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Psychological well-being and coping strategies among secondary school teachers: A cross-sectional study

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Abstract:

INTRODUCTION: Educators, academicians, and teachers are responsible for the development of the nation's human capital. Teacher coping methods are becoming more widely recognized as a key factor in determining teacher effectiveness. The aim of this study was to identify the various coping strategies adopted by high school teachers in Southern India.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: A cross-sectional study was conducted in government, aided, and unaided schools of Udupi, a coastal district in Southern India. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data from 460 high school teachers chosen based on convenience sampling. The coping strategies were identified using a modified version of Brief COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced) Inventory (Carver, 1997). Data were entered using SPSS version 15 and descriptive statistics was performed.

RESULTS: The study found that teachers had moderate level of coping skills in all domains. The most popular coping techniques used by secondary school teachers were positive reframing, active coping, and planning; nevertheless, substance use was recognized as the least popular coping strategy.

CONCLUSION: Positive reframing, active coping, and preparation were the most commonly used coping strategies by the teachers in the survey. Teachers are a vital resource who have received less attention than they deserve for their psychological well-being. A customized intervention program based on their perceived needs could be a good place to start.

Keywords:

Coping skill, psychological factors, secondary school teachers, well-being

Introduction

Teachers are the most important in-school factors influencing student progress, holistic learning, and academic performance. The quality of these educators' personal and professional progress is linked to their psychological well-being and coping skills.^[1] Teacher happiness is crucial for student happiness, especially in terms of maintaining a stable atmosphere for students and increasing their educational success.^[2,3] Teachers with poor health and coping abilities have been recognized as

having significant levels of stress. It implies that greater teacher coping skills and well-being would lead to more innovative, challenging, and effective mentoring and so improved educational outcomes.^[4]

Teachers' stress has been shown to have an impact on their performance all over the world. It has been discovered to be one of the main causes of burnout. As a result, research studies have focused on teacher stress and approaches to help their cope with anxiety.^[5] Teachers have a significant frequency of self-reported stress, anxiety, and poor coping abilities, according to a

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combined summary of studies conducted by health executive research from 2003 to 2014. The research also stated that the primary source of stress was the profession of teaching itself.^[6] Current concerns about teachers' mental health and coping skills are on the rise. According to an online study of 3500 teachers from around the world, their inadequate coping abilities have harmed 84% of their physical and psychological well-being. The percentage increased by 4% from 2014 to 2015.^[7]

Teachers face new challenges and dynamic experiences as a result of the ever-changing educational system, market forces, and policy reform which provide benefits and opportunities but also come with occupational risks due to the various psychological factors.^[8] Teachers' psychological well-being and coping are multifaceted challenges. The third sustainable development goals 2021 also emphasize healthy lives to promote well-being. Existing literature focuses primarily on negative influences related to teachers' work, with only a few thematic analyses of the identified literature revealing a range of issues related to teachers' coping strategies, well-being, and the required social-emotional competence.^[9]

There are a few studies carried out in the area of understanding the coping skills adopted by the school teachers.^[10] The present study explores the coping strategies adopted by the teachers in the diverse school settings including the public and private sectors which will fill the gap in knowledge on how teachers' well-being is maintained.

Materials and Methods

Study design and setting

The research design included a cross-sectional survey which was carried out in the Udupi and Karkala blocks, which are administrative areas within the Udupi district in southern India's coastal state of Karnataka. According to the State Education Board of Karnataka, there were five educational blocks in the Udupi district. A total of 2003 secondary school teachers worked in the district, representing 162 public and 93 private schools included the target population. The schools were chosen from government, private, rural, and urban locations using multistage stratified sampling.

Study participant and sampling

The two educational blocks, consisting of 57 government and 48 private schools, were chosen based on convenience sampling. A total of 460 eligible teachers in Udupi district secondary schools were contacted, with 366 females and 94 males consenting to participate and providing data from 57 schools. The sampling frame included

secondary school teachers who taught core subjects in Udupi District high schools (Kannada, English, Hindi, Sanskrit, Mathematics, Social Science, and Science). A list of schools and teachers who teach core subjects was compiled. To reach the sample size, schools/clusters were chosen at random from this list from four different strata. [Figure 1]

Data collection tool and technique

There were two parts to the tool. a sociodemographic pro forma was provided in part one, and a Brief COPE inventory was included in part two. The author gave his permission for the questionnaire to be used. Age, gender, marital status, travel time, and other pertinent personal and work-related variables were included in the sociodemographic questionnaire. With 14 subscales and 28 items, the Brief COPE is a modified version of the COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997).^[11] Active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, humor, religion, emotional support, instrumental support, self-distraction, denial, venting, substance use, behavioral disengagement, and self-blame are among the subscales. On the Brief COPE, items are graded on a four-point Likert scale ranging from one (I haven't done this at all) to four (I have done this a lot). A subscale score is calculated by adding the components that make up each subscale. Higher scores showed that a person used that coping approach more frequently.

Teachers were chosen for the study based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. At a time that was convenient for the participants, they were approached at their schools. Before beginning the study, participants were given a thorough explanation of the study's purpose and protocol, and written informed consent was obtained. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential.

The data were grouped, and descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the information. The scale's 14 domains were combined into a single attitude domain. The raw results were divided into categories using percentiles. Scores below the 10th percentile were labeled "poor coping skills," scores between the 10th and 90th percentiles were labelled "moderate coping skills," and scores above the 90th percentile were labeled "good coping skills." Descriptive analysis was carried out using SPSS version 20 (SPSS south Asia, Bangalore).

Ethical consideration

The cross-sectional study received institutional ethics committee approval (IEC 59/2019). The Deputy Director of Public Instruction (DDPI) and Block Education Officers (BEO) of Udupi and Karkala blocks, respectively, gave their approval for the study to be conducted at the school level in Udupi district.

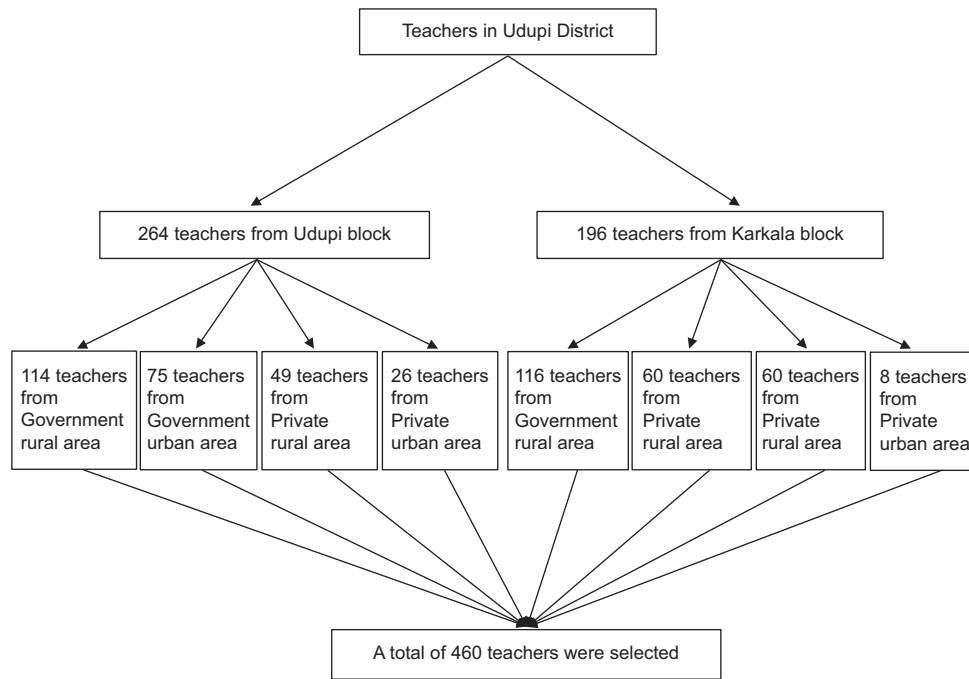


Figure 1: Distribution of selected sample

Results

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic information. The study included 366 female teachers and 94 male teachers. A higher percentage of teachers (73.7%) from rural areas participated, and the majority (85.7%) were Hindus. Out of the 460 participants, 160 (or 34.8%) were above the age of 40. 54.5% of participants in the survey taught language as a subject, whereas 45.5% taught basic subjects. Nuclear families dominated (59.1%), with 80.9% of married couples. Most families had at least three children (46.8%), 41.1% had single children, and 31.4% of the children were between the ages of 5 and 10. Less than half of the participants (46.1%) commuted to work in less than half an hour. The bulk of the participants (68.9%) were educated in government schools, with Kannada (65.4%) as the medium of instruction. A large percentage of the participants (56.6%) had 6–25 years of teaching experience, and 44.3% earned more than INR 30,000/month. The most prevalent employment tasks of teachers were note cross-checking (47.0 p%) and project work distribution (43.5%). The majority of participants (71.3%) believed they had additional tasks to fulfill, and 51.7% believed they had been overworked. More over three-quarters of the participants (87%) felt supported by their families. Workshops (60.9%), training (59.3%), and meetings (54.1%) were all attended by more than half of the attendees.

The study found that teachers had moderate coping skills in the domains of instrumental support, behavioral disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning,

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

Variables	Frequency (n=460), n (%)
Age in years	
<30	81 (17.6)
30-35	111 (24.1)
36-40	108 (23.5)
Above 40	160 (34.8)
Gender	
Male	94 (20.4)
Female	366 (79.6)
Type of family	
Single	10 (2.2)
Nuclear	272 (59.1)
Joint	174 (37.8)
Extended	4 (0.9)
Marital status	
Single	80 (17.4)
Married	372 (80.9)
Divorced and widowed	8 (1.7)
Teaching experience (years)	
Less than or equal to 5	185 (40.2)
6-25	260 (56.6)
>25	15 (3.2)

humor, acceptance, religion, and self-blame, and poor coping skills in the domain of substance use across government and private schools and rural and urban areas [Table 2].

Results from the Brief COPE indicated that the coping mechanism most used was “positive reframing” The mean scores obtained for all 14 subscales are illustrated

in Table 3. (M = 5.71; standard deviation [SD] = 2.23), which includes practices such as trying to see situations differently to make it seem more positive. Other commonly used coping mechanisms included “Planning”

(M = 5.61;SD = 2.05, which entails trying to come up with a strategy about what to do and thinking hard about what steps to take. “Active coping” (M = 5.43;SD = 2.22) which involves concentrating efforts on doing something

Table 2: Coping strategies adopted by the teachers

Domains	Government-rural (n=230), n (%)	Government-urban (n=87), n (%)	Private-rural (n=109), n (%)	Private-urban (n=34), n (%)
Self-distraction				
High	15 (6.5)	17 (19.5)	28 (25.7)	12 (35.3)
Moderate	170 (73.9)	61 (70.1)	64 (58.7)	16 (47.1)
Poor	45 (19.6)	9 (10.3)	17 (15.6)	6 (17.6)
Active coping				
Moderate	156 (67.8)	86 (98.9)	105 (96.3)	34 (100.0)
Poor	74 (32.2)	1 (1.1)	4 (3.7)	-
Denial				
High	2 (0.9)	-	6 (5.5)	1 (2.9)
Moderate	137 (59.6)	77 (88.5)	80 (73.4)	26 (76.5)
Poor	91 (39.6)	10 (11.5)	23 (21.1)	7 (20.6)
Substance use				
High	2 (0.9)	2 (2.3)	4 (3.7)	-
Moderate	85 (37.0)	4 (4.6)	10 (9.2)	1 (2.9)
Poor	143 (62.2)	81 (93.1)	95 (87.2)	33 (97.1)
Use of emotional support				
High	4 (1.7)	4 (4.6)	4 (3.7)	2 (5.9)
Moderate	146 (63.5)	69 (79.3)	92 (84.4)	31 (91.2)
Poor	80 (34.8)	14 (16.1)	13 (11.9)	1 (2.9)
Behavioral disengagement				
High	41 (17.8)	-	-	-
Moderate	121 (52.6)	45 (51.7)	54 (49.5)	19 (55.9)
Poor	68 (29.6)	42 (48.3)	55 (50.5)	15 (44.1)
Venting				
High	3 (1.3)	7 (8.0)	3 (2.8)	2 (5.9)
Moderate	122 (53.0)	53 (60.9)	80 (73.4)	23 (67.6)
Poor	105 (45.7)	27 (31.0)	26 (23.9)	9 (26.5)
Positive reframing				
Moderate	171 (74.3)	86 (98.9)	101 (92.7)	32 (94.1)
Poor	59 (25.7)	1 (1.1)	8 (7.3)	2 (5.9)
Planning				
Moderate	140 (60.9)	82 (94.3)	101 (92.7)	32 (94.1)
Poor	90 (39.1)	5 (5.7)	8 (7.3)	2 (5.9)
Humor				
High	8 (3.5)	14 (16.1)	11 (10.1)	-
Moderate	166 (72.2)	50 (57.5)	57 (52.3)	23 (67.6)
Poor	55 (23.9)	23 (26.4)	40 (36.7)	11 (32.4)
Acceptance				
Moderate	163 (70.9)	87 (100.0)	107 (98.2)	34 (100.0)
Poor	67 (29.1)	-	2 (1.8)	-
Religion				
Moderate	169 (73.5)	75 (86.2)	92 (84.4)	27 (79.4)
Poor	61 (26.5)	12 (13.8)	17 (15.6)	7 (20.6)
Self-blame				
High	8 (3.5)	13 (14.9)	15 (13.8)	4 (11.8)
Moderate	148 (64.3)	51 (58.6)	61 (56.0)	22 (64.7)
Poor	74 (32.2)	23 (26.4)	33 (30.3)	8 (23.5)
Use of instrumental support				
Moderate	153 (66.5)	83 (95.4)	105 (96.3)	34 (100.0)
Poor	77 (33.5)	4 (4.6)	4 (3.7)	-

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the brief COPE subscales

Domains (n=460)	Mean	SD
Self-distraction	4.98	2.04
Active coping	5.43	2.22
Denial	3.96	2.06
Substance use	2.46	0.97
Use of emotional support	4.19	1.98
Use of instrumental support	5.07	2.15
Behavioral disengagement	3.89	2.29
Venting	3.52	1.95
Positive reframing	5.71	2.23
Planning	5.61	2.05
Humor	3.81	1.94
Acceptance	5.37	2.20
Religion	5.21	1.98
Self-blame	3.59	1.81

SD=Standard deviation, COPE=Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced

about a situation and taking action to try to make the situation better, and the coping mechanism utilized the least was “substance use” (M = 2.46; SD = 0.97), which involves alcohol consumption or other drugs to try to make feel better. The total mean score for secondary school teachers’ coping skills was 62.8, with a SD of 27.87 [Table 3].

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to look into the coping strategies employed by secondary school teachers in both the public and private sectors. According to the findings, the majority of teachers have a moderate level of coping skills.

These findings match previous research conducted in a developing nation environment, which found that school instructors begin seeking support from each other in the school in a variety of ways including seeking assistance from senior colleagues, friends, and even the outside school community.^[12] The comparison of secondary school teachers’ coping techniques in government and private schools in rural and urban parts of Karnataka’s Udupi district, which revealed a moderate degree of coping abilities across regions, was an essential aspect in the current study. In contrast to the current study, a study conducted in Georgia and North Carolina found that urban school teachers had poor coping abilities and were more stressed than their rural counterparts.

Positive reframing, active coping, and planning were shown to be the most popular coping mechanisms utilized by secondary school teachers in the current study. This means that instructors typically urge themselves to think more positively about a negative or difficult circumstance, as well as to accept the reality of

stressful situations, devise strategies to manage them, and learn to live with them. Given the current standards in people oriented vocations such as social work, this is not surprising. Finding something to be grateful for in a tough situation and considering a benefit or upside to a stressful situation appear to have a significant impact on teaching.^[13]

In line with the findings of the current study, a study on school teachers found that escape avoidance, accepting responsibility, and uncontrolled hostility were all employed as negative coping methods, while exercise was shown to be a good coping strategy.^[14] The findings of a research conducted in Spain reinforced the idea that a larger combination of the techniques such as positive reappraisal support seeking and planning was linked to higher well-being expectations among the participants.^[15]

The current research does not claim that certain negative coping strategies generate stress; rather, it implies that different coping methods are linked to varying levels of stress.^[16-19] Negative coping, on the other hand, was consistently linked to negative consequences such as stress, anxiety, anger, unhappiness, and loneliness.^[20,21]

In a study conducted in Europe by Fadhel and Adawi, the majority of participants used religion as a positive coping mechanism. The findings demonstrated that the impact of stress and coping was determined by how it was perceived, and that coping mechanisms were influenced by the social and cultural aspects of the participants’ living environment. Individuals’ stress perception and coping mechanisms are influenced by their residence’s location. The study’s findings prompted the development of long-term follow up and intervention programs.^[22] Our findings are consistent with the findings of this study, which found that a teacher’s location can alter their level of coping from moderate to high.

Findings of the current study were consistent with previous research, which revealed that praying, meditating, and self-diverting acts were more effective active coping techniques than maladaptive and avoidance tactics. In comparison to their peers, deep aversion to substance usage helped them feel better, according to the literature. The study suggested that a counseling center is established and that frequent stress management workshops are organized for the participants.^[23,24] A study conducted in Ethiopia also had the same conclusion as the current study that there is a need to prepare teachers to cope with stressful situations in their professional career. In their study, the majority of instructors utilized problem-oriented and/or emotion-oriented ways to deal with their employment issues. In a study of instructors and students’ coping methods conducted in an African

context,^[25] comparative findings were revealed. Teachers discovered that social support is an important coping mechanism.

According to a study conducted in Hong Kong, secondary school teachers' coping methods buffered the effects of stressors on their psychological well-being and stress management skills.^[26]

Similarly, the findings of a study conducted in the United States also reported that the majority of causes of teacher stress had a weak positive association with their coping techniques, whereas the majority of stress effects had a weak negative link with their coping tactics.^[27,28]

For rural school teachers, poor working circumstances and time demands predicted burnout and poor coping skills; for urban school teachers, poor working conditions and pupil misbehavior predicted burnout and poor coping abilities. The findings were examined in relation to developing successful intervention programs to improve coping skills.^[29] Overall, the results of our survey showed that most secondary school teachers used moderate coping techniques. The study, however, had some flaws.

Limitations and recommendation

The geographical scope was limited to the Karnataka district of Udupi, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Because the study was cross-sectional, it was unable to determine the relationship between exposure and outcomes. Despite efforts to include male teachers in the study, female teachers made up the majority of the respondents. As a result, gender perceptions may not be comparable. Underreporting of certain attitudes might lead to response bias.

Understanding the relationship between many domains of coping and teacher psychological well-being, policy changes should focus on how to assist schools and teachers in improving their coping abilities, which is difficult but maybe necessary. Empowering school officials, principals, and teachers in this measure, as well as offering them a partnering role in their overall growth, could be a positive strategy to improve psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The most popular coping tactics adopted by the teachers in the study were positive reframing, active coping, and planning. Teachers are a valuable resource whose psychological factors and coping skills for their well-being have gotten less attention than they deserve, despite the fact that they have an impact on the academic outcomes and well-being of students under their

supervision. An intervention program tailored to their perceived needs could be a good start.

More research could be done to evaluate academicians from other fields of education in order to achieve better and more explicit results. Interventions should include education on coping strategies for teachers and how adaptive and problematic coping methods can help to reduce stress and increase well-being.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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