



## AN EXPLORATORY STUDY TO ASSESS THE LEVELS OF STRESS AND THE COPING STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY WOMEN AGED BETWEEN 35 TO 55 YEARS RESIDING IN VILLAGE DHAHAN, DISTRICT SBS NAGAR, PUNJAB.

<sup>1</sup>Ramandeep Kaur,<sup>2</sup> Dr. Rajwant Kaur Randhawa,

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Scholar, Desh Bhagat University, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Desh Bhagat University, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab.

**Abstract :** Life offers a succession of challenges and demands. Sometimes the demands really seem to pile up or become very difficult to meet which is called stress. We learn and grow from such challenges and develop our resources for meeting the future demands. These are known as coping strategies. An exploratory study was conducted to assess the levels of stress and coping strategies adopted by women aged between 35 to 55 years residing in village Dhahan, District Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Punjab. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample of 60 women. Structured stress scale and modified coping response inventory were used to collect the data. The findings revealed that 91.7% women had moderate levels of stress and 96.7% used satisfactory approach coping strategies and 78.3% used satisfactory avoidance coping strategies. Weakly negative correlation exists between levels of stress and approach coping strategies and weakly positive correlation exists between levels of stress and avoidance coping strategies.

**Keywords:** Stress, Coping strategies, Women.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is an inevitable and unavoidable component of life due to increasing complexities and competitiveness in living standards. The speed at which change is taking place in the world is certainly overwhelming and breathe taking.<sup>1</sup> We all are living on a planet being shaken by the largest crisis in history and we need to learn, not only how to control stress but how to eliminate its source. Those who do not learn to control stress will pay with their health and peace of mind. However, those who learn how to identify the damaging effects of stress can enjoy a healthier, more satisfying lifestyle. Some people used to think that stress only affects the wealthy people or people who held positions of great responsibility. But household women also fall high on stress scale. Every area of life produces stress. Most experts agree that interpersonal relationships are the main sources of stress.<sup>2</sup>

Rick Nauert conducted a prospective study on levels of stress, lifestyle and other matters among 1,462 middle-aged women in Gothenburg, Sweden. Interview schedule was used to collect data. This study was initiated at the end of the 1960s, and continued until 2005. Results showed that in 1968-1969, 28 percent of women stated that they suffered from nervousness, and 36 percent stated that they experienced stress. Study concluded that by 2004-2005, the percentage of women who experienced stress had more than doubled upto 75%.<sup>3</sup>

Middle age is the age to establish one's family. The causes of stress in middle aged women are mainly work, family and health. Middle age is the period marked by physical and psychological changes. Stress leads to specific physical diseases, worries and anxiety. These may flow over into other areas causing mental disease, family and social disorder and loss of spiritual dimension which is necessary in order to survive and overcome life's problems. When it becomes impossible to change one's environment then personal changes become necessary.<sup>2</sup>

Middle aged women experience role changes, departure of children, financial burden, care taking of elderly and loss of friends. For women, mid-life has been hypothesized to be either a time of emptiness and depression, stemming from the empty nest syndrome<sup>4</sup> or from menopause<sup>5</sup> or alternatively a time of frantic overload from juggling the multiple roles of parent and caretaker for elderly parents, members of so-called sandwich generation.<sup>6</sup>

Judith A. Berg (2011) conducted a study to assess the stress of caregiving in 933 women between ages of 40 to 55 in the Netherlands. Midlife women assume major responsibility for caregiving of children. Caregivers report health effects including

psychologic distress, lowered life satisfaction, interpersonal conflict, social isolation, sleep disturbances, disturbed eating patterns, higher blood pressure and a variety of physical problems. Study concluded that caregiving also produces long term effects such as morbidity, mortality and financial problems. The most serious long term effect for female informal caregivers is financial.<sup>7</sup> The research by Roth and Cohen on coping identified two basic orientations to stress- approach and avoidance. These orientations refer to the cognitive and emotional activity that is oriented either to or away from a threat. Approach strategies refer to attempting to take appropriate action to either change a situation or to make it more controllable. On the other hand, avoidance strategies attempt to protect the individual from the overwhelming power of the stressor by distancing the individual from the experience.<sup>8</sup>

### Statement of the problem

An exploratory study to assess the levels of stress and the coping strategies adopted by women aged between 35 to 55 years residing in village Dhahan, district Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Punjab.

### Objectives

- 1.To assess the levels of stress among the women aged between 35-55 years.
- 2.To explore the coping strategies adopted by the women aged between 35-55 years.
- 3.To correlate the levels of stress and coping strategies adopted by the women aged between 35-55 years.
- 4.To associate the levels of stress and coping strategies adopted by the women aged between 35-55 years with selected socio-demographic variables such as age, education status, marital status, family income, family size and type of family.

## II.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Research approach and design**-Research approach and design used in the present study was quantitative approach and design was non experimental i.e. Exploratory.

### Variables under study

The Dependent variables were levels of stress and coping strategies. The Independent variables were age, educational status, marital status, religion, family income, family size and type of family.

### Sample size

Sample size for the study was 60 women aged between 35 to 55 years residing in village Dhahan, District Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Punjab.

### Sampling technique

Technique used for sampling for present study was purposive sampling.

### Development and Description of tools

Three tools were developed for measuring the levels of stress and coping strategies adopted by the women aged between 35 to 55 years of age. The three tools used were:

#### Part I: Socio-demographic profile

#### Part II: Structured Stress Scale

#### Part III: Modified Coping responses inventory

##### Part I

This part consisted of variables related to age, educational status, marital status, religion, socio-economic status, family size and type of family.

##### Part II

The second tool used in the study for measuring the stress levels was the **Structured Stress Scale**. The Structured Stress Scale was a paper and pencil questionnaire consisting of sixteen questions. Each item was designed to identify how unpredictable, uncontrollable or overloaded the respondent has found his or her life to be during stressful life events preceding completion of the instrument. Responses were assessed on a 5 point scale. All the items except item no. 3 were scored as '1' = 'never' and '5' = 'very often'. Item no.3 was scored as '1' = 'very often' and '5' = 'never'.

##### Part III

The third tool used in the study was **Modified Coping responses inventory**. This tool was a 42-item self-report measure of coping responses. The Modified Coping responses inventory was designed to measure two different types of coping responses to stressful life circumstances. The tool measure approach-coping and avoidance coping. 31 items measure approach coping and 11 items measure avoidance coping. Further approach coping, avoidance coping and overall coping is categorized into poor, satisfactory and good coping strategies. Responses were assessed on 4-point scale with NO, Not at all= 0; YES, Once or Twice= 1; YES, Sometimes= 2 and YES, Fairly often= 3.

### Reliability of tool

After establishing the validity of the tool, final tool was made and then reliability of the tool was tested in the study population by test-retest method. Reliability of structured stress scale is 0.7 and modified coping response inventory is 0.86.

### Data collection procedure

A written permission was taken from the Sarpanch of the village Dhahan, District Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Punjab. The list of selected women was prepared by the investigator. Written informed consent was taken from the selected women.

First of all, self introduction was given to the sample and purpose of gathering information was explained. They were assured that their responses will be kept confidential. Difficult questions were explained for the ease of sample women. Approximately 45 mins-1 hour was taken by each respondent to fill the questionnaire.

### Ethical considerations

- A written permission was taken from the Sarpanch of the village Dhahan, District Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Punjab for conducting the study.
- Subjects were provided with the knowledge regarding the purpose of research study and the duration of involvement.
- Anonymity of subjects was maintained.
- The subjects were ensured of the confidentiality of subjects.

### III.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Organization of the data for analysis

Section 1: Sample characteristics

Section 2: Findings related to distribution of subjects as per levels of stress and use of coping strategies

Section 3: Findings related to association of the levels of stress and coping strategies adopted by the women aged between 35-55 years with selected socio-demographic variables.

#### SECTION 1: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

TABLE - 1

Frequency and percentage distribution of sample characteristics

N= 60			
Sr. No.	Characteristics	N	Percentage %
1.	<b>Age (in years)</b>		
	a. 35-40	15	25
	b. 41-45	23	38.33
	c. 46-50	11	18.33
	d. 51-55	11	18.33
2.	<b>Marital Status</b>		
	a. Married	53	88.33
	b. Unmarried	0	0
	c. Widow	6	10
	d. Separated	1	1.67
3.	<b>Education status</b>		
	a. Illiterate	8	13.33
	b. 5-8 <sup>th</sup> standard	15	25
	c. 9-10 <sup>th</sup> standard	30	50
	d. Above 10 <sup>th</sup> standard	7	11.67
4.	<b>Socio-economic status (monthly)</b>		
	a. Rs.1000-5000	15	25
	b. Rs. 5001-10000	25	41.67
	c. Rs. 10001- 15000	14	23.33
	d. Above Rs.15001	6	10
5.	<b>Religion</b>		
	a. Hindu	6	10
	b. Muslim	3	5
	c. Sikh	47	78.33
	d. Christian	4	6.67
	e. Others	0	0
6.	<b>Type of family</b>		
	a. Nuclear family	38	63.33
	b. Joint family	22	36.67
7.	<b>Family size</b>		
	a. 2-4 members	23	38.33
	b. 5-6 members	28	46.67
	c. 7-8 members	8	13.33
	d. Above 8 members	1	1.67

Table 1 revealed the frequency and percentage distribution of socio-demographic variables among women aged between 35-55 years. It showed that women were distributed into various categories according to age, marital status, education status, socio-economic status, religion, type of family and family size.

It is depicted that 23 (38.33 %) of women belonged to age group 41-45 years, 15 (25 %) to 35-40 years, followed by 11 (18.33 %) to 46-50 years and 11 (18.33 %) belonged to 51-55 years. Majority of women 53 (88.33 %) were married followed by 6 (10 %) widow and the least 1 (1.67 %) were separated. Most of the women i.e. 30 (50%) belonged to 9-10<sup>th</sup> standard followed by 15 (25%) belonged to 5-8<sup>th</sup> standard and 8 (13.33 %) to illiterate group and the least 7 (11.67 %) to above 10<sup>th</sup> standard education status. Majority of women i.e. 25 (41.67 %) had Rs.5001-10000 monthly income followed by 15 (25 %) belonged to Rs.1000-5000, 14 (23.33 %) belonged to Rs.10001-15000 and 6 (10 %) belonged to above Rs. 15001. Majority of women 47 (78.33 %) were Sikh followed by 6 (10 %) were Hindu and 4 (6.67 %) were Christian and the least 3 (5 %) were Muslims. Majority of women i.e. 38 (63.33 %) belonged to nuclear family and 22 (36.67 %) to joint family. It is represented that, 28 (46.67%) belonged to 5-6 members family size, 23 (38.33 %) to 2-4 members family size, followed by 8 (13.33 %) to 7-8 members family size and the least 1 (1.67%) to above 8 members family size.

Hence it can be concluded that out of 60 women, maximum of women were between the age group 41-45, married, with 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> standard education status and belonged to Rs.5000- 10001 monthly income. Majority of women were Sikh, and belonged to nuclear family and had 5-6 member family size.

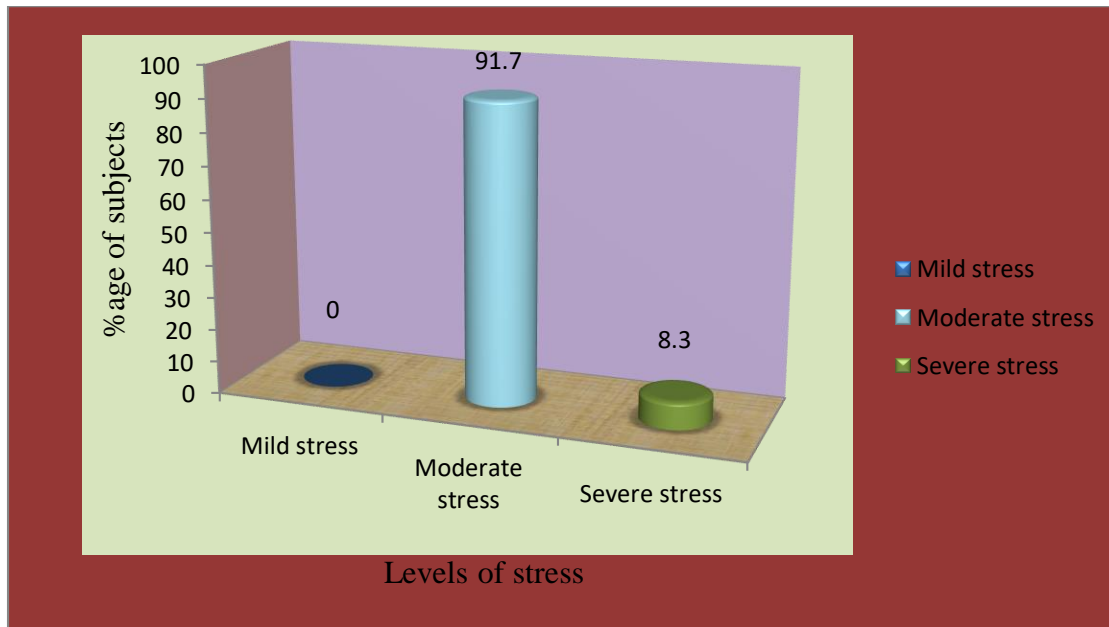
**SECTION 2: FINDINGS RELATED TO DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECTS AS PER LEVELS OF STRESS AND USE OF COPING STRATEGIES**

**Objective 1:** To assess the levels of stress among the women aged between 35-55 years.

**TABLE 2**  
Frequency and percentage distribution of women as per levels of stress

Levels of stress	Range	Frequency	Percentage
Mild stress	1-26	0	0.0
Moderate stress	27-52	55	91.7
Severe stress	53-80	5	8.3

N=60



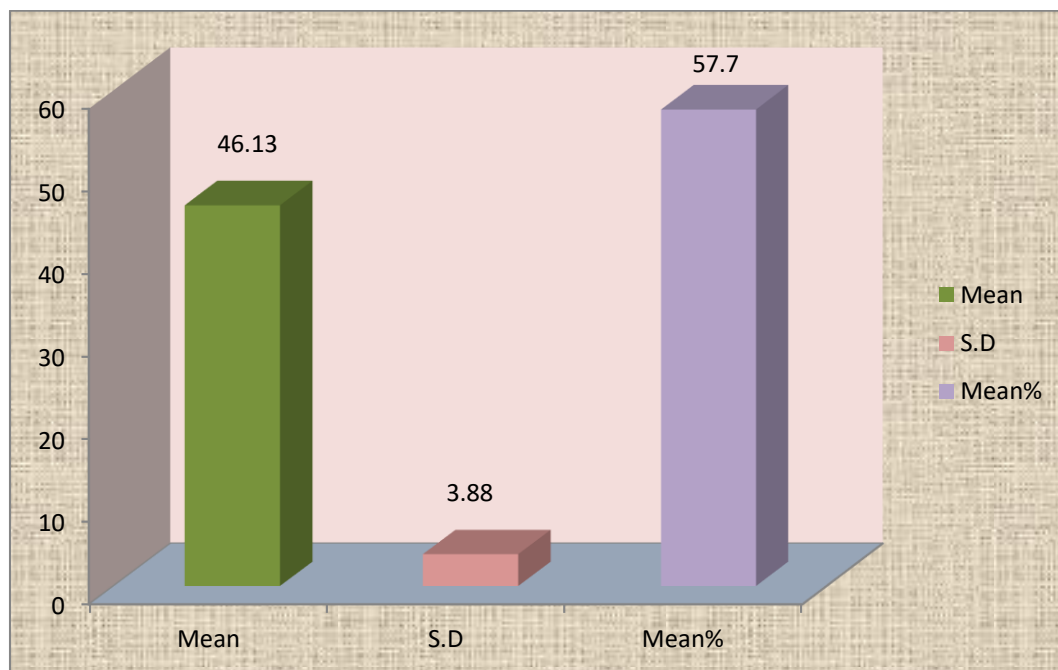
**Fig 1: Percentage distribution of women as per levels of stress**

Table 2 and Figure 1 revealed the frequency and percentage distribution of women as per levels of stress. It showed that maximum women i.e. 55 (91.7 %) had moderate stress followed by 5 (8.3 %) had severe stress and 0 (0%) women had mild stress. Hence it can be concluded that most of the women had moderate stress, followed by severe stress. And None of the women was free from stress.

**TABLE 3**

Mean, Standard deviation and Mean percentage for the levels of stress among women aged between 35-55 years

Sr. No.	Variable	Maximum Score	Mean	S.D	Mean%
1	Levels of stress	80	46.13	3.88	57.7



**Fig 2: Mean, Standard deviation and Mean percentage for levels of stress**

Table 3 and figure 2 depicted mean as 46.13, Standard deviation as 3.886 and mean percentage as 57.7 for levels of stress. Hence it can be concluded that scores of all women for levels of stress lie near to mean score and show less variability.

**Objective 2: To explore the coping strategies adopted by the women aged between 35-55 years.**

**TABLE 4**

**Frequency and percentage distribution of women as per use of coping strategies**

**N= 60**

Categories	Approach coping		Avoidance coping	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Poor coping strategies	2	3.3	13	21.7
Satisfactory coping strategies	58	96.7	47	78.3
Good coping strategies	0	0.0	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 depicted that maximum of women i.e 58 (96.7%) used satisfactory approach coping strategies, followed by 2 (3.3%) used poor approach coping strategies, and 0 (0%) used good approach coping strategies. And 47 (78.3%) women used satisfactory avoidance coping strategies, followed by 13 (21.7%) used poor avoidance coping strategies, and 0 (0%) used good avoidance coping strategies. Hence it can be concluded that maximum women used satisfactory approach coping strategies followed by few used poor approach coping strategies. None of the women used good approach coping strategies. And majority of women used satisfactory avoidance coping strategies, some used poor avoidance coping strategies and none of the women used good avoidance coping strategies.

**TABLE 5**

**Mean, Standard deviation and Mean percentage for use of coping strategies**

S r. No.	Coping strategies	Maximum score	Mean	S.D	Mean%	Rank order
1	Approach coping strategies	93	44.67	4.297	48.03	1
2	Avoidance coping strategies	33	13.50	2.494	40.91	2

Data presented in the table 5 depicted mean, standard deviation and mean percentage of scores regarding use of coping strategies by the women aged between 35 to 55 years. Table 5 showed Mean, Standard deviation and Mean percentage for approach coping strategies were 44.67, 4.297 and 48.03. Mean, Standard deviation and Mean percentage for avoidance coping strategies were 13.50, 2.494 and 40.91.

Hence, it can be concluded that use of approach coping strategies was more than avoidance coping by the women aged between 35-55 years.



**Objective 3: To correlate the levels of stress and coping strategies adopted by the women aged between 35-55 years.**

TABLE 6(A)

**Correlation between levels of stress and approach coping strategies adopted by women**

Sr. No.	Levels of stress		Approach Coping strategies		Correlation (r)
	Mean	Mean percentage	Mean	Mean percentage	
1.	46.31	57.7	44.67	48.03	-0.112

Table 6(a) depicted the Correlation between levels of stress and approach coping strategies adopted by women. Value of  $r = -0.112$  depicts that weakly negative correlation exists between levels of stress and approach coping strategies. Hence it can be concluded that if levels of stress increases then use of approach coping strategies decreases and vice-versa.

Table 6(b)

**Correlation between levels of stress and avoidance coping strategies adopted by women**

Sr. No.	Levels of stress		Avoidance Coping strategies		Correlation (r)
	Mean	Mean percentage	Mean	Mean percentage	
1.	46.31	57.7	13.50	40.91	0.017

Table 6(b) depicted the Correlation between levels of stress and avoidance coping strategies adopted by women. Value of  $r = 0.017$  depicts that weakly positive correlation exists between levels of stress and avoidance coping strategies.

Hence it can be concluded that if levels of stress increases then use of avoidance coping strategies increases and vice-versa.

**SECTION 3: Findings related to association of the levels of stress and coping strategies adopted by the women aged between 35-55 years with selected socio-demographic variables.**

**Objective 4** - To associate the levels of stress and coping strategies adopted by the women aged between 35-55 years with selected socio-demographic variables such as age, education status, marital status, family income, family size, type of family.

Table 7

**Association between levels of stress and selected socio-demographic variables**

N= 60

Socio-demographic variables		Levels of stress				
		Median and below		Above median		Chi square
		n	%	n	%	
Age(in years)	35-40	7	46.7	8	53.3	3.437 <sup>NS</sup>
	41-45	14	60.9	9	39.1	df =3
	46-50	9	81.8	2	18.2	
	51-55	6	54.5	5	45.5	
Marital Status	Married	32	60.4	2	39.6	0.920 <sup>NS</sup>
	Unmarried	0	0.0	0	0.0	df =2
	Widow	3	50.0	3	50.0	
	Separated	1	100.0	0	0.0	
Education Status	Illiterate	7	87.5	1	12.5	5.673 <sup>NS</sup>
	5th – 8th standard	7	46.7	8	53.3	df =3
	9th – 10th standard	20	64.5	1	35.5	
	Above 10th standard	2	33.3	4	66.7	
Socio-Economic Status	Rs.1000-5000	7	46.7	8	53.3	1.984 <sup>NS</sup>
	Rs.5001-10000	15	60.0	1	40.0	df =3
	Rs. 10001- 15000	10	71.4	4	28.6	
	Above 15000	4	66.7	2	33.3	
Religion	Hindu	4	66.7	2	33.3	2.236 <sup>NS</sup>
	Muslim	0	0.0	0	0.0	df=2
	Sikh	31	62.0	1	38.0	
	Christian	1	25.0	3	75.0	

	others	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Type of family	Nuclear family	25	65.8	3	34.2	1.447 <sup>NS</sup>
	Joint family	11	50.0	1	50.0	df=1
Family size	2-4 members	13	56.5	0	43.5	1.851 <sup>NS</sup>
	4-6 members	18	64.3	0	35.7	df =3
	6-8 members	5	62.5	3	37.5	
	Above 8 members	0	0.0	1	100.	

\*is significant; NS is not significant

Table 7 depicted the association between levels of stress and selected socio-demographic variables that are age, marital status, education status, socio-economic status, religion, type of family and family size. The chi square calculated value for association between levels of stress and age is 3.437 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between levels of stress and marital status is 0.920 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between levels of stress and education status is 5.673 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between levels of stress and socio-economic status is 1.984 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between levels of stress and religion is 2.236 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between levels of stress and type of family is 1.447 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between levels of stress and family size is 1.851 which is statistically non-significant.

Hence it can be concluded that there is no significant association between levels of stress and selected socio-demographic variables that are age, marital status, education status, socio-economic status, religion, type of family and family size.

**Table 8**  
**Association between approach coping and selected socio-demographic variables**  
 N=60

Socio-demographic variables		Approach coping				Chi square
		Median and below		Above median		
		n	%	n	%	
Age(in years)	35-40	12	80.0	3	20.0	4.072 <sup>NS</sup>
	41-45	12	52.2	11	47.8	df =3
	46-50	6	54.5	5	45.5	
	51-55	5	45.5	6	54.5	
Marital Status	Married	33	62.3	20	37.7	3.280 <sup>NS</sup>
	Unmarried	0	0.0	0	0.0	df =2
	Widow	2	33.3	4	66.7	
	Separated	0	0.0	1	100.0	
Education Status	Illiterate	4	50.0	4	50.0	1.728 <sup>NS</sup>
	5th – 8th standard	7	46.7	8	53.3	df =3
	9th – 10th standard	20	64.5	11	35.5	
	Above 10th standard	4	66.7	2	33.3	
Socio-Economic Status	Rs.1000-5000	8	53.3	7	46.7	0.558 <sup>NS</sup>
	Rs.5001-10000	15	60.0	10	40.0	df =3
	Rs. 10001- 15000	9	64.3	5	35.7	
	Above 15000	3	50.0	3	50.0	
Religion	Hindu	2	33.3	4	66.7	2.057 <sup>NS</sup>
	Muslim	0	0.0	0	0.0	df =2
	Sikh	30	60.0	20	40.0	
	Christian	3	75.0	1	25.0	
	others	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Type of family	Nuclear family	23	60.5	15	39.5	0.205 <sup>NS</sup>
	Joint family	12	54.5	10	45.5	df =1
Family size	2-4 members	15	65.2	8	34.8	1.653 <sup>NS</sup>
	4-6 members	15	53.6	13	46.4	df =3
	6-8 members	4	50.0	4	50.0	
	Above 8 members	1	100.0	0	0.0	

\*is significant; <sup>NS</sup> is not significant

Table 8 depicted the association between approach coping and selected socio-demographic variables that are age, marital status, education status, socio-economic status, religion, type of family and family size. The chi square calculated value for association between approach coping and age is 4.072 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between approach coping and marital status is 3.280 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between approach coping and education status is 1.728 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between approach coping and socio-economic status is 0.558 which is statistically non-significant.

The chi square calculated value for association between approach coping and religion is 2.057 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between approach coping and type of family is 0.205 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between approach coping and family size is 1.653 which is statistically non-significant.

Hence it can be concluded that there is no significant association between approach coping and selected socio-demographic variables that are age, marital status, education status, socio-economic status, religion type of family and family size.

**Table 9**

**Association between avoidance coping and selected socio-demographic variables**

N=60

Socio-demographic variables		Avoidance coping				Chi square
		Median and below		Above median		
		n	%	n	%	
Age(in years)	35-40	7	46.7	8	53.3	1.105 <sup>NS</sup>
	41-45	13	56.5	10	43.5	df =3
	46-50	5	45.5	6	54.5	
	51-55	7	63.6	4	36.4	
Marital Status	Married	29	54.7	24	45.3	1.880 <sup>NS</sup>
	Unmarried	0	0.0	0	0.0	df =2
	Widow	2	33.3	4	66.7	
	Separated	1	100.	0	0.0	
Education Status	Illiterate	6	75.0	2	25.0	2.635 <sup>NS</sup>
	5th – 8th standard	6	40.0	9	60.0	df =3
	9th – 10th standard	17	54.8	14	45.2	
	Above 10th standard	3	50.0	3	50.0	
Socio-Economic Status	Rs.1000-5000	7	46.7	8	53.3	0.987 <sup>NS</sup>
	Rs.5001-10000	13	52.0	12	48.0	df =3
	Rs. 10001- 15000	9	64.3	5	35.7	
	Above 15000	3	50.0	3	50.0	
Religion	Hindu	4	66.7	2	33.3	1.728 <sup>NS</sup>
	Muslim	0	0.0	0	0.0	df =2
	Sikh	27	54.0	23	46.0	
	Christian	1	25.0	3	75.0	
	others	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Type of family	Nuclear family	25	65.8	23	34.2	6.461*
	Joint family	7	31.8	5	68.2	df =1
Family size	2-4 members	16	69.6	7	30.4	4.920 <sup>NS</sup>
	4-6 members	13	46.4	15	53.6	df =3
	6-8 members	3	37.5	5	62.5	
	Above 8 members	0	0.0	1	100.0	

\*is significant; NS is not significant

Table 9 depicted the association between avoidance coping and selected socio-demographic variables that are age, marital status, education status, socio-economic status, religion, type of family and family size. The chi square calculated value for association



between avoidance coping and age is 1.105 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between avoidance coping and marital status is 1.880 which is statistically non-significant.

The chi square calculated value for association between avoidance coping and education status is 2.635 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between avoidance coping and socio-economic status is 0.987 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between avoidance coping and religion is 1.728 which is statistically non-significant. The chi square calculated value for association between avoidance coping and type of family is 6.461 which is statistically significant. The chi square calculated value for association between avoidance coping and family size is 4.920 which is statistically non-significant.

Hence it can be concluded that there is no significant association between avoidance coping and selected socio-demographic variables that are age, marital status, education status, socio-economic status, religion and family size. Only type of family is found to be significantly associated with avoidance coping.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I do here by commit this study to God, the Almighty who has been a source of everlasting strength, the courage and competence to understand and complete the research study project. My heartfelt thanks to my co-authors and all the subjects who participated in the study, without whose cooperation, it would not have been possible to delve into the personal nature of the study. permission to collect the data. Words fail as I attempt to express my sincere and deep sense of indebtedness for my loving husband S. Baljit Singh and my children whose boundless encouragement, psychological and financial support has made my project to reach its destination.

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