

Gender Differences in Stress and Coping Strategies among School Teachers

Hema Sharma
Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla.

The present study is an attempt to examine the gender differences in stress and coping behavior among school (Govt and Public) teachers both males and females (n=200) at Primary as well as Secondary level. To measure stress, level Teacher Stress Survey (Malik, 1993) was used and coping behavior was observed by using Cope inventory (Carver, Scheier and weintraub in 1989). Coping behavior was assessed at two levels 1) Problem focused coping and 2) Emotion Focused Coping behavior. The results indicated that job related stress is significantly and positively related to problems with regard to students, parents, administration and to other teachers for the total sample as well as for both males and females. Overall, female teachers have been found to experience more stress than their male counterparts. However, male teachers have been found to be using more Problem Focused Coping Strategies and females have been found to be using more Emotion Focused Coping Strategies.

KEY WORDS: Stress, Coping Behavior, Gender, School Teachers.

Modern living has brought tremendous pressure and stress on the employees. Recently, job stress has come into prominent work related research topic. Stress and all its related problems come both from the workplace and from the individual (**British Medical Association, 1998**). One occupation which has undergone enormous amount transformation and change is teaching. A substantiate amount of literature from around the world points to the fact that teaching is a stressful occupation (**Kyaricou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Wong, 1989; Travers & Cooper, 1997; Pithers & Cohen, 1998; Sud & Malik, 1999; McCormic et al., 2011**).

The stress experienced by teachers has been a subject of growing interest in recent years (**Greenglass et.,al., 1996**). A variety of factors have been identified as compromising the occupational stress teachers face. These factors include: interpersonal demands, the diversity of tasks required, lack of professional recognition & discipline problems in the classroom (**Pithers, 1995**), lack of support (**Chan, 1998**) and amount of paper work required and lack of resources provided (**Carlson & Thompson, 1995**). According to French, **Caplan & Van Harrison (1982)** work stress results primarily from an incompatible person-environment fit that produces psychological strain and stress related to physical disorders. When teachers feel their investments in their students, colleagues and school are greater than the outcomes they receive; they are likely to experience emotional, psychological & professional stress (**Van Horn et al., 2001; Taris et al., 2001 & Van Horn et al., 1999**). Occupational stress leads to many unpleasant and often irreversible consequences in employees. The behavioral consequences of stress in employees are alcohol and substance use (**Frone, 2003**).

Coping can be defined as the process of managing external or internal demands that are perceived as taking or exceeding a person's resources (**Lazarus & Folkman, 1984**). According to **Snyder & Pulvers (2001)**, coping reflects thinking, feeling or action so as to preserve a satisfied psychological state when it is threatened. A stressful circumstance can be rendered considerably less stressful if you know how to cope with it (**Blonna, 2005; Corbin and others, 2006; Greenberg, 2006**). According to **Santrock (2006)**, coping involves managing taxing circumstances, expending effort to solve life's problems, seeking to master or reduce stress. Hence, coping is central to the stress process and its additional outcomes. People cope with stress in many ways. Individuals have their own styles of coping (**Weiten & Lloyd, 2003**). From a motivational perspective, **Skinner & Wellborn (1994)** conceptualize coping as "an organization construct that describes how people regulate their own behavior emotion and motivational orientation under conditions of psychological distress."

In Problem Focused Coping (aimed at problem solving to alter the source of stress) and Emotion Focused Coping (aimed at managing or reducing the emotional stress) are the two dimensions of coping (**Folkman & Lazarus, 1980**). In the emotion regulation behaviors such as attention shifting and attention focusing can be used to regulate emotional arousal; for example, shifting attention from a negative stimulus appears to diminish arousal or frustration (**Rothbart, Ziaie & O' Boyle, 1992; Tronick, 1989**).

In contrast, problem- focused coping attempts to manage the stressful problems or situations. The most common problem-focused coping strategies include active coping, direct problem solving and planning (**Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Sandler, Tein, & West, 1994**). Sometimes but not always, categories such as cognitive decision making and seeking information (**Sandler et.al., 1994**) or instrumental social support (**Carver et.al., 1989**) are grouped within problem-focused modes of coping.

In short, coping refers to responding to stress in a way that reduces the threat and its effects; include what a person does, feels or thinks in order to master, tolerate or to decrease the negative effects of a stressful situation.

Method

Sample

Questionnaires were administered to a quota sample of 200 an equal number of public school and Govt. school teachers of Himachal Pradesh. And to make the sample more representable an equal number of males and females were taken from both elementary as well as secondary levels of the schools.

Measures

Demographic and Biographic Data: Data was collected on 8 demographic characteristics- age, gender, educational qualification, no. of years in service, marital status, size of school, grade level taught and type of school.

Teacher Stress Survey: This inventory was developed by Malik in 1993. It contains 38 stressful events. It represents the type of stressful situations teachers experience at work in India. These stressful situations are related to students, school administration, parents and interpersonal conflict with other teachers. Cronbach alpha coefficient of reliability was found to be .98.

Cope Inventory: Developed by Carver, Scheier and Weintraub in 1989 has been used. It is a multidimensional coping inventory to assess the different ways in which people respond to stress. It comprises of 60 items having a 4- point rating scale ranging from 1(I usually don't do this at all) to 4 (I usually do this a lot). There are 4 items in each of the 15 sub-scales, for the present study these scales were further clubbed into Problem Focused Coping and Emotion Focused Coping. The Cronbach's alpha reliability for college students range from .45 to .92 for all the sub-scales and test- retest reliability ranged from .42 to .89 on two samples (Carver, weintraub and Scheier, 1989).

Procedure

All the questionnaires were stapled together in the following order- demographic profile, teachers stress survey followed by cope inventory and then they were distributed to the teachers in their respective schools. Instructions for these questionnaires were written clearly on the top of each test.

Results and Discussion

The main findings of the present study are that job related stress significantly & positively related to students for total sample ($r=.493, P<.01$), for males ($r=.422, P<.01$) as well as for females ($r=.619, P<.01$) and it shows that females ($M=31.14$) are experiencing more job stress due to students as compared to their male counterparts ($M=27.98$).

Job related stress is also significantly and positively related to parents or the total sample ($r=.575, P<.01$), for males ($r=.508, P<.01$) as well as for females ($r=.642, P<.01$) showing that female teachers ($M=10.62$) are experiencing more stress due to parents than male teachers ($M=4.31$).

Job related stress is also significantly and positively related to administration or the total sample ($r=.497, P<.01$), for males ($r=.434, P<.01$) as well as for females ($r=.796, P<.01$) showing that female teachers ($M=15.61$) are experiencing more stress due to parents than male teachers ($M=14.47$).

Job related stress is also significantly and positively related to the problems related to other teachers for the total sample ($r=.497, P<.01$), for males ($r=.340, P<.01$) as well as for females ($r=.782, P<.01$) showing that female teachers ($M=13.96$) are experiencing more stress due to parents than male teachers ($M=7.44$).

Female teachers are reporting significantly high overall job stress ($M=71.83$) than their male counterparts ($M=54.20$).

Table 1

Means and SDs of Scores on Various Measures by Gender				
Variables	Males		Females	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Overall Job Related Stress	54.20	20.369	71.83	37.825
Students	27.98	9.177	31.14	10.416
Parents	4.31	6.172	10.62	12.664
Administration	14.47	7.518	15.61	12.190
Other Teachers	7.44	6.059	13.96	2.345
Positive Reinterpretation & Growth (P)	14.83	1.371	13.29	2.345
Mental Disengagement (E)	10.41	1.577	10.98	2.103
Venting (E)	6.69	2.038	9.74	2.946
Instrumental Social Support (P)	6.92	2.440	10.63	2.008
Active Coping (P)	11.75	2.289	11.17	1.875
Denial (E)	7.61	1.378	8.27	2.122
Religious Coping (E)	15.37	1.433	15.42	1.347
Humor (E)	7.11	2.570	5.73	2.518
Behaviour Disengagement (E)	4.91	2.085	6.20	2.301
Restraint (P)	9.55	1.127	9.98	1.714
Emotional Social support (E)	6.11	2.103	9.92	2.600
Substance Use (E)	7.41	1.609	4.00	.000
Acceptance (E)	7.57	1.075	8.19	1.368
Suppression of Competing Activities (E)	10.21	2.143	10.12	1.672
Planning (P)	13.98	2.065	12.19	2.087

(P) Problem Focused Coping

(E) Emotion Focused Coping

Problem Focused Coping serves the function of finding a set of actions that are effective in bringing about desired outcome. It is used when control is perceived over the situation. In contrast *Emotion Focused Coping* is both construct emotion expression and explosive emotional discharge (Stanton, Danoff-Burg, Camerson & Ellis, 1994). It removes some of the distress that can interfere with problem focused coping efforts and can thereby make problem focused coping easier. Similarly, problem focused coping can render a threat less forbidding, thereby diminishing emotional distress. Certain kinds of emotion focused coping has both problem focused and emotion focused coping aspects (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

With regard to Problem Focused Coping, Job related stress turned out to be significantly and negatively related to positive reinterpretation and growth for the total sample ($r = -.179$, $P < .05$), Instrumental social support ($r = -.172$, $P < .05$), suppression of competing activities ($r = -.427$, $P < .01$) and planning ($r = -.164$, $P < .01$).

Job related stress turned out to be significantly and negatively related to active coping for female teachers ($r = -.266$, $P < .01$). However, for males and for total sample, results turned out to be non-significant.

However, job related stress turned out to be non significant with restraint as a coping strategy for the total sample as well as for males and females.

In the present study, male teachers are making more use of overall problem focused coping strategies as compared to their female counterparts. Male teachers have been found to make more use of positive reinterpretation and growth, active coping, suppression of competing activities and planning. Ramya & Parthasarathy (2009) carried out a study to examine the coping patterns followed by the junior college students. The study findings revealed that male students mostly used problem-focused coping strategies as compared to females.

With regard to Emotion Focused Coping. Job related stress turned out to be significantly and negatively related to mental disengagement for the total sample ($r = -.183, P < .05$), religious coping ($r = -.159, P < .05$), and humor ($r = -.141, P < .05$).

However, job related stress turned out to be significantly and positively related to focus on and venting of emotions for the total sample ($r = .280, P < .01$), behavior disengagement ($r = .243, P < .01$), use of emotional social support ($r = .164, P < .05$), substance use ($r = .262, P < .01$) and acceptance ($r = .234, P < .01$).

The relationship of job stress is significantly and negatively related to denial for females ($r = -.233, P < .01$). However, no significant relationship has emerged with regard to total sample and male teachers.

Table 1 shows that for, mental disengagement ($P < .05$), focus on venting of emotions ($P < .01$), use of instrumental social support ($P < .01$), behavior disengagement ($P < .01$), emotional social support ($P < .01$), and for acceptance ($P < .01$) females have significantly higher mean value as compared to their male counterparts. Whereas, with regard to positive reinterpretation and growth ($P < .01$), humor ($P < .01$), substance use ($P < .01$) and planning ($P < .01$), males have score significantly higher as compared to females. No significant gender differences have emerged on other variables of the study.

The results of the present study reveals that females are making more use of emotion focused coping strategies to deal with stress than males. Female teachers have been found to make more use of mental disengagement, venting, behavioural disengagement, emotional social support, and acceptance. Further, it is evident from Table 1 that females are also reporting more stress due to parents of students, students, school administration and their colleagues as compared to their male counterparts who are relying more on problem focused coping.

Socialization theory propose that, in virtually all cultures, boys and girls are subject to different socialization pressures and practices which result in sex-differentiated patterns of behavior (Lippa, 2010). Matud (2004) also observed that women were lower on rational coping and men were having more emotional inhibition (Enzlinac, Mathieub, Demyttenaereac 2001).

According to Hammermeister and Burton (2004), studies have shown that women are more socialized from birth to use emotion-focused coping strategies and men are more socialized to use problem-focused coping strategies. Emotion-focused coping has been consistently associated with high levels of anxiety and low levels of stress adaptation (Zeidner, 1995).

Thus the present finding is consistent with the previous studies which show that girls use more Emotion Focused Coping than boys (Washburn-Ormachea et.al.,2004;_Brougham et al. 2009; Leigh et al. 2015, Brems & Johnson, 1989;Stone & Neale, 1984,).

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