

Stress and Coping Mechanisms Among Government School Teachers

Dr Rambabu Kalathoti

Computer Science and Engineering

Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation

ramkmsis@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the prevalence of occupational stress and the coping mechanisms employed by government school teachers. Teaching in government-run institutions often entails high workloads, limited resources, and socio-economic challenges that can exacerbate stress levels. Adopting a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 350 government school teachers across three districts. The standardized Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) and the Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) were administered to assess stress dimensions and coping strategies respectively. Descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and multiple regression were used to examine the relationships between demographics, stressors, and coping styles. Findings reveal that time pressures, role ambiguity, and lack of administrative support are the most significant stressors. Teachers predominantly employ problem-focused coping (e.g., time management, seeking peer support) and emotion-focused coping (e.g., positive reframing, relaxation exercises), though avoidance strategies also appear among younger and less experienced teachers.

Regression results indicate that problem-focused coping significantly predicts lower stress levels ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < .001$), whereas reliance on avoidance coping predicts higher stress ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .01$). The study contributes to understanding how government school teachers manage occupational stress and highlights the need for institutional interventions—such as professional

development in stress management, peer-support networks, and administrative policy reforms—to foster teacher well-being and retention.

KEYWORDS

stress; coping mechanisms; government school teachers; occupational stress; resilience



Fig.1 Government School Teachers, [Source\(\[1\]\)](#)

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is widely recognized as a highly demanding profession, characterized by heavy workloads, emotional labor, and continuous responsibility for student learning and well-being. Among career professions, educators report some of the highest levels of work-related stress, which can lead to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and turnover (Kyriacou, 2001). Government school teachers often face additional challenges: large class sizes, inadequate infrastructure, and bureaucratic constraints that limit autonomy and resource availability (Day

& Gu, 2007). In many regions, particularly in developing countries, government schools serve socio-economically disadvantaged communities, placing further emotional and instructional demands on teachers.

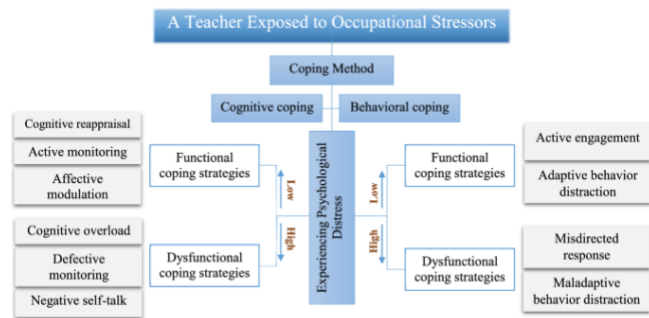


Fig.2 Stress and Coping Mechanisms, [Source\(\[2\]\)](#)

Despite extensive research on teacher stress in private and international school settings, there is relatively less empirical focus on government school teachers, whose contexts differ significantly in terms of policy support, training opportunities, and resource allocation. Moreover, while stress is well documented, less is known about the specific coping mechanisms these teachers deploy to navigate daily pressures. Coping mechanisms are cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage internal and external demands deemed taxing by the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Understanding these strategies is crucial for designing supportive interventions that enhance teacher resilience and effectiveness.

This manuscript addresses two primary research questions:

1. **What are the predominant sources of occupational stress among government school teachers?**
2. **Which coping mechanisms do these teachers employ, and how are these strategies associated with their reported stress levels?**

To answer these questions, a structured survey was administered to a representative sample of government school teachers. Statistical analyses explored the relationships between demographic variables (e.g., age, years of

experience), identified stressors, and three broad coping dimensions: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance-focused. The findings aim to inform policy makers, school administrators, and teacher training institutions about targeted supports to reduce stress and promote healthy coping.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: the next section reviews theoretical frameworks and empirical studies on teacher stress and coping. Following that, the methodology section details the survey design, sampling, instruments, and analytical procedures. The results section reports descriptive statistics and regression analyses. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the implications for practice, outlines limitations, and suggests avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives on Stress and Coping

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model conceptualizes stress as arising from person–environment transactions, wherein individuals appraise demands as taxing or exceeding their resources. Coping is defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage these demands. This model distinguishes primarily between:

- **Problem-focused coping**, which targets the stressor itself (e.g., planning, information seeking);
- **Emotion-focused coping**, which targets emotional responses (e.g., positive reframing, relaxation); and
- **Avoidance-focused coping**, which involves disengagement (e.g., denial, distraction).

The model has been widely applied in educational research to understand how teachers interpret and respond to classroom challenges (Chang, 2009).

Stressors in the Teaching Profession

Research identifies multiple dimensions of teacher stress. Kyriacou (2001) categorized stressors as:

1. **Time pressures** (lesson preparation, grading);
2. **Student misbehavior**;
3. **Role conflict/ambiguity**;
4. **Poor peer support**; and
5. **Lack of administrative support**.

In government schools, additional stress arises from large class sizes, insufficient teaching materials, and mandated curricular changes without corresponding training (Blase & Blase, 2002). For example, in a survey of rural government teachers in India, Rao and Parulekar (2018) found that 87% reported high stress due to overcrowded classrooms and inadequate infrastructure.

Coping Strategies Among Teachers

Teachers employ varied coping strategies. Problem-focused coping—such as collaborative lesson planning and time management—has been linked to lower burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Emotion-focused strategies like mindfulness and social support mitigate emotional exhaustion (Corcoran & Tormey, 2012). In contrast, avoidance strategies (e.g., substance use, emotional withdrawal) correlate with higher distress and attrition (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Empirical studies in government school contexts remain scarce. One study in South Africa by Pretorius (2014) highlighted that government school teachers primarily relied on peer support groups and informal debriefing sessions to cope, noting limited access to formal counseling or professional development. Similarly, a Pakistan-based study (Ahmed & Gujjar, 2016) reported emotion-focused strategies—prayer, positive thinking—as dominant among teachers facing resource constraints.

Gaps and Research Need

While the general patterns of teacher stress and coping are established, the specificity of government school environments—characterized by top-down policy mandates, resource scarcity, and socio-economic disparities—warrants

targeted investigation. Prior studies often employ small, localized samples or qualitative designs, limiting generalizability. There is a need for quantitative, cross-district analyses that link demographic factors to both stress and coping, thereby providing actionable insights for system-level interventions.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A cross-sectional, survey-based quantitative design was employed to assess stressors and coping mechanisms among government school teachers.

Participants and Sampling

The population comprised full-time teachers from government primary and secondary schools in three adjacent districts. Using stratified random sampling, 400 teachers were invited, of whom 350 returned valid responses (response rate: 87.5%). The sample included 212 female (60.6%) and 138 male (39.4%) teachers, aged 24–58 years ($M = 38.7$, $SD = 8.2$), with teaching experience ranging from 1 to 35 years ($M = 12.4$, $SD = 7.1$).

Instruments

1. **Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI; Fimian, 1984):** A 20-item scale measuring five stress dimensions: Time Management, Work-Related Stressors, Professional Distress, Discipline and Motivation, and Emotional Strain. Responses use a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “Never” to 5 = “Very Often”). Cronbach’s α for the total scale was .89 in this study.
2. **Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI; Tobin et al., 1989):** A 32-item inventory assessing Problem-Focused Engagement, Emotion-Focused Engagement, Problem-Focused Disengagement, and Emotion-Focused Disengagement. Responses use a 5-point scale (1 = “Not at all” to 5 = “Very much”). Subscale alphas ranged from .81 to .87.

Data Collection

Surveys were administered in paper form during scheduled staff meetings. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, and informed consent was secured. Completed surveys were coded and entered into SPSS v.26 for analysis.

Data Analysis

- **Descriptive statistics** summarized demographic variables, stressor means, and coping scores.
- **Pearson correlations** examined relationships between stress dimensions and coping subscales.
- **Multiple regression analyses** assessed the predictive power of coping styles on overall stress, controlling for age, gender, and teaching experience.

RESULTS

Descriptive Findings

- **Stressors:** Time Management ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .84$), Discipline & Motivation ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .91$), Work-Related Stressors ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .88$), Professional Distress ($M = 3.32$, $SD = .79$), Emotional Strain ($M = 3.28$, $SD = .85$).
- **Coping:** Problem-Focused Engagement ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .72$), Emotion-Focused Engagement ($M = 3.65$, $SD = .68$), Problem-Focused Disengagement ($M = 2.45$, $SD = .74$), Emotion-Focused Disengagement ($M = 2.52$, $SD = .81$).

Correlation Analysis

Problem-Focused Engagement correlated negatively with total stress ($r = -.48$, $p < .001$), indicating that teachers who actively address stressors report lower stress. Emotion-Focused Engagement also showed a negative correlation ($r = -.33$, $p < .01$). In contrast, both disengagement subscales correlated positively with stress (Problem-Focused

Disengagement: $r = .29$, $p < .01$; Emotion-Focused Disengagement: $r = .31$, $p < .01$).

Regression Analysis

A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with overall stress as the dependent variable. In Step 1, demographic variables (age, gender, experience) were entered, accounting for 5% of variance ($R^2 = .05$, $p < .05$). In Step 2, coping subscales were added, significantly increasing explained variance to 41% ($\Delta R^2 = .36$, $p < .001$). In the final model, Problem-Focused Engagement emerged as the strongest negative predictor ($\beta = -.42$, $t = -7.23$, $p < .001$), followed by Emotion-Focused Engagement ($\beta = -.21$, $t = -3.45$, $p < .001$). Problem-Focused Disengagement ($\beta = .18$, $t = 2.98$, $p < .01$) and Emotion-Focused Disengagement ($\beta = .17$, $t = 2.67$, $p < .01$) were significant positive predictors of stress.

Subgroup Analyses

- **Experience:** Novice teachers (<5 years) reported higher reliance on disengagement coping ($M = 2.78$) than veterans (>15 years; $M = 2.31$, $p < .01$).
- **Gender:** Female teachers scored slightly higher on Emotion-Focused Engagement ($M = 3.73$) than males ($M = 3.52$, $p < .05$), but no gender differences emerged for problem-focused styles.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the multifaceted nature of occupational stress among government school teachers and highlights coping mechanisms that mitigate or exacerbate stress. Time management and student-related challenges constitute the most pressing stressors. Teachers predominantly employ engaged coping—both problem- and emotion-focused—which are effective in reducing stress, whereas disengagement strategies contribute to heightened distress.

Practical Implications:

1. **Professional Development:** Training programs in time-management and collaborative problem solving can enhance problem-focused coping skills.
2. **Peer-Support Networks:** Formalizing peer-mentoring and debriefing sessions can strengthen both problem- and emotion-focused engagement.
3. **Administrative Policies:** School leaders should streamline administrative burdens and clarify role expectations to reduce time-related and role ambiguity stressors.

Limitations and Future Research:

The cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Self-report measures may introduce social-desirability bias. Future studies could employ longitudinal designs to track stress and coping trajectories, and qualitative interviews to deepen understanding of context-specific coping narratives.

In conclusion, fostering adaptive coping among government school teachers through targeted interventions can enhance teacher well-being, instructional quality, and retention—ultimately benefiting the educational outcomes of the communities they serve.

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