

## **Emotional Intelligence, Occupational Stress, Problem Focused and Active Avoidance Coping Strategies of Female Teachers**

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Present study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence; problem focused coping strategy, occupational stress and active avoidance coping strategy among female School teachers of District Hyderabad through a quantitative correlational research. The participants of the present study comprised of 968 female government school teachers, between 22 to 52 years of age ( $M=36.07$ ,  $SD=19.85$ ). Simple random sampling was used for data collection. It is being hypothesized that the emotional intelligence of female teachers will be negatively correlated with occupational stress and positively correlated with problem focused coping strategy. Moreover, occupational stress would be positively correlated with active avoidance coping strategy. To test these hypotheses four measuring tools were used that is, Occupational Stress Scale (Sohail & Khanum, 2000), Self-Report Measure of Emotional Intelligence (Khan & Kamal 2010), Brief Cope Scale (Akhtar, 2005) and Personal Information Questionnaire. Findings of the present study supported the hypotheses and have important implications for educational sector, particularly for teachers' training and development.

*Keywords:* Emotional intelligence, occupational stress, coping strategies, school teachers

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Teaching is a highly respectable and dignified profession; it is called the mother of all professions. In today's challenging and demanding environment, all professions are extremely stressful and teaching is no exception. Teaching is also becoming a highly stressful profession, and there are lots of reasons behind it. Teachers are not only responsible to have updated content knowledge and pedagogical skills, but they also have to prepare teaching plans, and make great efforts to teach unmotivated students. They are responsible for summative and formative student assessment and also checking a bulk of student assignments within a short span of time. They are always under evaluation of head teacher and supervisory staff adding to their stress. All these factors contribute in increased occupational stress among school teachers. Teachers have great responsibilities on their shoulders as the future of the upcoming generation depends on them. Their physical and psychological fitness is extremely important to carry out these responsibilities. The emotional intelligence of a teacher plays an important role in managing and balancing their emotions to guide their students effectively and in dealing with their heads and colleagues in a proper way (Winograd, 2005).

Chan, Chen, and Chong (2010) reported in their study that, the main causes of teachers' stress were heavy workload, time pressure, external school review, and behavior of the students. The appropriate use of emotions is highly helpful in dealing with everyday personal and professional stressors of life. It is proved in researches that, emotionally intelligent people are better able to cope with the reasons of occupational stress including, work overload, and role ambiguity (Darvish, & Nasrollahi, 2011). Goleman (1995) defined emotional intelligence as "*the abilities to recognize and manage one's own and others emotions, motivating oneself, restraining impulses, and handling interpersonal relationships in an effective manner*" (p. 105).

Emotional intelligence has a positive impact on the behavior of school teachers. A study conducted by Kauts and Saroj (2012) revealed that emotionally intelligent teachers were more

effective and they had low occupational stress as compared to those teachers who have low emotionally intelligence. Naqvi, Iqbal and Akhtar (2016) in their study found a strong relationship between high emotional intelligence and better performance among secondary school teachers.

Low emotional intelligence has negative impact on the ability to cope with stress and on physical and psychological wellbeing (Batoool, 2011). Previous studies revealed that, with high level of emotional intelligence, individuals live well-adjusted life and are satisfied with their environment, they have better abilities to solve their problems, and receive social support (Bastian, Burns, & Nettelbeck, 2005).

High emotional intelligence makes an individual able to use appropriate coping strategies to deal with environmental stress including occupational stress. Coping refers to the active steps to solve problems associated with personal and interpersonal relationships. These steps enable an individual to deal with problems associated with an individual's personal life and interpersonal relationships. When the demands of a situation are perceived as stressful or beyond the capacity of an individual with then, he/she may use their thoughts and behaviors to reduce the stress of the situation, known as coping behavior (Fernandera et al., 2005; Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen & DeLongis, 1986; Folkman & Markowitz, 2004).

Problem focused coping is closely related with emotional intelligence and it refers to the ability of being focused on the problem and being active in looking for solutions associated with emergence of any stressful situation, with the help of social support (Hasting et al., 2005). Individuals with high emotional intelligence use problem focused coping strategies and positive emotional focused coping strategies (Saklofske, Burns, & Nettelbeck, 2003; Saklofske, Austin, Galloway, & Davidson, 2007).



Employees with high occupational stress and low emotional intelligence use maladaptive coping strategies, such as denial coping and active avoidance coping strategies. Active avoidance coping strategies involve deliberate acts of detachment and escaping from sources of stress. When employees use active avoidance coping strategy to deal with their occupational stress they perceive the situation as frightening and hence avoid it to minimize the situational risk or threat (Singhai, 2014). These maladaptive coping strategies which include active avoidance and emotion focused coping results in experiencing more dissatisfaction and view the problem as unending (Green & Ross, 1996).

Those school teachers who frequently use active avoidance coping face more stress, less job satisfaction, lots of physical complaints, emotional tiredness, and experience more mental and physical exhaustion (Chan, 1998; Griva & Joeke, 2003; Innes & Kitto, 1989; Pascual, Perez-Jover, Mirambell, Ivañez, & Terol, 2003; Pomaki & Anagnostopoulou, 2003; Rasku & Kinnunen, 2003; Verhoeven, Kraaij, Joeke, & Maes, 2003).

### **Significance of the study**

In Western countries there are plenty of studies, which are conducted on issues of school teachers, but in Pakistan, especially in Sindh, very few researches have been conducted on the problems of school teachers (Hanif & Tariq, 2011). There is a dire need to conduct such researches to explore the issues related to teachers stress, their level of emotional intelligence and particularly the coping strategies that they are using to deal with their occupational stress. Teaching in Pakistan is a highly challenging profession as teachers are suffering from physical and psychological pressure, poor working conditions including bad hygiene, lack or absence of clean drinking water and teaching in small messy class rooms with a slow process of promotion and low wages etc.

The physical and mental health of teachers is extremely crucial to perform their responsibilities. Emotional intelligence is a

relatively new and a valuable concept and its importance in educational industry must be explored. The findings of the present study will be helpful for administrative staff, heads and policymakers to take practical steps to facilitate and support school teachers. Results of present study can also play an important role in making schools management and high authorities aware to arrange workshops and trainings for their staff, on stress management, emotional awareness, and on coping strategies to handle occupational stress.

The present research aims to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence, problem focused coping and occupational stress. Moreover, to find out the relationship occupational stress with active avoidance coping strategies among female school teachers of district Hyderabad. It is being hypothesized that (1) there would be a negative correlation between occupational stress and emotional intelligence, (2) emotional intelligence would be positively correlated with problem focused coping strategy, and (3) occupational stress would be positively correlated with active avoidance coping strategy.

## **Method**

### **Research design**

The current study is an empirical co-relational research. Survey method was used for data collection through questionnaire technique.

### **Participants**

The participants of the present study comprised of nine hundred and sixty eight ( $N= 968$ ) female school teachers of Hyderabad District. The participants were aged between 22 to 52 years ( $M=36.07$ ,  $SD=19.85$ ) and were teaching in different schools of Hyderabad, Pakistan. The participants were selected through simple random sampling technique.

## Measures

The data for the presents study was collected through the following measures:

**Personal information questionnaire.** It consisted of questions regarding demographic information of the participants such as name, age, teaching experience and marital status of the participants.

**Occupational Stress Scale (OSS).** The Urdu version of OSS developed by Sohail and Khanum (2000) was used in present study to measure teachers' occupational stress. The scale comprises of 90 items and has ten subscales, nine items in each subscale. The subscales are, Inter Role Distance (IRD), Role Stagnation (RS), Role Expectation Conflict (REC), Resource Inadequacy (RIN), Role Overload (RO), Role Isolation (RI), Personal Inadequacy (PI), Self-Role Distance (SRD), Role Ambiguity (RA), and Role Erosion (RE). Participants respond to each item on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 0=never to 4=always. The scale is proven to be high in construct validity and test retest reliability and is suitable to assess organizational stress of Pakistani population.

**Self-Report Measure of Emotional Intelligence (SRMEI).** The SRMEI was developed by Khan and Kamal in 2010. It is used to measure over all emotional intelligence and its components. The test has 60 items and has three subscales; emotional self-awareness (items= 21), emotional self-regulation (items= 27), and interpersonal skill (items= 27). Participants respond to each item on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1=never to 5=always. The alpha reliability co-efficient of the scale is ( =.95). High scores on SRMEI show increased level of emotional intelligence and emotional self-control.

**Brief Cope Scale.** The Brief Cope Scale was developed by Carver in 1997 and was translated by Akhtar in 2005. The scale has 28 items and four subscales; problem focused coping subscale, positive coping, active avoidance coping and religious / denial



coping. Participants respond on a 4 point Likert scale ranging from 1=never to 4=a lot. The alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is .77.

Procedure

The first step for the present study comprised of taking official approval for the use of the above mentioned scales from the authors. Post permission, an ethical approval to carry out research and collect data was taken from concerned school authorities. After receiving an approval from the authorities teachers were approached for data collection. The aims of the study were explained to the participants and they were also assured that their responses would remain anonymous and will only be used for research purposes. It took an average of 1.5 hour for participants to fill the forms. Post collection of the data the results were analyzed through SPSS.

Results

The data of the current study was analysed through SPSS and the above mentioned hypotheses were tested. The findings are mentioned below in the tables.

**Table 1**  
*Pearson Moment Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Occupational Stress (N=967)*

Variables	M	SD	r
Emotional Intelligence	177.83	21.10	- 0.98**
Occupational Stress	161.36	09.87	

Note. \*\* $p < .01$

Table 1 represents the correlation coefficient between occupational stress and emotional intelligence. The table indicates a significant strong negative correlation between occupational stress and emotional intelligence.

**Table 2**

*Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Predicting Role of Emotional Intelligence in Developing Occupational Stress (N=967)*

Predictors	B	$\beta$	t	F	$R^2$	p	95% CI	
							LL	UL
Occupational Stress	210.38	-0.96	674.26	123.14	.92	.01	214.76	216.01

Table 2 indicates simple linear regression analysis which was performed to analyze whether emotional intelligence is a predictor of stress among school teachers. It shows emotional intelligence is a significant negative predictor of occupational stress.

**Table 3**

*Pearson Moment Correlation between Emotional Intelligence & Problem Focused Coping Strategies (N=967)*

Variables	M	SD	r
Emotional Intelligence	181.51	10.87	0.73*
Problem Focused Coping	20.89	04.78	

Note. \*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 3 represents the correlation coefficient of emotional intelligence and problem focused coping strategy. It shows a significant strong positive correlation between emotional intelligence and problem focused coping strategy. Table 3 indicates that as is emotional intelligence is increasing, the level of problem focused coping is also increasing.

**Table 4**

*Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Predicting Role of Emotional Intelligence in Developing Problem Focused Coping Strategy (N=967)*

Predictors	B	$\beta$	t	F	$R^2$	p	95% CI	
							LL	UL
AACP	146.94	0.79	137.85	123.21	.53	.01	144.65	148.83

Note. PFCS= Problem Focused Coping Strategy



Table 4 represents simple regression of emotional intelligence and problem focused coping strategy. It shows that emotional intelligence is a predictor of problem focused coping strategy among female school teachers.

**Table 5**  
*Pearson Moment Correlation between Occupational Stress & Avoidance Focused Coping Strategies (N=967)*

Variables	M	SD	r
Occupational Stress	161.36	9.87	0.84**
Avoidance Focused Coping	23.27	7.23	

Note. \*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 5 represents the correlation coefficient between occupational stress and active avoidance coping strategy. Results show that a strong positive correlation exists between active avoidance coping strategies and occupational stress. An increase in occupational stress increases active avoidance coping strategy.

**Table 6**  
*Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Predicting Role of Active Avoidance Coping Strategy in Developing Occupational Stress (N=967)*

Predictors	B	$\beta$	t	F	$R^2$	p	95% CI	
							LL	UL
AACS	25.31	0.84	08.84	24.72	.71	.01	19.62	30.92

Note. AACS= Active Avoidance Coping Strategy

Table 6 displays simple linear regression analysis to analyze active avoidance coping as a predictor of occupational stress among female school teachers. It indicates that occupational stress is a significant positive predictor of active avoidance coping strategy.

### Discussion

Stress is an inevitable part of modern life and occupational stress is also the result of it. Teaching which was once considered to be a rather relaxed job is now considered to be highly stressful and demanding. In educational settings, teachers stress is a serious issue. As compared to other professions teaching has double stress and less job satisfaction due to various reasons, including disruptive behavior of students, criticism from parents and head staff, post working conditions, etc. One third of teachers perceive their profession as highly stressful (Borig, 1990).

Emotional intelligence is helpful for individuals in every walk of life, including handling professional stress; it enables an individual to understand their emotions and positively work in dealing with personal and professional stressors. The results of the research study by Gardener (2005) indicated a positive impact of emotional intelligence on physical and mental well-being, job satisfaction and dedication with occupation among school teachers.

The present study was conducted to find out the relationship between emotional intelligence, problem focused coping strategy, occupational stress and active avoidance coping strategy among female school teachers of district Hyderabad. There were three hypotheses tested in the study. The results of the present study support the first hypothesis and indicate that there is a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress. The results of the study are consistent with the study conducted by Gorsy, Goyat, and Anand (2015). The findings of their study also indicate that emotional intelligence is negatively correlated with occupational stress. Another previous research conducted by Punia, Balda and Poonam (2016) is also in line with the results of the present study and reveals that emotionally intelligent teachers experience less occupational stress. The research further mentioned that several demographic factors such as sex, age, educational level, years of teaching experience and types of school, play a significant role in the perception of various sources of stress related to the teaching profession.

The results of the study also revealed that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with problem focused coping strategy. Similar results have also been obtained in a study conducted by Bibi, Kazmi, Choudhry and Khan in 2015. The study was conducted on 374 University teachers of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa and the results revealed that emotional intelligence was positively correlated with problem focused coping and positive coping strategies. Another research suggested that emotional intelligence has positive impact on psychological well-being and problem focused coping (Por, Bariball, Fritzpatrick & Roberts, 2011).

The results of the present study showed a positive relationship between occupational stress and active avoidance coping strategy, and thus supported the third hypothesis. Similar findings were found in a study conducted by Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntalla (2013), when investigating the relationship between occupational stress and professional burnout in teachers of primary and secondary education. Results of their study revealed that teachers who were using rational coping strategies were efficiently able to deal with occupational stressors and burnout, as compared to teachers who were using active avoidance coping strategies. Bharathi (2013) conducted a study and revealed that the solution for occupational stress was direct involvement with the causes of stress rather than avoidance of stressors.

### **Conclusion**

Teaching in school is a challenging job, which has various issues and stressors and therefore the well-being of teachers should be a priority of educators. They should take steps to retain their staff and avoid absenteeism, burnout and other related problems among school teachers. With the help of providing trainings of emotional intelligence to school teachers these serious issues can be resolved and their problem focused coping can be increased and avoidance focused coping can be decreased.



### Limitations and future suggestion

The present research was conducted on only female school teachers and therefore it is recommended to include male teachers in future researches. It is also suggested that, the same research problem should be investigated among university and college lecturers to search for the causes and level of their occupational stress and emotional intelligence.

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