

Comparison Between Emotion Focused And Problem Focused Coping Strategies Of Stress Among Working Women In Pakistan

Muhammad Sohail Nawaz Laghari¹, Israr Ahmed², Syeda Manal Fatima^{3*}, Mehvish Shafiq⁴, Aqsa Batool^{5*}

1. *Principal in Government Technical Training Institute , Muzaffargarh, Pakistan*
Sohaillaghari87@gmail.com
2. *Lecturer Education , Government Degree College of Special Education, Multan, Pakistan*
israrahmed299@gmail.com
3. *Riphah Institute of Clinical & Professional Psychology, Riphah international University, Pakistan*
manal.fatima@riphah.edu.pk
4. *Lecturer Applied Psychology, Women University Multan, Pakistan*
mehvishafiq@gmail.com
5. *Psychologist, Department of Special Education, Punjab, Pakistan*
psychologist.aqsa@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper embraced comparative approach of emotion focused and problem focused coping strategies of stress among working women in Pakistan by underpinning literature review to results. **Methodology** A cross-sectional design as well as convenient sampling technique was used to collect data. The sample was comprised of 200 females working in different banks, markets, companies or organization, hospitals and educational institutions of Multan. Brief cope inventory was applied to investigate coping strategies while occupational stress index implemented to measure stress of working women. Descriptive and inferential statistics were considered to analyze data. T test was used to measure effect of marital status, job contractual status and job sector status on stress. Analysis of variance applied to examine effect of qualification, socioeconomic status and job profession on stress. Correlation was used to detect relationship between coping strategies and occupational stress. **Findings** The research findings indicate that women employed in the private sector experience more stress due to frequent changes in policies imposed by the administration. Conversely, government policies tend to remain stable for longer periods, resulting in a more flexible work environment and less stress for female employees. The research also reveals that women working in teaching professions tend to feel more relaxed, while those in public-facing or sales roles experience greater levels of stress. While, highly qualified women are more capable of handling problems and less prone to becoming stressed than less-educated women. Additionally, the socioeconomic status of a working woman's family plays a role in her stress levels, with those from affluent families work for enjoyment rather than financial necessity and experiencing less stress than those from poorer or middle-class backgrounds who must work to support themselves or their families. **Conclusion** Conclusive report recommended that emotional focused strategy of stress is more strategic in handling stress of women than problem focused strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The costs of workplace stress can be physical, psychological, and social for the individual, while the organization may experience social, cultural, and financial costs. To manage stress, women employees can also use emotional management, cognitive strategies, and social support networks. Strategies to promote stress resilience and thriving at work include creating emotion focused and problem focused strategies, promoting a healthy organizational culture, and providing access to social support networks as opportunities for growth of women. Studies have shown that workplace stress is a significant issue for women in Pakistan, with many experiencing stresses due to factors such as heavy workloads, discrimination, and harassment. Women in male-dominated fields or those in lower-paying jobs are particularly vulnerable to stress. To cope with workplace stress, women in Pakistan often use various emotion focused and problem focused strategies, including social support networks, prayer, and physical exercise. However, many women also face barriers to accessing these coping strategies, such as cultural norms that discourage seeking help for mental health issues. The primary objective of this research was to evaluate the level of stress among married working women using the Perceived Stress Scale and to determine their level of coping as assessed by the Stress Coping Resources Inventory. The study findings indicated that a considerable proportion (72%) of the married working women experienced a high level of stress, while 22% had a moderate level of stress, and only 6% had a low level of stress. However, a significant proportion (58%) of the participants demonstrated an above-average level of coping, while 41% had an average level of coping, and only 1% had a below-average level of coping. None of the participants showed a high level of coping. (Amin et al., 2022). According to the research findings, introducing efficient coping mechanisms,

advocating for the adoption of beneficial coping techniques, and limiting the use of harmful coping methods in a firm's stress management plan could potentially reduce the stress levels of workers and boost their job performance. As such, it's imperative to establish sufficient support systems that encourage the use of productive coping methods at work, as this could have a significant impact on enhancing work performance (Otsuka, Yet al., 2022; Mushtaque et al., 2021). According to the study, female managers experience stress due to the challenge of balancing the responsibilities of a home and an institution, which may be a challenging task. The daily household tasks and organizational duties may lead to increased pressure and stress for these women. To manage this stress, the women in the study used various techniques such as recreation, self-care, social support, and relational coping. These techniques were used unconsciously to prevent negative health impacts from the stress they experienced. (Roberts, C. O. et al., (2021). In a study of 448 undergraduate exercise science students from three different courses at a university, researchers administered the Perceived Stress Scale and Brief Cope four weeks before final exams to assess stress levels and coping strategies. T-tests were conducted to examine gender-based differences in stress levels and coping strategies. Results indicated that females reported higher levels of stress compared to males (Mushtaque et al., 2022). Furthermore, gender differences were observed in coping strategies used and coping dimensions. Females were found to use the emotion-focused coping dimension more often than males, relying on four specific coping strategies: self-distraction, emotional support, instrumental support, and venting. (Graves et al., 2021).

Goel et al.'s (2021) study investigated the relationship between stress coping mechanisms and workplace stress perceptions in employees from three different service industry sectors. The

study took data from 204 randomly selected employees. The study focused on the impact of gender, age, management level, and organizational ownership on employees' stress perceptions and coping mechanisms. Results of the study indicated that age had a significant impact on perceived workplace stress and stress coping mechanisms, but not gender, management level, or organizational ownership. The results depicted that older employee reported higher use of coping mechanisms but also higher levels of perceived workplace stress compared to their younger counterparts. The objective of this paper was to explore the stress levels, coping strategies, and related factors among medical students. The study was carried out from March to May 2019 and involved all medical students at the Faculty of Medicine, Prince of Songkla University. The researchers utilized three questionnaires for data collection, including demographic information, the Suanprung stress test, and the Brief COPE inventory Thai version. The findings demonstrated that female students utilized more emotional coping strategies to manage stress than their male counterparts, which led to more adaptive coping strategies being used by women. Additionally, participants with high grades ($GPA \geq 3.5$) demonstrated high level of strategies of adaptive coping. This could be attributed to their ability to adapt to academic demands and their possession of more coping mechanisms and problem-solving skills than their peers. (Norphun et al., 2020). The study conducted by Adasi et al. (2020) examined the coping strategies utilized by students to manage stress. The results showed that both male and female students employed various coping strategies, including praying/meditating and self-distracting activities. Although females reported higher levels of perceived stress regarding academic and health-related stressors, there was no significant difference between genders in terms of coping strategies utilized. The study suggested that males should be encouraged to adopt more

adaptive coping strategies to manage stress effectively (Mushtaque, Awais-E-Yazdan, et al., 2022). In Boatemaa et al.'s (2020) investigation of breast cancer patients in Ghana, it was found that women with breast cancer adopted diverse coping strategies to deal with their challenges. The study also revealed that the types of coping strategies used were influenced by the level of social support received. Based on these findings, the study recommended that psycho-social counseling and support should be integrated into breast cancer management. Another study concluded that women who have jobs in both the private and public sectors experience higher levels of stress due to their multiple roles. Additionally, the findings indicated that women working in the private sector reported higher levels of stress compared to those working in the government sector. (Shobana S et al., 2016). According to the research conducted by Shakir and Zia (2014), a job may be temporary, but the stress associated with it can have long-term effects. The study found that temporary jobs with lower job security can result in mental stress, leading to the deterioration of mental health. Teachers who remain in temporary employment for an extended period may experience severe and lasting negative effects on their well-being and health due to the mental stress caused by the lack of job security. In this study, a mixed methods approach was employed to investigate the variations in types and levels of stress among women aged 18-24 years who have different socioeconomic statuses (Hassan et al., 2022). The study involved 106 female participants with low or high socioeconomic status. The research also highlighted the types of stressors that were more commonly experienced by women with low SES compared to those with high SES. High level of stress was found among women with low socioeconomic status in relation to college attendance. (Yovanoff, 2011).

Hypothesis of the study

- 1) H₁ : Job profession would affect stress of working women
- 2) H₂ :Qualification would affect stress of working women
- 3) H₃: Job sector status would affect stress of working women
- 4) H₄ : Socioeconomic status would affect stress of working women
- 5) H₅ : Job contractual system would affect stress of working women
- 6) H₆ : Marital status would affect stress of working women
- 7) H₇ :Emotion focused coping strategy would be more effective than Problem focused coping strategy in stress of working women

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participant

The sample of the study was 200 women which were selected from different job profession. Participants were selected through convenient sampling due to time constraints and financial problems. Demographic detail of the participants is given in demographic table of result section.

Instruments

Brief cope inventory

The Brief COPE inventory was utilized to gauge the coping styles of the participants, and it was developed by Carver in 1997. This inventory comprises 14 sub-scales, each with two items. According to Carver, strategies such as acceptance, emotional and social support, humor, positive re-framing, and religion fall under emotion-focused coping. Meanwhile, active coping, instrumental support, and planning are considered as problem-focused strategies.

Demographic factors

Dysfunctional coping strategies, on the other hand, include behavioral disengagement, denial, self-distraction, self-blaming, substance use, and venting. In this study, only eight sub-scales associated with emotion-focused and problem-focused coping were utilized.

Occupational stress index

To evaluate stress levels in the workplace, researchers utilized the Occupational Stress Index (OSI). Srivastava and Singh (1984) developed the English version of the OSI at Banaras Hindu University in Uttar Pradesh, India. To test the scale's reliability, the split-half method (odd-even) was employed, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for the scales as a whole, resulting in values of 0.935 and 0.90, respectively.

Procedure

Data was collected from working women in different institutions of Multan. Informal consent was taken before conducting survey through instruments. The confidentiality of the given information was maintained.

Statistical Analysis

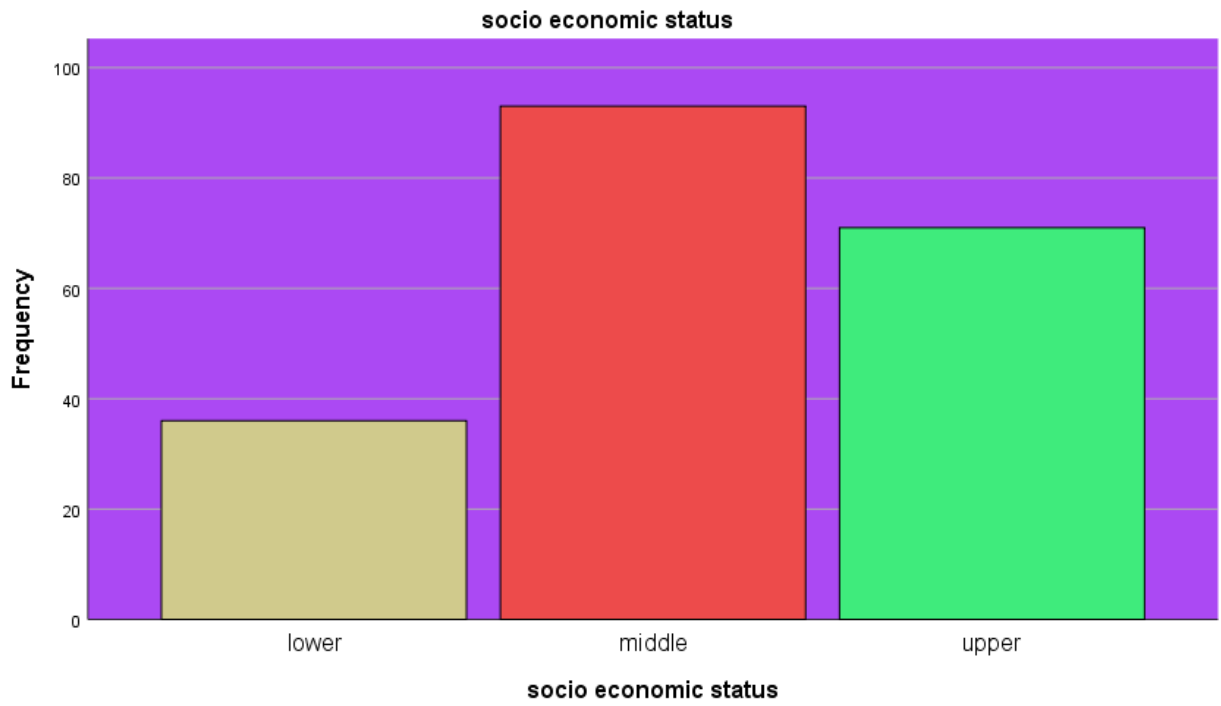
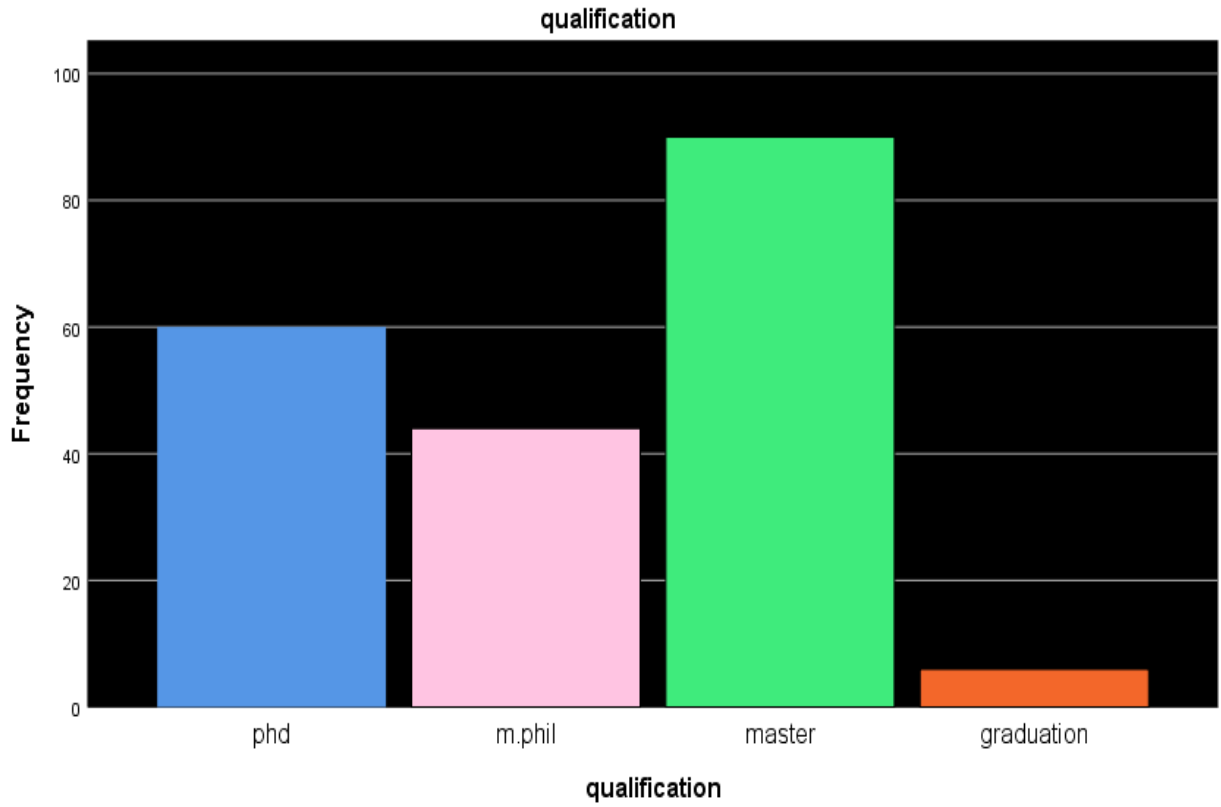
Data analysis was accomplished by using descriptive and inferential statistics. Data was analyzed by using SPSS version 25.

Research design

The study employed a cross-sectional research design.

Results and Findings

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data. Result of different analysis are given as follows



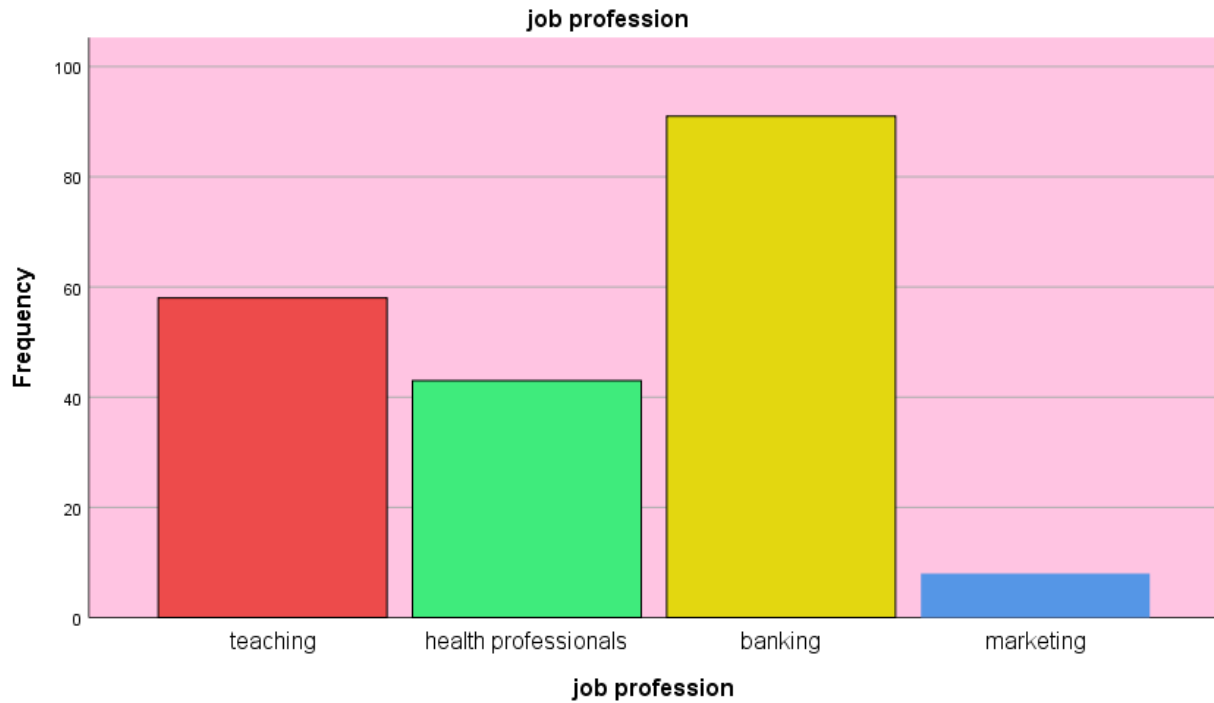


Table 1 Demographic table N=200

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage	M	SD
Qualification			2.21	.911
PHD	60	16		
M.Phil	44	43		
Master	90	29		
Graduation	6	10		
Marital status			1.50	.501
Married	99	49.5		
Unmarried	101	50.5		
Job contractual status			1.51	.501
Permanent	99	49.5		
Temporary	101	50.5		

Job profession				2.25	.922
	Teaching	58	29		
	Health professionals	43	21.5		
	Banking	91	45.5		
	Marketing	8	4		
Job sector status				1.50	.501
	Government	101	50.5		
	Private	99	49.5		
Socio economic status				2.18	.712
	Lower	36	18		
	Middle	93	46		
	Upper	71	36		

TABLE 2 Descriptive Statistics Table for occupational stress, problem focused coping and emotion focused coping.

Variables	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
occupational stress	152.82	32.215	100	211
problem focused coping	15.58	3.384	10	23
emotion focused coping	14.09	5.907	3	24

Table 2 explains the descriptive statistics for all variables of research study. Occupational stress (M= 152.82, SD=32.215) has the highest value than problem focused coping (M= 15.58, SD= 3.384) and emotion focused coping (M= 14.09, SD=5.907).

TABLE 3 Bivariate Correlation Coefficient between occupational stress, problem focused coping and emotion focused coping.

Variables	occupational stress	emotion focused coping	problem focused coping
occupational stress	1	-.987**	.988**
emotion focused coping	-.987**	1	.611**
problem focused coping	.988**	-.988**	1

Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Occupational stress has highly significant negative relationship with emotion focused coping ($r = -.987^{**}$, $p = .000$). And highly significant positive relationship with problem focused coping ($r = .988^{**}$, $p = .000$).

TABLE 4 Mean, SD and T Values for the marital status effect on occupational stress.

VARIABLES	M	SD	T	p
Married	178.01	17.41	-17.373	.000
Unmarried	128.12	22.89		

Married women ($M = 178.01$, $SD = 13.25$) reported significant higher level of stress than unmarried women ($M = 128.12$, $SD = 22.89$), $t(198) = -17.373$, $p < .001$.

TABLE 5 Mean, SD and T Values for the job contractual status effect on occupational stress.

VARIABLES	M	SD	T	P
Permanent	129.60	23.70	-.14.40	.000
Temporary	175.57	21.40		

Temporary working women ($M = 175.57$, $SD = 21.40$) reported significant higher level of stress than permanent working women ($M = 129.60$, $SD = 23.70$), $t(198) = -14.40$, $p < .001$.

TABLE 6 Mean, SD and T Values for the job sector status effect on occupational stress.

VARIABLES	M	SD	T	P
Government	125.13	18.85		

			-24.86	.000
Private	181.06	12.20		

Private working women (M=181.06, SD=12.20) reported significant higher level of stress than government working women (M=125.13, SD=18.85), $t(198) = -24.86, p < .001$.

TABLE 7 Mean, SD and F Values for the job profession effect on occupational stress.

Variables	M	SD	F	p
Job profession			627.53	.000
Teaching	111.21	10.05		
Health `professionals	143.91	8.97		
Banking	179.12	10.66		
Marketing	203.13	4.29		

df= (3,196)

Women working in Marketing job (M=203.13, SD=4.29) reported significant higher level of occupational stress than Women working in banking (M=179.12, SD=10.66), Women working in health profession (M=143.91, SD=8.97), Women working in teaching (M=111.21, SD=10.05), $F(3, 196) = 627.53, p < .001$.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to analyze the stress levels of working women, the impact of demographic variables on their stress, and the effectiveness of different coping strategies. The study considered two coping strategies: emotion-focused and problem-focused. A cross-sectional design as well as convenient sampling technique was used to collect data. The sample was comprised of 200 females working in different banks, markets, companies or organization,

hospitals and educational institutions of Multan. Brief cope inventory was applied to investigate coping strategies while occupational stress index implemented to measure stress of working women. Descriptive and inferential statistics were considered to analyze data. T test was used to measure effect of marital status, job contractual status and job sector status on stress. Analysis of variance applied to examine effect of qualification, socioeconomic status and job profession on stress. The first hypothesis was that job profession would affect the stress levels of working women, and findings are in congruent with the previous study (Roberts, C. O. et al.,(2021). Teaching jobs were considered suitable for women, while marketing and sales jobs were deemed inappropriate, causing more stress. The second hypothesis was that qualification would impact stress levels, and the results showed that higher qualifications led to

increased confidence and decreased stress levels. Higher qualification increases your knowledge, up to date current development in the field hence it increase her confidence which helps to meet challenges of the job. Employees with lower qualification experience high level of occupational stress. The findings were in line with the literature work. ((Norphun et al.,2020). The third hypothesis was that job sector status would affect stress levels, and the results confirmed that private jobs produced more stress than government jobs due to job insecurity. Previous research has indicated that older workers tend to exhibit higher levels of active coping strategies and experience lower levels of stress compared to their younger counterparts.(Shobana S et al., 2016) also discovered that women working in private sector experienced more stress than women who work in government sector. The fourth hypothesis was that socioeconomic status would impact stress levels, and the results showed that women with a strong socioeconomic background experienced less stress and women with low socioeconomic status experienced high level of stress. (Yovanoff, 2011). The fifth hypothesis was that job contractual systems would affect stress levels, and the results indicated that temporary jobs created more stress. The inculcation are congruent with the findings of (Shakir and Zia, 2014). The sixth hypothesis was that marital status would affect stress levels, and the results revealed that married women experienced more stress due to the burden of family responsibilities. (Amin et al., 2022) evinced that marriage women face high level of stress than unmarried women. Lastly, the seventh hypothesis was that emotion-focused coping strategies would be more effective than problem-focused coping strategies, and the findings were significant. The study's findings were consistent with previous researches the study conducted by Graves et al. (2021) reported that women tended to utilize more emotion-focused coping strategies, whereas men

tended to employ more problem-focused coping strategies. Moreover another study also supported this hypothesis that women use emotion focused therapy rather than problem focused to deal with stress. (Norphun et al., 2020)

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to determine the most effective coping strategies for working women to manage stress, as well as investigate the impact of demographic variables on stress levels. The results indicate that emotional coping strategies are more effective for women, while problem-focused strategies are more effective for men, which is consistent with prior research. The study also found that married women experience more stress due to the additional responsibilities of family life and work, while single women experience less stress. Additionally, having a permanent job is associated with lower stress levels compared to temporary work, as job security provides a sense of stability. The research also revealed that working in the private sector creates more stress for women due to unpredictable policies, whereas working in the education sector is less stressful. Women with higher levels of education are better equipped to handle stress, while those with less education experience more stress due to feeling overwhelmed. Socioeconomic status also plays a role, as women from wealthier families tend to work for enjoyment rather than financial need and experience less stress, while women from poorer families work to meet their financial needs and experience more stress.

Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, which restricts the ability to generalize the results to the wider population. Secondly, the sample was only drawn from one city in Punjab, which raises

concerns about the generalization of the findings to other areas. Additionally, the use of a convenient sampling technique may have introduced selection bias, as participants who were more readily available or willing to participate may have been over represented in the sample. Finally, the study focused on only a few demographic variables, which limits the scope and depth of the analysis. A study should be conducted with large sample size to generalize overall population. Sample size should be selected from different cities of Pakistan. Sample should be selected randomly. More demographic variables should be studied in future research.

References

1. Adasi, G. S., Amponsah, K. D., Mohammed, S. M., Yeboah, R., & Mintah, P. C. (2020). Gender differences in stressors and coping strategies among teacher education students at University of Ghana. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(2), 123-133.
2. Amin, U., Rasool, I., Jan, R., Yousuf, R., Mabool, S., & Qadir, H. (2022). Assess the level of stress and coping level among married working women in Kashmir. *IP Journal of Paediatrics and Nursing Science*, 5(1), 22-28.
3. Boatemaa Benson, R., Cobbold, B., Opoku Boamah, E., Akuoko, C. P., & Boateng, D. (2020). Challenges, coping strategies, and social support among breast cancer patients in Ghana. *Advances in Public Health*, 2020, 1-11.
4. Carver, C. S. (1997). You want to measure coping but your protocol's too long: Consider the brief. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 4(1), 92-100
5. Dayala Rajan A and Balamurugan S. (2016). Impact of Spiritual Practices on Behavioral Aspects of Corporate Management A study on it Employees of Coimbatore City. *International Journal Recent Science Research*. 7(7), pp 12292-12294
6. Goel, M., & Verma, J. P. (2021). Workplace stress and coping mechanism in a cohort of Indian service industry. *Asia Pacific Management Review*, 26(3), 113-119.
7. Graves, B. S., Hall, M. E., Dias-Karch, C., Haischer, M. H., & Apter, C. (2021). Gender differences in perceived stress and coping among college students. *PloS one*, 16(8), e0255634.
8. Hassan, M., Malik, A. S., Sang, G., Rizwan, M., Mushtaque, I., & Naveed, S. (2022). Examine the parenting style effect on the academic achievement orientation of secondary school students: The moderating role of digital literacy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1063682>
9. Mushtaque, I., Awais-E-Yazdan, M., & Waqas, H. (2022). Technostress and medical students' intention to use online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan: The moderating effect of computer self-efficacy. *Cogent Education*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2022.2102118>
10. Mushtaque, I., Muhammad Riaz Khan, Zahra, R., Syeda Manal Fatima, Ejaz, M., Tauqeer Ahmed Lak, Rizwan, M., Muhammad Awais-E-Yazdan, & Raza, M. (2022). Prevalence of Coronavirus Anxiety, Nomophobia, and Social Isolation Among National and Overseas Pakistani Students. *Journal of Population and*

- Social Studies [JPSS], 30, 408–422.
<https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jpss/article/view/258736>
11. Mushtaque, I., Waqas, H., & Awais-E-Yazdan, M. (2021). The effect of technostress on the teachers' willingness to use online teaching modes and the moderating role of job insecurity during COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan. *International Journal of Educational Management*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print). <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-07-2021-0291>
 12. Norphun, N., Pitanupong, J., & Jiraphan, A. (2020). Stress and coping strategies among Thai medical students in a southern medical school. *Siriraj Medical Journal*, 72(3), 238-244.
 13. Otsuka, Y., Itani, O., Matsumoto, Y., & Kaneita, Y. (2022). Associations between Coping Profile and Work Performance in a Cohort of Japanese Employees. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(8), 4806.
 14. Roberts, C. O., Sarfo, K., & Kwakye, I. N. (2021). Coping Mechanisms to Mitigate Occupational Stress by Women in Accra Metropolis. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(6), 207-227.
 15. Shakir, M., & Zia, A. (2014). Temporary job and permanent stress. *Journal of Educational Practice*, 5(14), 144-150.
 16. Shobana, S., Chacho. N., Verma, R., and Mathur., A. (2016). A comparative study on occupational stress among women in Government and private sector. *International Journal of Recent Scientific Research*, 7(7), 12292-12294
 17. Yovanoff, E. K. (2011). Stress and Status: how socioeconomic status affects stress in young adult women.