by a moderate level of stress (n=474, 34.2%), whereas 23.5% of teachers were experiencing a lower level of stress.

Table 1: The frequencies of the level of occupational stress

Level of stress	Number of respondents	Valid percent
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Lower level of stress	326	23.5
Moderate level of stress	474	34.2
Higher level of stress	586	42.3

### **Overall stress**

The frequencies and descriptive analysis of the data revealed that the significant proportion of teachers was experiencing a moderate level of burnout (n=536, 38.7%), followed by a lower level of burnout (n=470, 33.9%); however, a considerable number of participants were indicated to experience lower level of burnout (n=380, 27.4%). The summary table and bar graph are given below (Table 2).

Table 2: The frequencies of burnout among female teachers

<b>Burnout</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>
<b>The lower level of burnout</b>	470	33.9
<b>Moderate level of burnout</b>	536	38.7
<b>Higher level of burnout</b>	380	27.4

N = 1386

### **Results Pearson correlation**

The Pearson correlation test was calculated and found a statistically significant relationship between occupational stress and burnout, with a p- value <0.001. Thus, null hypothesis is rejected that no statistically significant relationship between occupational stress among female private school teachers and burnout was found.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of occupational stress and burnout

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. deviation±</b>
Overall stress	128.1501	53.27760
Burnout	36.9704	4.19900

Table 4: Results of Pearson correlations

<b>Pearson correlations</b>	<b>Sig (2-tailed)</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>0.406**</b>	.003	1386

The correlation is significant at the < 0.01 level

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of subscales of Brief COPE

<b>Self-distraction</b>	<b>4.5361</b>	<b>1.05676</b>
<b>Active coping</b>	4.0281	1.34725
<b>Denial</b>	5.7374	1.41687
<b>Emotional support</b>	5.7460	1.42256

<b>Instrumental support</b>	5.6833	1.24244
<b>Behavioural disengagement</b>	6.9957	1.47665
<b>Venting</b>	6.9902	1.41638
<b>Positive reframing</b>	4.0498	1.01026
<b>Planning</b>	4.5808	1.08267
<b>Acceptance</b>	4.6039	1.57300
<b>Religion</b>	7.3268	1.57300
<b>Self-blame</b>	6.5058	1.35701
<b>Humour</b>	6.9827	1.42072

The descriptive statistics of coping strategies indicated that female teachers' most adapted coping strategies were dysfunctional coping strategies (Mean, 27.50, SD± 3.39) followed by emotion-focused coping strategies (Mean, 26.70, SD±2.49). The lowest values were observed for problem-focused coping strategies (Mean, 14.29, SD± 2.26).

Table 6: Descriptive statistics coping strategies

<b>Coping strategies</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.td Deviation±</b>
<b>Problem-focused</b>	14.2922	2.26202
<b>Emotion-focused</b>	26.7092	2.49705
<b>Dysfunctional coping</b>	27.5007	3.39191
N=1,386		

### **Social support**

Table: 7 presents frequencies of social support (moderating variable), it includes 3 items. The highest proportion of respondents reported, "I have been doing this at medium amount" (37%, n= 525). However, for item 2 (I talked to people who had similar experiences to what they did) most of the study participants reported, "I do it a little" (33%, n=660). For item 3, the highest frequencies were obtained for I do it a little (47%, n=635), and the lowest for I do it a lot (3% n= 24).

Table: 7 Frequencies of social support

<b>Items of social support</b>	<b>I usually don't do this at all. N (%)</b>	<b>I usually do this a little bit N (%)</b>	<b>I usually do this a medium amount N (%)</b>	<b>I usually do this a lot N (%)</b>
I've been getting help and advice from others	168(15)	170(12)	525(37)	523(36)
I talk to people who had similar experiences to what they did	467(33)	660(47)	190(13)	69(5)
I talk to someone to discover more about the situation	411(29)	635(47)	298(21)	24(3)

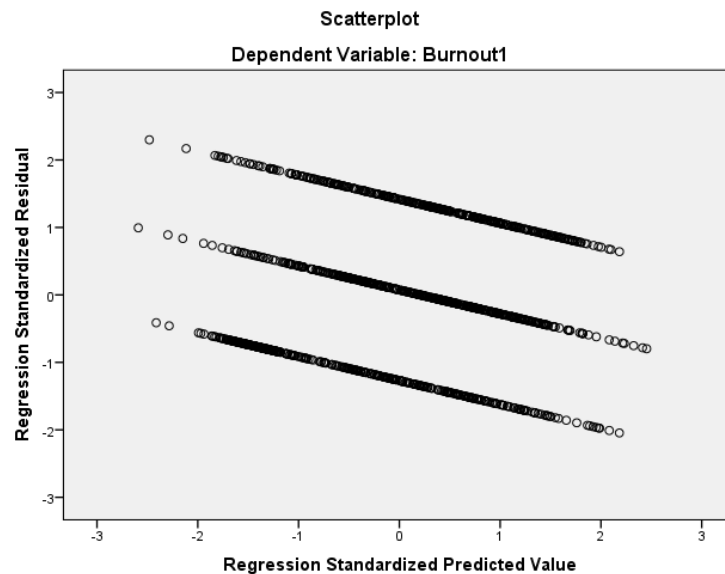
### **Hypothesis:2**

*H<sub>0</sub>: There is no statistically significant relationship between social support, burnout and coping strategies utilized by the teachers working in private schools.*

The linear regression analysis was calculated to test the significance of the moderating variables, including social support, the dependent variable burnout and the independent variable coping strategies. The results indicated a statistically significant relationship with ( $p < 0.001$ ). The regression model was developed as  $b = -351$   $t(-2.168)$   $F(43.715)$   $R^2$  of .112 ( $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected that there is no statically significant relationship between social support coping strategies and burnout. Table 6 presents the results of the linear regression analysis.

Table: 8 Results of Linear regression analysis

<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Df</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>F change</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>Sig</i>
.335	.112	4	-2.168	-.351	43.715	43.715	24.215	0.000



## Discussion and recommendations

The occupational stress and burnout among female teachers working in private schools were validated based on the results obtained from the study. The significant positive relationship ( $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ ) illustrates that a higher level of occupational stress leads to burnout; as stress increases, burnout increases proportionately. The overall results of the Brief COPE inventory demonstrated that the most used coping strategies were religious coping, venting, behavioural disengagement, and emotional support. Religious coping strategies were the most used coping strategy by the teachers in our study, which is consistent with the findings of the studies conducted in Islamic countries (Azman, Jamir Singh & Suleman, 2017; Mahmoudi, Ebadi & Akbarzadeh, 2007). In contrast, studies conducted in Western countries have been reported to utilize coping strategies such as playing music, dancing, and other leisure activities to ease stress (Johnstone, 1989, Cockburn, 1996). The most noted activities among religious coping strategies are reading the Quran and Hadith, offering Salah (prayer) and making doa, which provides them strength to face the challenging working conditions. This is technically related to the cultural and religious beliefs and practices that help an individual feel relaxed and provide mental peace. Venting is a way to express and consider a problematic situation, and most respondents indicated to use that a lot. This illustrates that teachers were more likely to express their stressors, which is helpful in a way to ease their stress. However, it may not help teachers to solve problematic situations; instead, it provides relaxation to think about the solution later. The female private school teachers were not primarily using strategies like planning and active coping, which illustrates that teachers were not addressing stress technically. Alternatively, they were more comfortable using strategies like religion, which provides them strength to face problems or venting, which is a way to ease their feelings of being stressed or venting negative emotions or behavioural disengagement, which helps them to take their



mind off the problem. However, it is necessary to address the stress and address it to alter the stressful encounter. The problem-focused coping strategies included three different strategies, i.e., active coping, use of instrumental support, and planning. Participants' responses indicated teachers were not utilizing problem-focused strategies too frequently.

The moderating effect of social support was analyzed to assess the relationship between coping strategies and burnout. An inverse significant regression model was developed as  $b = -351$   $t(-2.168)$   $F(43.715)$   $R^2$  of .112 ( $p < 0.001$ ). The significant inverse effect of social support shows that when social support increases, it helps in the coping process to prevent burnout. Teachers prefer utilizing social support to safeguard themselves from burnout. However, the amount of social support may not address stress confronted by teachers therefore, a higher proportion of respondents were experiencing higher level of stress. Due to the heavy workload and strict monitoring in private schools do not allow teachers to develop social support networks among fellow teachers. These findings were consistent with the study reported by Jendle & Wallnas (2017), which stated that if an individual is anxious due to a stressful encounter, social support helps them to calm down. Social support encourages the person to utilize a better coping strategy later. Social support is one of the significant sources of ventilation of negative emotions; often, that social support comes from family, co-workers, and friends.

## Recommendations

The present study's findings suggest a dire need to improve working conditions for teachers. Teachers should be provided appropriate benefits and a conducive working environment to feel emotionally and socially interactive, intellectual, and productive. To promote a healthy working environment for teachers, following steps can be taken: division of workload among teachers fairly, assigning duties to the teachers matching their interest and abilities, by a positive strong sense of collegiality, involvement of teachers in decision making; positive feedback, appropriate wages, appreciation and rewards for their efforts and hard work; optimum level of resources and facilities for teaching, in hand support for teachers to resolve their issues, and flexible school policies to minimize the level of occupational stress among teachers.

## Conclusion

Conclusively, based on the results of the present study, the most utilized coping strategies of female private school teachers were religious coping strategies, venting, behavioral disengagement and emotional support; teachers indicated to have a moderate level of social support all the utilized coping strategies could prevent higher level of burnout among teachers. Still, the possessed coping strategy could not help teachers keep up with the good mental health. A significant proportion of respondents were experiencing a higher level of occupational stress, and a considerable number of teachers were experiencing a higher level of burnout. This indicates that teachers were confronted with challenging working conditions and needed stress managing training to address stress technically.

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