

# A Study of the Stress Levels and Coping Strategies of Women Teachers Teaching at Secondary School Level in Jammu City

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## Abstract

Stress is not a mental disorder. Stress does not indicate any psychological problem. It is not a personality trait. It is not some of us have it and other's do not. All of us have it. Stress is a physical and psychological condition of our body and mind. It is each individual's perception towards the situation as threatening, dangerous, harmful or demanding. The nature of emotional reaction or stress response is the result of negative or positive evaluation of the event and not the event itself. The appraisal of stressful situation as threatening is the crucial leading to emotional arousal. Attitudes, beliefs, values and appraisal of the situation create stress. Stress has long been a major topic of study for psychologists as they have attempted to develop various concept of health psychology. Most of the stressful events are just ordinary and insignificant which can be ignored. But the case is reverse. The rope looks like a snake. Some people always tend to perceive the situation as damaging, destructive or demanding. Such people possess the the trait of stress-proneness. Also people with high achievement drive, ambitious, impulsive and workaholic are more vulnerable to stress and stress related symptoms. According to Morgan & others (1993) stress may be an internal stage which can be caused by physical demands on the body such as disease, exercise, extremes of temperature, professional hazards and so on or by environmental or social situations which are evaluated as potentially harmful, uncontrollable or exceeding our resources for coping. Stress has been identified as one of the factors related to teacher attrition and is believed to be a cause of high teacher turnover and absenteeism in parts of the Pacific (Hammond & Onikama, 1997). High stress can cause teachers to leave the profession, and their reasons for leaving the profession. Teachers is often seen as a time of "storm and stress Researchers agree that the knowledge of coping is fundamental to understand how stress affects people, for good or bad. The present study has been undertaken to study the stress levels of women teachers in government and private schools and the various reasons behind their stress. This study is also expected to throw light on effective coping strategies be adopted by women teacher to overcome stress.

**Keywords:** Stress, Coping Strategies.

## Introduction

### Nature and Process of Stress

Stress is not a mental disorder. Stress does not indicate any psychological problem. It is not a personality trait. It is not some of us have it and other's do not. All of us have it. Stress is a physical and psychological condition of our body and mind.

An activating event does not necessarily cause stress. It is each individual's perception towards the situation as threatening, dangerous, harmful or demanding. The nature of emotional reaction or stress response is the result of negative or positive evaluation of the event and not the event itself. The appraisal of stressful situation as threatening is the crucial leading to emotional arousal. Fundamentally, whatever beliefs we hold about ourselves and our relationship with the outside world, "it is our faith, our shraddha", which determines what we are. Situations, events and people do not lead to stress. Attitudes, beliefs, values and appraisal of the situation create stress. We live by perceptions and not facts. The causes of stress lie within. It is a lie to state that circumstances, incidents and others cause stress lie within. It is a lie to state that circumstances, incidents and

others cause stress. We can always make choices in life. Nobody can make you happy nor can any body take it away from you. Stress has long been a major topic of study for psychologists as they have attempted to develop various concept of health psychology. We all experience stress state time and again. Most of the stressful events are just ordinary and insignificant which can be ignored. But the case is reverse. The rope looks like a snake. Some people always tend to perceive the situation as damaging, destructive or demanding. Such people possess the trait of stress-proneness. Also people with high achievement drive, ambitious, impulsive and workaholic are more vulnerable to stress and stress related symptoms.

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#### **Types of Stress**

List of stressors given here are not exhaustive. There can be many more varied and multiple stressful events. Stressors of life are unlimited at every footstep. However, some commonly distressing situations and problems have been presented just to discern an overview of environmental challenges and demands. Stressors related to **personality** are irrational beliefs, values, beliefs and attitudes, misperception of events, situations and people, stress proneness, agnostic views, existential/death anxiety, perfectionist attitude, non assertions, poor time sense, poor habits, poor decision making, poor sense of inter-personal relations and dynamics, procrastination tendencies and unpleasant physical personality like very short height, obesity, uneven facial features. **Personal stressors** include improper life style, loneliness, domestic/marital conflicts, varied problems related to children, sexual problems, poor physical health/disease/physical handicap, financial/emotional exploitation, deceit/betrayal by someone close to you, language barrier, loss of house and property and adjustment problems due to cultural lag. **Environmental stressors** include environmental pollution, noise, pollution, poor lighting/ventilation, overcrowding and space limitation, field/out door hazards and lack of other facilities, water/electricity shortage, absence of hygiene and extreme heat/cold. **Stressors related to job functioning** may be poor and obsolete work knowledge and skills in the context of modern technological requirements, aptitude and job mismatch, work overload and work under load, working in shifts/inconvenient and odd timings, role diffusion and ambiguity, undefined goals, too many dead lines, too elastic/too rigid work culture, poor leadership, low salary/low reward, poor perspective of promotion/promotion denied, frequent and sudden tours, non cooperation of co-workers and boss, atmosphere of mistrust and unhealthy competitions, gender bias/sexual harassment, conspiracy/betrayal in the office and cultural mismatch. Stressors related to natural calamities/disasters and other traumatic events like war/migration/terrorism, communal riots,

rape/molestation, threat of kidnapping physical/mental abuse, death in the family, risky surgery of self or some significant other, painful diagnostic/treatment procedures, accident of self or the significant other, earthquake, flood/famine, fire, and other foreseen disasters.

Can we kill stress? No. Stress can never be wiped off from life. No eradication programme of stress can be launched by any Government of the world. Stress can never be eliminated from life. We all have to learn to kill stress by managing it.

#### **Stress and Teachers**

Stress has been identified as one of the factors related to teacher attrition and is believed to be a cause of high teacher turnover and absenteeism in parts of the Pacific (Hammond & Onikama, 1997). High stress can cause teachers to leave the profession. Teachers in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)-Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap-Guam, Hawaii, the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands answered questionnaires regarding their days away from school, their desire to leave teaching, and their reasons for leaving the profession. They also rated themselves on workplace stress using a modified version of the 22-item Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)-educators Survey (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986). Results of these studies indicate that in seven of the ten locations, teachers who said they might leave teaching within the next two years experienced higher degrees of stress and burnout than their non-leaving peers (Pacific Resources for Education and Learning R&D Cadre, 1998). These "potential leavers" displayed more emotional exhaustion, greater feelings of depersonalization, and less personal accomplishment in their jobs. Teachers of high concern in all societies. Teachers are often seen as a time of "storm and stress". Workplace stress might play a part in these high attrition rates. Indeed, people from the U.S. Mainland who are teaching in CNMI display significantly more stress and are more likely to report that they might leave teaching within the next two years, compared to Pacific-born teachers in CNMI. In the State of Hawaii, where there is a continually low supply of teachers from local universities, the pattern is similar, with non-Pacific born teachers more likely to leave teaching as well as have higher levels of stress.

#### **Symptoms & Sources of Stress Amongst Teachers**

The resulting symptoms is much harder for a condition such as stress than it is for a disease such as mesothelioma (which is only caused by exposure to asbestos). Because many of the symptoms of stress are generalised - such as increased anxiety, or irritability - it is easy for them to be ascribed to a characteristic of the worker, rather than to a condition of the work. The range of symptoms includes the following: Body ache, Feeling anxious or depressed, tired all the time, constipation or other stomach discomforts, repeated headache, high blood pressure, difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, difficulty keeping good relationship with others, weight gain or loss, overeating, irritability, with drawn behavior are the various symptoms of stress among teachers.

Some degree of stress is a normal part of life and provides part of the stimulus to learn and grow, without having an adverse effect on health. When stress is intense, continuous or repeated - as is often the case with occupational stress - ill health can result (Hazards,1994). The experience of stress can affect the way individuals think, feel and behave, and can also cause physiological changes. Many of the short and long term illnesses caused by stress can be accounted for by the physiological changes that take place when the body is placed under stress. From the documented evidence, it is clear that as far as work life is concerned extreme stress is so aversive to employees that they will try to avoid it by withdrawing psychologically (through disinterest or lack of involvement in the occupation etc.). Excessive stress can destroy the quality of life and also affect family life. Teachers under stress are far more likely to have accidents than teachers in low stress jobs, and are much more likely to have to take time off work for stress-related sickness. In jobs where work overload is the cause of the stress, the teachers find that they have to take time off to deal with the stress, only to return to work to find that the already unmanageable workload has substantially increased in their absence, thereby increasing the source of the stress and fuelling a vicious cycle which may ultimately lead to a complete breakdown in health (Selye,1976). The main sources of stress are academic, social, emotional and time concerns, ignorance, teachers' dominant behaviors in the classroom teaching and assessment, low achievement, over burdens, classroom interactions, and economic issues. The causes of stress also include any event or occurrence that a person considers a threat to his or her coping strategies or resources. The effect of stress is directly linked to coping. Majority of the teachers strive and try to handle the stress in a positive way. Where as, some of the teachers do not know, the ways to cope up with their problems and; therefore, adopt unhealthy ways. Thus, the dimensions of coping behavior should be studied from a development perspective. The coping could be at an emotional, cognitive, or social support seeking level.

#### **Dimensions of Stress**

When we talk of stress among teachers, many factors cause stress among teachers. Home stress is actually the imbalance in the family functioning. In society everyone is dependent on one another through interaction, interrelation and interdependence and it causes stress. School is the outcome of society that is why, all the teachers has to go to school but improper working in school cause tension, pressure and anxiety etc. The teachers are the nation builder and the eyes of society are on the teachers. Sometimes parents want their children's to be doctors, engineers or to perform extraordinarily in their life. All these expectations are transferred on to the teachers. School Teachers face high amounts of stress during teaching and handling students. Classrooms in developing countries remain overcrowded and the teachers face intensive verbal communication, prolonged standing, high volume of workload. The environment of a working place has great impact on the level of stress.

#### **Stress and Coping**

**A coping strategy can be effective at one stage** but may be totally unsuitable at another stage. In the similar way, a particular coping strategy may be totally appropriate in one situation while inappropriate in another. Wong (1993) redefined stress as a problematic condition resulting from the appraisal of an imbalance between demands and resources, bringing in the coping specifically to restore the balance. Coping has been conceptualized in the psychological literature in many ways, yet the term has not been clearly understood. Researchers agree that the knowledge of coping is fundamental to understand how stress affects people, for good or bad. Coping strategies have been defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as a set of behavioral and cognitive responses that are designed to master, tolerate, or reduce the demands of a stressful situation. Coping is thus conceived as a combination of cognitive, behavioral, psychodynamic and physiological response to resolve the problem and remove the tension. According to Coyne and Gottlieb (1996) and Skinner and Wellborn (1994) the definition of coping is limited to effortful and unanticipatory behavior, as one undertakes the risk of excluding the very interesting aspects of coping, like habitual/automatic and thoughtful and planned behaviours. According to Altman and Sherwood (2003) Coping as an adaptive process mediating between stress and its long term effects on mental and physical health and functioning. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1993); coping has been seen as a part of a dynamic, ongoing, and constantly changing process. Lazarus and Folkman 1984 pointed out three main features of coping. The assessment of coping is concerned with what a person actually thinks or does in a stressful situation. It needs to be examined with in a specific context.

#### **Difference in Coping Patterns**

The greatest factor in unlike patterns of stress was gender. However, most evidence suggested that female teachers experience more depression and negative moods. This can be explained by a difference in coping patterns: female teachers tend to respond to stress by "internalizing" their negative mood, while male teachers tend to use distractions, often negative ones such as alcohol and drug use. Therefore, female teachers were found to experience more anxiety, suicidal feelings, and body-related problems, while male teachers had a higher rate of deviant behavior. Several other reasons suggested for the higher rate of stress-related illness in females were that women are caretakers by nature and often take on too much responsibility, that men are more likely to feel "in control" in the workplace, and that women are more likely to be homemakers as well as having a job, which doubles responsibility and therefore increases stress. Female use peaceful, less violent methods of coping with stress, such as utilizing social support networks in lieu of ventilation strategies. In contrast, males are reported to be aggressive and to act as pillars of strength and to ventilate their feelings through the use of swearing, and taking anger out on others. In addition, other studies indicated that females are more inclined than males to rely on support networks as a coping

strategy (Frydenberg & Lewis). Social support can protect individuals from the effects of stress on health.

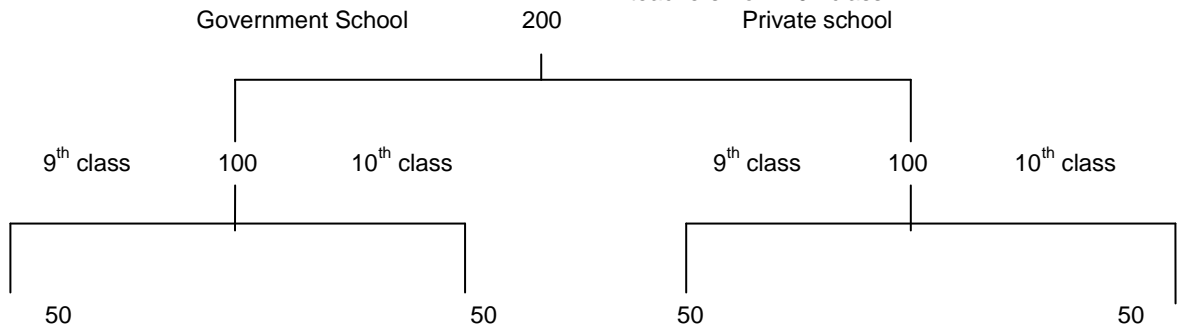
**Need and Significance**

It is very important to study the level of stress experienced by women teachers so that the coping strategies which they use to manage stress can be identified and used by other teachers for their benefit. Stress is basic to life, no matter how healthy wealthy, powerful, good looking or happy a person might be. The present study has been undertaken to study the stress levels of women teachers in government and private schools and the various reasons behind their stress. This study is also expected to throw light on effective coping strategies will be adopted by women teacher to overcome stress.

**Objectives of the Present Study**

The following objectives have been delineated for the present study:

1. To identify the stress level of women teachers teaching at secondary schools in Jammu city.
2. To identify the differences in stress levels between women teachers teaching in government and private schools.



**Tools**

Questionnaires shall be based on stress level & coping strategies will be prepared specifically for this purpose.

**Collection of Data**

The present investigation shall be undertaken in five phases.

**Phase 1**

In the first phase, the investigator shall select the high schools and prepare preliminary draft of the tools for collecting the data for the study. The investigator shall undertake the review of related literature. The investigator shall under take the review of related literature. The researchers conducted in the given research will be scanned vis-à-vis the problem in hand so as to get a holistic view of the field and topic of study

**Phase 2**

This phase shall be concerned with the drafting, finalization and fine tuning of tools to be utilized for the present study. At this stage, sample details shall be finalized and the selected high schools shall be established. Further schedule of data collection shall be finalized.

**Phase 3**

The data regarding different level of stress in relation to physical, psychological, social, academic are collected and effective and skillful coping

# Remarking

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3. To identify the differences in stress levels between women teachers of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> class.
4. To study the stress coping strategies used by women teachers teaching at secondary schools.

**Hypotheses for the Study**

Keeping in view the objectives of the present study following hypotheses have been formulated:

1. There is high degree of stress among women teachers at secondary school stage.
2. There is a significant difference between stress levels of women teachers teaching in government and private schools.
3. There is a significant difference between stress levels of women teachers teaching 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> class.

**Methodology**

**Sample**

The sample will comprise of 200 women teachers, 100 from government school and 100 from private school. 50 women teachers will be taken from 9<sup>th</sup> class government school and 50 women teachers from 10<sup>th</sup> class. Similarly, 50 women teachers will be taken from 9<sup>th</sup> class private school and 50 women teachers from 10<sup>th</sup> class.

strategies shall be collected from different high schools of Jammu city.

**Phase 4**

In this phase, scoring and tabulation of data shall be taken up.

**Phase 5**

In this phase data processing and analysis using appropriate statistical techniques shall be carried out. Statistical techniques namely measures of central tendency, measure of dispersion, measures of association (co-relation) and contrast group analysis, t-test shall be use to determining the difference between the various groups.

**Statement of the Problem**

A study of the stress levels and coping strategies of women teachers teaching at secondary school level in Jammu city.

**Operational Definitions**

In the present study the operational terms used are given as under:

**Stress**

Stress can be defined as a failure to adopt something. It occurs when the environmental or internal demands exceed individual's resources to adopt. It is a process of adjusting to circumstances that disturb or threatened to disturb, persons equilibrium. Women teachers stress is mainly because of family, school, individual or societal basis.

**Coping Strategies**

Stress coping strategies are the various techniques to handle stress. Time management, change in routine activities, exercise, meditation, nutritious diet, good support network, leave other expectations, think optimistically, setting goals and priorities, organizing work, boost our self, share the problems, write problems etc.

#### Delimitation of the Study

Due to lack of time and other resources the researcher limited her study to the following aspects:

1. The study was confined to Jammu city high schools only.
2. Only two independent variables namely class, school were taken into consideration for the present study.
3. The sample was limited to 100 women teachers i.e. 50 government and 50 private secondary schools.
4. The present study was confined to secondary school teachers only.
5. In the study only two dependent variables were taken into consideration i.e. stress and coping strategies.

#### Conclusion

After reviewing the related literature it was found that some of the researches have been conducted to study stress levels of the women teachers and other target groups. The results show that teachers experienced high levels of stress in most of the studies as compared to other professions. Very few studies have been conducted on women teachers as far as measuring stress levels are concerned in areas like individual, home, school and social. The coping strategies of women teachers have also not been studied in details by many researchers. Thus the present study assumes importance in studying the stress levels and coping strategies of women teachers teaching at the secondary level. Further no study seems to have been done in the field of stress and coping strategies in the state of J & K. The present study is also expected to yield important information on the levels

of stress and coping strategies of women teachers in government and private schools.

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