

Impact of Coping Strategies on Female Principal's Stress Management

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Abstract:

Educational administration is a challenging profession for which school leaders experience ongoing pressures and demands from all sides. Among these are the administrative tasks, responsibility for student achievement, and supervision of teachers, student discipline, and community expectations. Without effective coping strategies, principals may experience burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and diminished professional performance. The purpose of this study seeks to investigate the various ways of coping employed by public sector female principal and examine their impact on managing stress. Quantitative research method was used incorporating surveys the target population of this study included 163 principals of government schools at the secondary level in the district Mardan. A random sampling method was employed to determine the participation. 74 heads were chosen. Data was collected by questionnaire. And analysis of data was done by descriptive statistics (Mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (correlation, regression). The findings of the study revealed that correlation value ($r = 0.093$) indicates a very weak positive relationship between the two variables (coping strategy and stress management), The $R^2 = 0.009$ means that coping strategy explains only 0.9% of the variance in stress management, which is negligible. The correlation between PFCS (Problem-Focused Coping Strategy) and SM (Stress Management) is $r = -0.117$, indicating a very weak negative relationship. The $R^2 = 0.014$ means PFCS explains only 1.4% of the variance in stress management, which is extremely low. Additionally The correlation value ($r = 0.097$) indicates a very weak positive relationship between the two variables, EFCS (Emotion focused coping strategy and stress management) and $R^2 = 0.009$ indicates that only 0.9% of the variance is explained, moreover the correlation value ($r = 0.141$) indicates a very weak positive relationship between ACS (Avoidance coping strategy) and stress management while $R^2 = 0.020$ means that ACS explains only 2% of the variance in stress management, which extremely low. On the bases of the above findings, it recommends that district education leaders should make intensive brief training to enhance the practical ability of female principals in stress management a regular component. It also recommends cutting back on paperwork by delegating routine clerical tasks to support staff.

Keywords: *Coping Strategies, Female Principal, Stress Management, Job Satisfaction, Burnout*

1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace stress has spiked as a problem among many occupations in recent years, notably that of education. The school principal, pivotal in the role of administrative leadership to guarantee academic success, must deal with staff, student discipline, and school accountability. This wide range of duties can expose them to high stress levels, which may negatively affect their work performance and their own well-being (Collie, 2021).

Within the context of education, stress is regarded as the mental and physical reaction to demands and pressures emanating from professional roles (Kyriacou, 2021). Stress among school principals can be attributed to heavy workloads, time constraints, policy changes, lack of support from administration, and the difficulty of fulfilling multiple positions simultaneously. These stressors, if left unchecked, can degrade the quality of the civil service (Grissom et al., 2021).

To understand how people deal with stress, it is necessary to understand how they cope. Strategies of coping include the cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage particular external and/or internal demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The goal of feeling-based coping on the contrary hand, is to control emotional reactions by using strategies including obtaining psychological assistance, relaxing and meditating positively. Avoidance approaches entail avoiding the stimulus, that may offer short-term respite but is frequently seen to be not as effective over time (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2020).

In educational leadership, the effectiveness of coping strategies significantly influences how principals manage stress and maintain their performance. Research indicates that principals who employ problem-focused coping strategies tend to experience lower stress levels and higher job satisfaction, as they actively address challenges and seek solutions (Burić & Kim, 2021). On the other hand, reliance on avoidance coping has been related to greater stress and burnout as it postpones dealing with the problem, magnifying the pressure (Aldrup et al., 2022).

Emotion-focused strategies, that are effective in regulating emotional responses in the short term, may differ in their effectiveness as a function of context and person differences. Stress for public sector female principals sometimes adds new dimensions to the phenomenon which they must confront. Across cultures and even more so in the underdeveloped regions of the world largely in the case of Pakistan, female leaders in education face several challenges including gender discrimination, limited authority in decision making, societal misconceptions and thoughts as well as work-life balance Complications. These attributes contribute to increased stress among female principals compared to male (Shah & Ali, 2022).

The Public Sector Schools, especially operate under bureaucratic systems, are subjected to the policy constraints, have scant resources to work with, and all these may contribute to making the principals more stressed. Female principals in these communities are dealing with administrative issues and with community and societal expectations related to gender role-appropriate relationship. This double responsibility can negatively impact their mental well-being and success as an educator (UNESCO, 2021).

In the context of educational leadership, recent studies highlight the importance of coping flexibility in resilience promotion. Resilience the capacity to positively adjust in adverse contexts of life has been linked with the employments of more effective coping strategies. Female principals employed more adaptive coping strategies such as problem-focused and social support; these women were also more likely to be resilient and sustained their effectiveness as leaders in difficult situations (Gu & Day, 2021).

In addition, the importance of the coping strategies-stress relationship for a single principal has ramifications for the environment of the school as a whole. Positive stress management have been related to principals' better decisions, stronger support for teachers, and a

healthier school environment. On the other hand, high levels of stress, and poor coping strategies can have detrimental effects on leadership practice (e.g. teacher morale and student results) (Leithwood et al., 2020).

This study is focused (in case of public sector female principals) to investigate the influence of different coping strategies problem-focused, emotion-focused and avoidance on stress management. By investigating only female principals, this study attempts to fill a significant void in the research and offer understanding in terms of gender specific stress management within educational leadership.

Research Gap

A major motivation for this study is the increasing understanding that stress greatly influences the success of educational leaders. Stress in principals has been associated with burnout, reduced job satisfaction, impaired decision making, and diminished organizational performance (Grissom et al., 2021). In public sector schools, that stress is keenly felt, for resources are limited and expectations for accountability run high. Female leaders, in fact, might be under different kinds of pressures related to social expectations, gender roles, and/or work–life balance issues, planning and executing research in this area (Shah & Ali, 2022).

Contemporary research differentiates between three coping strategies: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2020; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2022). Stress management these are not the same among these strategies. Active confronting the source of the stressor in problem-focused coping is generally regarded as more effective in reducing stress and enhancing performance. Emotion-focused coping allows people to modify how they react emotionally; avoidance coping is sometimes associated with negative outcomes such as more stress and burn-out (Aldrup et al., 2022).

Furthermore, this study is justified by the need to address the gender gap in educational leadership research. While there has been a growing number of studies on stress and coping in education, many have not specifically focused on female principals or have treated principals as a homogeneous group without considering gender-specific experiences. Female principals often operate in environments where they must navigate both professional challenges and societal expectations, which may influence their coping behaviors and stress levels in unique ways (UNESCO, 2021). Such understanding of stress in educational administration needs to be more nuanced, considering the gendered nature of these processes. Improved principal stress management may also positively influence other school outcomes such as teacher motivation, student achievement and school climate (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Although international research has emphasized coping strategies for school leaders, there is a lack of studies in South Asian context in general and in Pakistani context in particular. Most of the indigenous researches broadly concentrate on stress among the teachers, not the principals. Moreover, there is insufficient Evidence on how coping strategies directly impact principals' performance and decision-making. This study will fill this gap by exploring the impact of different coping strategies in managing stress among secondary school principal. Furthermore, it fills a void in the literature, particularly in relation to the public sector education system in developing countries where institutional constraints are more pronounced. The funding is too small, the class sizes too large, the rules and regulations too stifling these are among the challenges confronting public-sector schools. In these settings, women principals are expected to deliver quality education and meet potential stakeholder demands, while at the same time they have to manage through such barriers. It is useful to see how they cope with these pressures for institutionalized support and policy instruments.

Problem Statement

Public sector female school principals are increasingly experiencing occupational stress due to heavy workloads, administrative responsibilities, accountability pressures, limited resources, organizational politics, and bureaucratic constraints. In addition to these professional demands, female principals face gender-related challenges, societal expectations, and work life balance responsibilities, which may further intensify their stress levels and affect their leadership effectiveness and well-being. Although coping strategies are considered vital for managing occupational stress, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of different coping strategies among public sector female principals in Pakistan. In particular, little is known about how problem focused, emotion focused, and avoidance coping strategies influence their ability to manage stress effectively. Therefore, the problem addressed by this study is the lack of practical evidence on the impact of different coping strategies on stress management among public sector female principals. The study targets to determine how various coping strategies contribute to managing occupational stress and enhancing the well-being and leadership effectiveness of female principals in public secondary schools.

Aims and Objective

The study aims to determine how various coping strategies contribute to managing occupational stress and enhancing the well-being and leadership effectiveness of female principals in public secondary schools. The objective of this study was to analyze the impact of overall coping strategies on female principal's stress management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals use to deal with internal or external demands that they perceive as stressful or beyond their available resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies effect how stress affects psychological well-being and performance (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Effective coping can cushion negative stress outcomes, whereas maladaptive coping may intensify stress-related problems (Hobfoll, 1989). While other fields (e.g., sociology, biology) employ the word coping (to indicate how society or an organism manages a crisis), there is little question that its primary domain is within psychology (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Coping, as described by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984), refers to the continuous cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals make to manage specific internal or external demands that they perceive as stressful or beyond their control.

In particular, as one has to consciously exert effort to manage stress, it is unreasonable to consider an individual's reflexive or spontaneous response to be part of that person's coping, since these factors are not under a person's volitional control (Compas, 1987). It is typical that attitudes toward coping (at least as far as children are concerned) are situated in a field with a newborn's reflexive motions at one side and spontaneous reactions which, due to acquired experience, are no longer submitted to conscious control at the other (Murphy, 1974). For similar why, active stress management should not be confused with defense mechanisms located in unconscious mind, which an individual uses to also obtain a similar end (reduction of stress). In contrast with coping, and similar to defense mechanisms, adjustment appears to be more general and represents a broader concept, as evidenced by the following sayings in what the latter stands for and means not only includes diverse intentional - ways of confronting a challenge (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Chang, et al., 2005; Gil-Monte, 2005; Aldwin, 2007; Papazisis et al., 2008; Papazisis et al., 2008a; Zyga, 2010; Karasavvidis et al., 2011; Zyga, 2013). There was different type of coping strategies;

- 1 **Problem-Focused Coping Strategies:** Problem-focused coping strategies refer to thoughtful cognitive and behavioral efforts aimed at managing or altering the source of stress rather than merely regulating emotional responses.

- 2 **Task Oriented and Solution Based Coping:** Rooted in the transactional model of stress and coping, problem-focused coping is employed when individuals observe stressors as controllable or modifiable (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These strategies involve identifying stressors, analyzing their causes, generating solutions, and taking direct action to reduce or eliminate the stressful conditions
- 3 **Common Problem Focus Strategies among Principals:** Common forms of problem-focused coping include planning, time management, seeking instrumental support, information gathering, decision-making, and restructuring work processes (Carver et al., 1989).
- 4 **Empirical Studies on Problem Focus Coping:** In organizational settings, problem-focused coping has been widely associated with positive occupational outcomes such as improved job performance, improved self-efficacy, and reduced burnout. Research proposes that individuals who actively engage in problem solving and task-oriented coping are better prepared to manage role overload, work pressure, and organizational limitations (Cooper et al., 2001). Such strategies are chiefly effective in professional roles that involve complex responsibilities and decision-making authority, as they permit individuals to exert control over their work environment and mitigate stress at its source.
- 5 **Effectiveness in Reducing Work Related Stress:** Within educational leadership, problem-focused coping plays a serious role in how school principals manage occupational stress. Education leaders regularly experience enduring stress related to work demands, accountability, personnel management, and policy implementation. Studies show that principals who employ problem-focused coping mechanisms (for example, delegating tasks, improving organizational processes, participating in strategic planning, and seeking professional development) are more resilient and effective leaders (Grissom et al., 2015). Principals are able to reduce the severity and number of stressors by taking a preventative approach to institutional barriers and, in doing so, contribute to a more positive school climate.
- 6 **Association with Leadership Effectiveness and Resilience:** Besides, problem-focused coping has been linked to lower levels of emotional exhaustion and higher job satisfaction among educational leaders. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) claim that problem-focused coping, apart from decreasing stress, also contributes to the promotion of positive psychological outcomes by fostering feelings of mastery and competence. In public sector school contexts, where structural and resource limitations are dominant, the effective use of problem-focused coping strategies is chiefly important. Researchers highlight the need to examine how organizational environments empower or hinder the use of problem-focused coping strategies among school principals (Kyriacou, 2001).

Emotion-focused coping refers to the cognitive and emotional changes to manage emotional distress related to a stressor, rather than changing the stressor itself or the stressful situation. Consistent with the transactional model of stress and coping, this form of coping is usually used when individuals consider stressors to be manifest or when they have little immediate control over the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping is a critical means of maintaining psychological health and leadership effectiveness for principals operating in public sector schools, where they are often subject to inflexible bureaucratic arrangements, minimal autonomy, and scarcity of resources.

Studies indicate that public school principals are likely to employ emotion-focused coping strategies, such as emotional regulation, acceptance, positive reappraisal, and cognitive reframing, to cope with chronic stress. In reframing stressful events more positively or meaningfully,

principals may be able to mitigate emotional distress and maintain motivation in the face of unrelenting job demands (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Social and emotional support is looking for another prominent emotion-focused coping strategy among principals. Appealing in informal discussions with colleagues, mentors, or professional networks allows principals to express emotions, gain comfort, and reduce feelings of isolation commonly associated with leadership roles (Kyriacou, 2001).

Moreover, principals may employ emotional distancing and self-control strategies to maintain professionalism in high-pressure situations involving staff conflicts, student discipline, or community criticism. While emotional suppression can help leaders function effectively in the short term, research cautions that excessive reliance on emotional suppression may contribute to long-term emotional exhaustion if not balanced with other coping mechanisms (Maslach et al., 2001). Spiritual coping and meaning-making strategies are also often reported in studies of educational leadership, mainly in public sector contexts within developing countries. Principals might draw upon personal values, faith, or a sense of purpose to make sense of their role in leadership and thus enhance emotional resilience and stress tolerance (Pargament, 1997).

Avoidance coping comprises cognitive-behavioral strategies to distract the self from, minimize, or distance from stressors with no direct confrontation of the stressors. In educational management, school principals might be able to use avoidance coping when stressors present as overpowering, unmanageable or emotionally threatening. Typical avoidance behaviors are postponing decisions, removing oneself from stressful conversations, temporarily ignoring troubling problems, or mentally removing oneself from work stress (Carver et al., 1989). Although avoidance coping strategies may result in emotional relief in the short-term, prior work indicates that continued use of these strategies may exacerbate stress and impair leader effectiveness (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

There is a general consensus that educational leadership is a high responsibility and high stress profession. School principals are instructional leaders and managers of the school, as well as policy recipients (Voogt & Knezek, 2008). The strain for educational leaders is not just a matter of personal welfare but has been found to affect leader performance, organizational climate, and even the performance of schools as a whole (Kyriacou, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2008). It is important to understand stress in educational leadership because extended periods of occupational stress may result in burnout, emotional depletion, and diminished work satisfaction (Maslach et al., 2001). Such stress may damage principals' ability to make decisions, the nature of their relationships with others, and their effectiveness in leading instructional improvement.

Stress is popularly known as a mental and physical reaction experienced by people when they believe that they are unable to adequately cope with environmental demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The body of any individual responds to a demand by a phenomenon known as stress, which Selye (1976) defined as the non-specific response of the body to any demand. In the workplace, stress occurs when work requirements surpass an employee's capacity to respond effectively (Cooper et al., 2001; Robbins & Judge, 2017). Stress is not inherently negative; however, extended exposure to stressors without acceptable coping mechanisms can result in burnout, emotional exhaustion, and reduced performance (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Stress has been widely researched in organizational psychology, and it is commonly conceptualized as a response to demands that outweigh an individual's resources to cope with these demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Workload, role ambiguity, time pressure, and interpersonal conflict are identified by organizations stress research as a handful of major stressors that influence leadership positions (Cooper et al., 2001). In the field of educational research, these theoretical perspectives have been borrowed to research stress in teachers and school administrators. Studies

almost uniformly reveal that school leaders are highly stressed as a result of accountability demands, personnel management duties, and unceasing performance expectations (Chaplain, 2001). Coping strategies, namely problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and social support, are considered to have a great impact on the reduction of the adverse effects of stress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Although this line of inquiry is expanding, stress for principals especially in public secondary schools is less researched than stress for teachers.

Work and educational environments tensions are usually regarded as psychological and physical responses that occur as a result of people expecting a high amount of workload or workload demand they might not be able to fulfill or they perceive a discrepancy between what they can give and what they need to receive (McGrath, 1970). Stress is a complex process of several steps of person-environment transactions, both a stimulus and a response on the basis of a transactional model of stress. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the workplace, stress has been associated with a range of issues, such as role overload, role ambiguity, time pressure, and interpersonal conflict, all of which have the potential to reduce the quantity and quality of an employee's work, as well as how satisfied they are with that work, and how they think about it (Cooper et al., 2001). In the education realm, particularly in school leader positions, stress has been attributed to pressures of accountability, administrative duties, policy enactment, and community expectations. Leaders in education are commonly affected by greater pressure as a result of the dual accountability for both human and system outcomes, and so, stress represents an essential variable in leadership and organizational practice in schools (Kyriacou, 2001; Maslach et al, 2001).

Occupational stress refers to the physical, emotional and psychological response to an imbalance between job demands and job-related control. In organizational psychology, job stress is conceptualized as the interaction between the employee and work environment on a dynamic continuum with individual cognition, evaluation, and available coping resources playing a critical role (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Typical work stressors are heavy workloads, time pressures, work/home interference, work roles that are not clearly understood, work roles that conflict, lack of control and little social support at work (Cooper et al., 2001). Chronic exposure to such stressors has been linked to negative consequences such as reduced job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, impaired performance, and increased absenteeism. From a health perspective, long-term work stress may play a role in the development of fatigue, anxiety, depression, and other stress-related diseases, which underscores its importance as a problem in today's work environments (Maslach et al., 2001).

Occupational strain has been widely documented among teachers and school leaders in educational settings, influenced by accountability measures, curriculum reform, administrative roles, and increasing demands of various stakeholders including parents, governing bodies, and policy makers. School principals –though school educational leaders in general- have been demonstrated to be one of the most stressed groups in terms of occupational stress (Kyriacou, 2001), having the burden of responsibility for both instruction and the administration of the organization. It may be difficult to combine leadership, supervision, policy implementation and community relations without causing role strain and burnout. Finally, studies demonstrate that occupational stress is intensified by contextual factors such as limited resources, bureaucratic red tape, and a lack of professional autonomy within the public educational agency (Chaplain, 2001). Hence, to study job stress in an educational leadership context contributes new knowledges for application of the stress management strategy, leadership practice and support of the organization.

Stress in educational leadership has emerged as a critical area of interest in the literature because of the growing demands and accountability pressures on school leaders. Those who lead

in education, and in particular school principals, must navigate between instructional, administrative, management and compliance roles, all of which are conducted under the watchful eye of staff, policy, and external stakeholders in often resource constrained environments. This combination of demands leads to high occupational stress and consequent negative impacts on leaders' psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and professional effectiveness (Whitaker, 1996; Kyriacou, 2001). There is an increasing body of evidence that sustained exposure to stress in leadership could result in burnout, emotional exhaustion and a diminished capacity to make sound decisions for schools and in turn affecting school climate and organizational outcomes (Maslach et al., 2001). In addition, accountability-based reforms and heightened external scrutiny have increased the stresses among those leading education, making stress a key factor in explaining what enables leadership sustainability and effectiveness in education systems (Leithwood et al., 2008; Fullan, 2014).

Stress among public secondary school principals has become an increasingly prominent issue in educational leadership literature as the demands and complexity of the principal ship has grown. They have to deal with being the tampering point between policy, instructional leadership, administrative management and community responsibility in the public secondary school setting. They need to be responsible for academic standards, work with the teaching and non-teaching staff, handle student discipline, run the infrastructure and take instructions from education bodies, typically in settings of scarce resources and bureaucratic restrictions. Such conflicting and competing demands subject principals to chronic work stress that is exacerbated by high-stakes accountability systems and media attention (Whitaker, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2008). Ongoing strain in the body of a principal of a public high school has been demonstrated in research to negatively affect the principal's personal health, the principal's potential to lead, and the principal's ability to make decisions that influence the school atmosphere and the organizational performance (Maslach et al., 2001). Thus, to investigate stress of public secondary school principals contributes to equipping supportive leadership system, specialized professional development program, and policy solutions to fostering sustainable and effective school leadership.

Theoretical Framework

The present research was based in the premise of Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), elaborated by the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). This schema provides a lens to analyze how work strain and coping strategies of public sector school principals relate to leadership and psychological well-being. Stress is a pervasive experience in the workplace, and the transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) remains one of the most utilized perspectives in predicting stress in work and educational settings. Rather than a uniform reaction to environmental stressors, the concept of stress encapsulates a dynamic and reciprocal interaction between the person and environment. Stress is perceived to occur when environmental demands are appraised as exceeding an individual's resources, these demands are appraised as a threat or a challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The transactional model also incorporates the idea of coping flexibility, or the ability to draw from problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies as the situation and one's perception of controllability changes. For example, a school principal may initially respond with emotion-focused strategies by seeking support from colleagues to manage feelings of anxiety and later with problem-focused strategies by delegating duties to reduce workload. In terms of educational leadership, the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping provide a constructive perspective

through which to investigate how public-school principals manage the high stressors of their role—their imperative to address administrative issues, meet accountability demands, manage staff discord, and operate within limited resources. By conceptualizing stress as a transaction, this theory highlights that the adaptiveness of coping strategies is influenced not just by characteristics of the stressor, but also by the individual's perception of the limitations and resources available to them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Maslach et al., 2001). Experiential research validates the use of this theory within educational settings. Research demonstrates that principals that employ problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies simultaneously are the best able to sustain their psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and leadership effectiveness under stress (Grissom et al., 2015; Whitaker, 1996). In contrast, maladaptive or exclusively avoidance coping strategies may worsen stress and lead to burnout, diminished motivation, and poor-quality organizational results (Maslach et al., 2001).

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) - the creators of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model - have proposed that this model can be applied to describe the work stress, burnout, and engagement of employees within an organization. The model also states that all work and workers have demands and resources, which interact with each other influencing work stress, motivation, and job performance. In the field of educational leadership, the JD-R model has also been widely used to explore how school principals cope with professional stress and maintain success in challenging work contexts.

The JD-R model also emphasizes the interplay between demands and resources in predicting coping. Under supported and overworked principals may experience more stress and be more inclined to engage in problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. On the other hand, sufficient resources may increase the effectiveness of problem-focused coping as needed resources to deal with stressors are obtained. Maladaptive or evasive coping strategies may be employed under the conditions of depleted resources or overwhelming demands (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) which can also culminate in emotional exhaustion and/or impaired performance at the organizational level.

The resource-based perspective (RBV) is the predominant paradigm through which knowledge management (KM) has been theorized. The theory states that people are stressed when they view that they are losing their resources, have actually lost resources, or they do not gain resources despite of investing resources. Resources can include material things (objects), qualities of a person (personal characteristics), situations (conditions) or activities (energies) that the individual values or that are a means to obtain other resources. In educational leadership, COR theory provides a practical lens for examining how public sector school principals manage stress by protecting, gaining, and investing resources through coping strategies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was based on quantitative methodology to examine the effect of coping strategies on stress among public sector lady head. Correlational research design was used in this study. The correlational design was appropriate for this study as it allows to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. The population of this study was consisting of 163 principals of public sector secondary schools of district Mardan. A random sample of 74 female principles were taken. A structured questionnaire was adapted for the Coping Strategies and stress management Inventory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) was administered. It measured the frequency and type of coping strategies used by principals, covering problem-focused and emotion-focused and mixed strategies. The questionnaire was included for stress management and Likert-scale items for easy quantification. The data were collected through multiple methods. The researcher visited selected schools and administered questionnaires directly to the principals.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their participation, and sufficient time was provided to complete the questionnaires. Some data were collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The link was shared with the District Education Office, which further distributed it to principals through WhatsApp groups, allowing them to complete the questionnaire conveniently. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data and were presented in tables to meet the objective of this study. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS v.25) which is professional statistical software widely accepted in education and social research field for advanced statistical analysis for dependable result.

4. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for 74 respondents are shown in the table 1. A majority of participants fall in the older age groups, with 47.3% aged > 49 years, followed by 43.2% in the 40–49 years category. Only a small proportion (9.5%) are between 30–39 years. The percentages indicate that over half of the respondents (52.7%) are below 50 years. A vast majority (75.7%) are from rural areas, as opposed to only 24.3% from urban areas. This shows that the participants were predominantly from rural areas. Most (67.6%) are in possession of a Master's degree, which is also the most the most popular one. There are also a few MPhil (18.9%) and PhD (12.2%) holders, these two-figure representing higher educational level for a part of the respondents. Just 1.4% hold a Bachelors. A large majority (83.8%) hold an M.Ed. degree, making it the most common qualification. A smaller proportion (6.8%) have a B.Ed. while 9.5% possess both qualifications. This indicates that most respondents are professionally well-qualified in education.

The largest group (31.1%) has 5–10 years of experience, followed closely by 29.7% with less than 5 years. About 25.7% of principals have more than 15 years of experience, indicating a considerable proportion of highly experienced administrators. The smallest group (13.5%) falls within 11–15 years of experience. Nearly half of the principals (48.6%) are in Scale 17, making it the largest group. Scales 18 and 19 each represent an equal proportion of 25.7% of the respondents. This indicates that while most principals are in the lower administrative scale, a significant number are distributed equally across higher scales. The vast majority of respondents (93.2%) are married, indicating that most principals have family responsibilities. Only a small proportion (6.8%) are single.

The mean values suggest moderate level of respondents across all variables, with age having the greatest mean (3.42). Participants also demonstrated average levels of academic qualifications (2.42) and administrative experience (2.35). There is high variation in professional qualification (1.227) and administrative experience (1.164) which is indicated by standard deviation whereas marital status has Almost no variation (0.253). Sample shows a moderate level of heterogeneity, mainly in terms of qualifications and experience.

Table 1: Demographic Information (N=74)

Variable	Categories	<i>f</i>	%	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	30-39 Year	7	9.5	3.42	0.662
	40-49 Year	32	43.2		
	> 49 Year	35	47.3		
Location of School	Urban	18	24.3	1.76	0.432
	Rural	56	75.7		
Academic Qualification	Bachelor	1	1.4	2.42	0.722
	Master	50	67.6		
	MPhil	14	18.9		
	PhD	9	12.2		

Professional Qualification	B.Ed. M.Ed. Both	5 62 7	6.8 83.8 9.5	2.31	1.227
Administrative Experience	< 5 years 5-10 Years 11-15 Years > 15 Years	22 23 10 19	29.7 31.1 13.5 25.7	2.35	1.164
Scale	Scale 17 Scale 18 Scale 19	36 19 19	48.6 25.7 25.7	1.77	0.837
Marital Status	Single Married	5 69	6.8 93.2	1.93	0.253

The table 2 shows the correlation between Coping Strategies (CS) and Stress Management (SM) among female principals. The correlation value ($r = 0.093$) indicates a very weak positive relationship between the two variables. The significance value ($p = 0.432$) is greater than 0.05, Hence, coping strategies do not have a meaningful impact on stress management.

Table 2: Relationship Between Overall CS and SM

	CS	SM
CS	1	
SM	0.093	1

The Model Summary in table 3 shows the relationship between overall Coping Strategies (CS) and Stress Management (SM). The correlation $R = 0.093$ indicates a very weak relationship between CS and stress management. The R Square = 0.009 means that CS explains only 0.9% of the variation in stress management, which is negligible. The Adjusted R Square = -0.005 suggests that the model has no real predictive power, and the standard error (0.82337) reflects some variability in predictions.

Table 3: Model Summary: Relationship Between Overall CS and SM

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.093 ^a	.009	-.005	0.82337

Notes: Predictors: (Constant), CS

Table 4 shows the results of the regression model between overall Coping Strategies (CS) and Stress Management (SM). The F-value (0.625) was low, suggesting that the model was weakly explanatory. The p-value of significance = 0.432 is above 0.05. This implies that overall coping strategies cannot bring about a significant improvement to stress management in female principals.

Table 4: Overall Regression Model Between Overall CS and SM

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	.424	1	.424	.625	.432 ^a
Residual	48.811	72	.678		
Total	49.235	73			

Notes: a. Predictors: (Constant), CS b. Dependent Variable: SM

The table 5 shows the impact of overall Coping Strategies (CS) on Stress Management (SM). The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.252$) indicates a very small positive effect of CS on stress management. The standardized beta ($\beta = 0.093$) also shows a weak relationship between the variables. The significance value ($p = 0.432$) is greater than 0.05, meaning the impact is not

statistically significant. The constant is close to significance ($p = 0.055$) but does not affect the main result. Furthermore ($t=0.791$) is also low.

Table 5: Impact of Overall CS and SM

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardize Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
	<i>B</i>	Beta			
(Constant)	2.202	1.130		1.949	.055
CS	.252	.318	.093	.791	.432

5. DISCUSSION

There is no significant relationship between overall coping strategy and female principals' stress management. Result indicates that there is a very weak positive correlation ($r = 0.093$) between coping strategies and stress management of female principals, and it is not statistically significant ($p = 0.432 > 0.05$). This suggests that, in general, coping strategies do not exert a strong effect on stress management. These results are consistent with recent findings, indicating that coping styles as a global construct may not when specific coping types are disaggregated.

For example, Carver and Connor-Smith (2020) observed that whether coping is considered adaptive depends on its type and context, not on how globally it is applied. Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema and Schweizer (2020) also argued that global indicators of coping may conceal distinct effects of adaptive and maladaptive coping. In the field of educational leadership, influence outside through governing stress also more than the sole coping strategy: workload, administrative pressure and institutional support are the Finding of yet another factor outside one's control on coping in Collie (2021). Recent work by Harms et al. (2022) and Kim & Burić (2023) reinforces that coping strategies alone are not directly 'weakly' predictive of personal resilience or organizational climate.

Global coping strategies are not strong predictors of stress management in female principals in a manner comparable to that of the researchers' regressions alignment to the literature was The Model Summary in suggests that there is a very weak association ($R = 0.093$) between global coping strategies (CS) and stress management (SM). The $R^2=0.009$ means that only 0.9 per cent of the variation in stress management can be explained by coping strategies and the value of Adjusted $R^2= -0.005$ suggests that the model does not provide any foresight. This is in line with the two studies by Carver and Connor-Smith (2020), who argue that global coping constructs more often than not do not predict outcomes. Eisenbeck et al. (2022) find that generalized coping factors could conceal relevant effects. And it also indicates that the model is insignificant statistically ($F = 0.625$, $p = 0.432 > 0.05$), which means that for female principals, general coping strategies are not significant predictors of them in managing stress. This agrees with Collie (2021) and Herman et al. (2022), who reported that stress in educational leaders is greater and strongly associated with external factors such as workload, institutional pressures, and organizational climate rather than general coping strategies alone.

It also indicates a very slight positive effect ($B = 0.252$, $\beta = 0.093$) of coping strategies on the management of stress, which is not statistically significant ($p = 0.432$). This aligns with the results of Kim and Burić (2023) and Skinner and Saxton (2021), who underlined that coping strategies emerge as significant predictors solely in the context of mediating variables like emotional regulation, resilience, or contextual support. Results align with findings of modern literature showing that overall coping strategies may not be enough to largely predict stress management, especially in intricate work environments such as that of school leaders. Hence,

Assumption1 of the study was upheld, suggesting that there is no association between overall coping strategies and stress management of female principals.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The association of coping strategies with stress level management was rather weak and slightly positive, indicating that these strategies were not very effective in increasing stress level management. Both correlation and regression analyses indicated weak and non-significant relationships between coping strategies and stress management. The study found that coping strategies do not have a statistically significant impact on stress management for female secondary school principals. The R^2 values were very low (from 0.009 to 0.020), indicating that coping strategies explain less than 2% of the variance in stress management, which implies that more influential factors could be investigated. The study findings suggest that coping strategies by themselves are poor predictors of stress management in female secondary school principals, thus pointing to other psychological, organizational, and environmental aspects as perhaps having a greater influence.

The results suggest that coping strategies might not be sufficient to effectively cope with stress in the domain of public-school administration. In view of this, the following recommendations are proposed, aimed at female principals immediate (short-term) and sustainable (long-term interventions), in the public sector. Departments of education need to promote an atmosphere of support and inclusion within the organization that acknowledges the barriers encountered by women serving as principals. Promotion of participative decision-making, recognition of accomplishments and establishment of trust between school leaders and education authorities could contribute to decreasing stress levels among them. The findings of this study suggest that the stress of public sector female principals is not controllable by coping strategies alone. A comprehensive strategy addressing the well-being and career success of women school leaders must involve some combination of personal skill development, organizational support, and systemic change at the policy level.

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