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## DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS AND COPING STRATEGIES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS - A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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### **Abstract**

*The present paper aimed at studying coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers from different streams of teaching with different years of experience. 750 teachers of Govt. secondary schools of Punjab from four districts namely Mohali, Patiala, Ropar and Fatehgarh sahib were selected randomly for the purpose. The ways of coping questionnaire by Folkman and Lazarus (1988) was used to assess the coping strategies used by the secondary school teachers of Punjab. The findings of the study revealed that teachers from mathematics and science streams use 'Planful problem solving' strategy for coping stress followed by 'Seeking Social support' strategy whereas, teachers from other streams of teaching prefer to use 'Seeking Social support' strategy for coping stress followed by 'Self Controlling'. It was also found that 'Seeking social support' strategy to combat stress has been the most widely used strategy for teachers irrespective of gender, different years of experience and different streams of teaching.*

**Keywords:** Coping Strategies, Demographic variables

### **Introduction**

Modern living has brought with it, not only innumerable means of comfort, but also a plethora of demands that tax human body and mind. Now-a-days everyone talks about stress. It is cutting across all socio economic groups of population and becoming the great leveler. Not

only just high pressure executives are its key victims but it also includes labourers, slum dwellers, working women, businessmen, professionals and even children. Stress is an inevitable and unavoidable component of life due to increasing complexities and competitiveness in living standards. The speed at which change is taking place in the world today is certainly overwhelming and breathe taking. In the fast changing world of today, no individual is free from stress and no profession is stress free. Everyone experiences stress, whether it is within the family, business, organization, study, work, or any other social or economical activity.

Stress among teachers has become a topic of professional interest but studies relating to teacher's stress have not been carried out on large scale. Stress disturbs the equilibrium of the body. It affects physically, emotionally, and mentally. When individuals experience stress or face demanding situation, they adopt ways of dealing with it, as they cannot remain in a continued state of tension. How the individual deals with stressful situations is known as 'coping'. There are two major targets of coping: changing ourselves or changing our environment. Coping refers to a person's active efforts to resolve stress and create new ways of handling new situations at each life stage (Erikson, 1959) The goals of coping include the desire to maintain a sense of personal integrity and to achieve greater personal control over the environment. Then he modifies some aspects of the situation or the self in order to achieve a more adequate person-environment fit. Coping thus, is the behaviour that occurs after the person has had a chance to analyze the situation, take a reading of his or her emotions and to move to a closer or more distant position from the challenge. Whenever there is a problem, previous means of coping and dealing with problems seem meaningless in face of new threats and challenges. It is important to know ourselves and restore the state of equilibrium in order to survive the problem situation. Facing and overcoming various life stresses enforces resilience towards extremely threatening life situations. Resilience enables one to protect oneself and bounce back from stressful circumstances more easily (Ferdrickson, 2001). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) conceptualized coping as any response to stimulations life stressor that serves to prevent, avoid or control emotional distress.

Therefore, coping strategies are those responses that are effective in reducing an unwanted load (i.e. the psychological burden). The effectiveness of coping strategy rests on its ability to reduce immediate distress as well as to contribute to more long term outcomes such as

psychological well being. For many years researches on stress and coping strategies have been confined to clinical areas. The area of teaching has been considered as the easiest and least stressed. The role of schools and contributions of our teachers to society are immense. The strength of our economy, realization of democratic principles, and quality of life depend to a large extent on our educational system and quality of teaching. Teaching is inter- personal, attitudinal, extra classroom as well as intra – classroom oriented. To be a teacher is to be a member of a special profession.

Mixed trends for use of coping strategies by the teachers was found. A few studies (Khan et al. (2005), Kalyani et al. (2009)) found no significant gender differences in different kind of coping strategies. Some studies (Folkman et. al. (1986)) stated that women tended to use relatively more positive reappraisal than did men, and men tended to use relatively more self-control than did women. However, it is also reported (Vitaliano et al. (1985), Chan and Hui (1995)) that women used relatively more problem focused coping, wishful thinking, social support, avoidance, and self-blame than did men. The results of some researches (Chaturvedi and Purushothaman (2009)) revealed that marital status, age, and experience were found to be significant determinants of stress-coping, whereas the scores did not differ significantly on the basis of level of teaching.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The present study was conducted:

1. To study the coping strategies used by secondary school teachers of Punjab.
2. To compare the coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers of Punjab.
3. To compare the coping strategies used by more experienced and less experienced secondary school teachers of Punjab.
4. To compare the coping strategies used by secondary school teachers of Punjab from different streams of teaching (science & mathematics stream and others).

## **DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

1. The study was limited to the schools of four districts of Punjab namely Mohali, Patiala, Ropar and Fatehgarh sahib.
2. The study was restricted to government schools because difference in organizational climate of private and government schools may affect the variables of the study.

## **HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY**

1. There will be no significant relationship between nature of coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers of Punjab.
2. There will be no significant relationship between nature of coping strategies used by less experienced and more experienced secondary school teachers of Punjab.
3. There will be no significant relationship between nature of coping strategies used by secondary school teachers of Punjab from different streams of teaching (mathematics and science and others).

## **SAMPLE**

### **Sample for the main study**

For the current investigation, the sample was the 750 teachers of Govt. secondary school of Punjab from four districts namely Mohali, Patiala, Ropar and Fatehgarh sahib.

The sample was collected at two levels, viz.

- Secondary school level
- Teachers sample

### **Secondary school level**

At this level cluster random sampling technique was used. A list of all Govt. Secondary schools (581) of four different districts was obtained to select the schools. Nearly 53 schools were needed to collect the data of 750 teachers. In all 58 Secondary schools were selected

randomly as the number of teachers available in each school on the day of data collection may vary.

### **Teachers sample**

Random sampling technique was used at this stage. From the above 58 schools, 750 secondary school teachers were chosen. Care was taken that at least 375 teachers were male and 375 female. From each school approximately 16 teachers (8 male and 8 female) of which 4 each from mathematics and science stream and others stream were chosen. Only those questionnaires were retained which were complete in all respects.

### **TOOLS USED**

The ways of coping questionnaire by Folkman and Lazarus (1988) was used to assess the coping strategies used by the secondary school teachers of Punjab. The eight coping strategies measured by this tool are (i) Confrontive controlling (ii) Distancing (iii) Self controlling (iv) Seeking social support (v) Accepting responsibility (vi) Escape- avoidance (vii) Planful problem solving (viii) Positive reappraisal.

### **STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED**

Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) was employed to study the coping strategies used by secondary school teachers. Since, sample size was large and the Chi Squared matrix was bigger than a 2 x 2 matrix, Cramer's *V* was applied.

### **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

In the present study various codes have been used for different coping strategies. The list of codes used in the present study are given below in Table 1.1

<b>Code</b>	<b>Name of the Coping strategy</b>
CC	Confrontive Controlling
D	Distancing
SC	Self Control
SSS	Seeking Social Support
AR	Accepting Responsibility
E-A	Escape- Avoidance
PPS	Planful Problem solving
PR	Positive Reappraisal

The relationship of coping strategies and demographic variables is studied under three heads i.e.:

1.1 Coping strategies and Gender

- 1.2 Coping strategies and Experience
- 1.3 Coping strategies and Streams of teaching

Where, chi-square was statistically significant and sample size was large and the Chi Squared matrix was bigger than a 2 x 2 matrix, **Cramer's V** was used (Cramer, 1999). The formula is:

$$V = \sqrt{\frac{X^2}{n(q-1)}} \quad \text{where, } q = \text{smaller \# of rows or columns}$$

**1.1 Coping strategies and gender**

In the relationship between coping strategies and gender, eight types of coping strategies (Table 1.1) and gender (male and female) were involved.

To study the relationship between coping strategies used by male and female teachers, chi- square test was applied.

**Table 1.2 value of chi-square showing relationship between various coping strategies and gender**

VALUE OF Chi- Square ( $\chi^2$ )	df	Level of significance
81.67	7	0.01

The value of chi- square is significant at 0.01 level. This shows that there exists significant relationship between the coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers of Punjab.

Since, chi-square is statistically significant, cramer's V was calculated. The value of cramer's V i.e. 0.32 falls between 0.3 to 0.5 which shows that there is a moderate relationship



(Cramer, 1999) between nature of coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers.

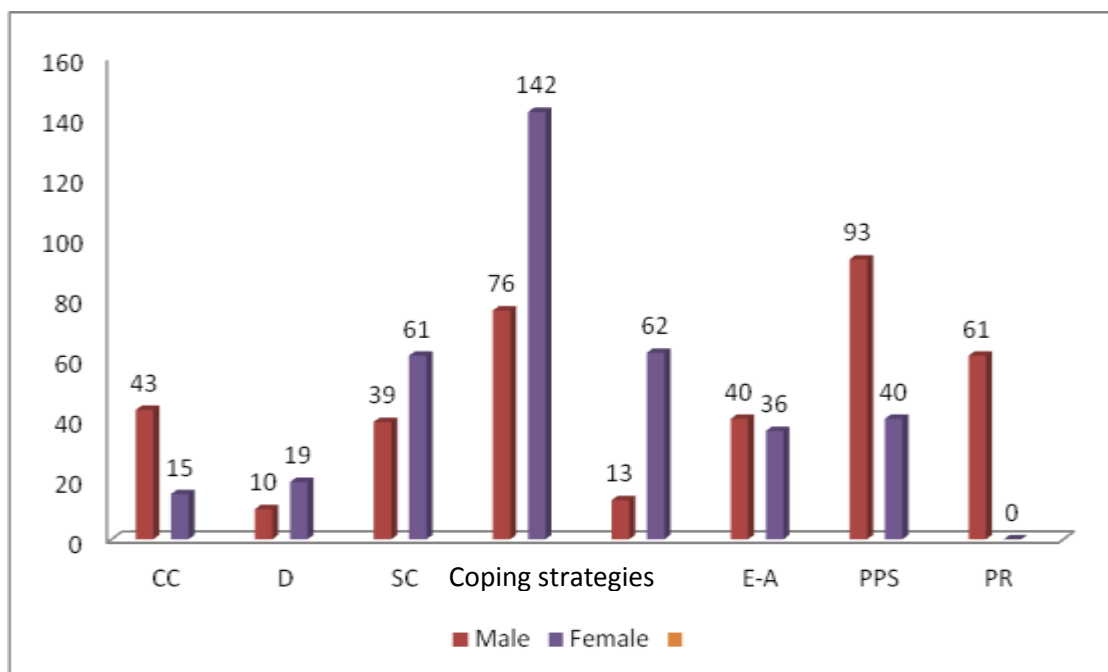
The frequency of coping strategies used by male and female teachers is shown in Table 1.3.

**Table 1.3 Frequency of coping strategies used by male and female teachers**

Coping Strategy ↓ Gender →	Coping Strategy								Total
	CC	D	SC	SSS	AR	E-A	PPS	PR	
Male	43	10	39	76	13	40	93	61	375
Female	15	19	61	142	62	36	40	--	375
Total	58	29	100	218	75	76	133	61	750

From Table 1.3 it can be inferred that maximum number of female teachers (142) use SSS i.e. seeking social support strategy as compared to male teachers who use planful problem solving strategy (93) to combat stress. Male teachers also prefer to use seeking social support strategy but not as much as the female teachers.

The comparison of frequencies of various coping strategies used by male and female teachers are also shown in figure 1.1.



**Fig 1.1 comparison of various coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers**

From Table 1.1 it can be seen that all the coping strategies are used by both the gender except for positive reappraisal which is used by only male teachers. Man is a social animal. Since, we all live in society, our decisions are commonly affected by the values and support of the members of the society. Our society is male dominated and the decisions taken by the females are seldom paid heed. They are supposed to gather the support of other people for implementation of their decisions. When the females enter the teaching profession, they are considered subordinate to the male members. Moreover, male teachers also try to prove their supremacy by not letting female teachers take their own decisions on the professional front. Then female teachers have to use the support of colleagues so as to make their point strong. It seems this support is needed at every stage of professional life of female teachers. Hence, they resort to ‘seeking social support’ strategy. Males on the other hand are given more freedom to take decisions and their decisions are hardly questioned by anyone. So, when males are encountered with the problems, they apply the practical approach and try to solve the problem in a planned way. So, they opt for ‘planful problem solving’ strategy.

Markham (1999) and Mathew (2005) found that seeking social support is the most favoured coping strategy used by the teachers.

On the basis of above results and discussions, hypotheses 1 stating “there will be no significant relationship between nature of coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers of Punjab, does not stand accepted.

### 1.2 Coping strategies and experience

In the relationship between coping strategies and experience, eight types of coping strategies (Table 1.1) and three levels of experience (up to 10 years, 11 to 20 years and more than 20 years) were involved.

To study the relationship between coping strategies used by less experienced and more experienced teachers, chi- square test was applied.

**Table 1.3 value of chi-square showing relationship between various coping strategies and experience**

VALUE OF Chi- Square ( $\chi^2$ )	df	Level of significance
81.89	14	0.01

The value of chi- square is significant at 0.01 level. This shows that there exists significant relationship between the coping strategies used by less experienced and more experienced secondary school teachers of Punjab.

Since, chi-square is statistically significant, cramer’s *V* was calculated. The value of cramer’s *V* i.e. 0.33 falls between 0.3 to 0.5 which shows that there is a moderate relationship (Cramer, 1999) between nature of coping strategies used by less experienced and more experienced secondary school teachers of Punjab.

The frequency of coping strategies used by less experienced and more experienced teachers is shown in Table 1.4.

**Table 1.4 Frequency of coping strategies used by more experienced and less experienced teachers**

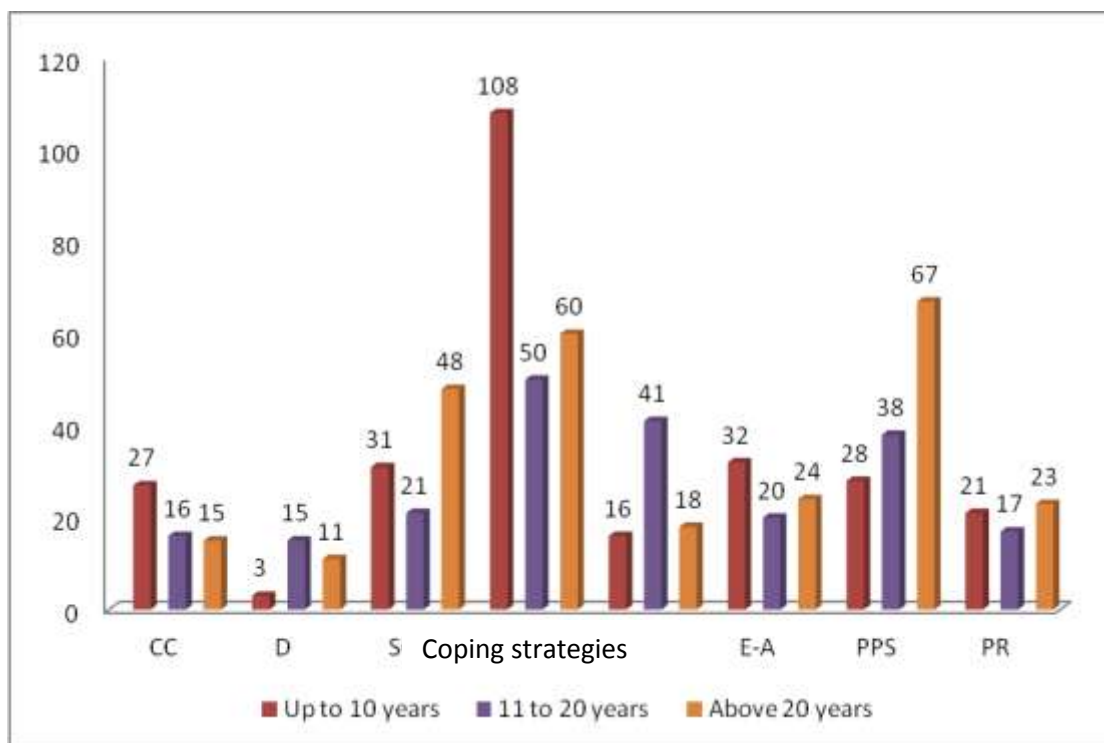
Coping Strategy ↓ Experience →	CC	D	SC	SSS	AR	E-A	PPS	PR	Total
<b>Up to 10 years</b>	27	03	31	108	16	32	28	21	266
<b>11 to 20 years</b>	16	15	21	50	41	20	38	17	218
<b>Above 20 years</b>	15	11	48	60	18	24	67	23	266
<b>Total</b>	58	29	100	218	75	76	133	61	750

From Table 1.4 it can be inferred that SSS i.e. seeking social support strategy is used by maximum number of teachers with experience up to 10 years (108) and with experience between 11 to 20 years (50) as compared teachers with more than 20 years of experience who prefer to use planful problem solving strategy (67) to combat stress.

Besides using SSS i.e. seeking social support strategy, another coping strategy preferred by teacher up to 10 years of experience is Escape- avoidance (32) and also for teachers with experience between 11 to 20 years (41). It seems that teachers with up to 10 years of experience and experience between 11 to 20 years prefer to take the support of others when they encounter a problem or try to avoid the situation. But for teachers with more than 20 years of experience, the second most preferred coping strategy after planful problem solving is seeking social support

(60). As teachers gain experience, they learn better ways of dealing with problems and they start solving the problems in a planned way. But, seeking social support is also used by them.

The comparison of frequencies of various coping strategies used by secondary school teachers with experience up to 10 years, between 11 to 20 years and more than 20 years are also shown in figure 1.2.



**Fig 1.2 comparison of various coping strategies used by secondary school teachers with experience up to 10 years, 11 to 20 years and above 20 years**

Life is full of experiences. As a result of various experiences, there occur many behavioural changes in an individual. As, an individual progresses through life, he learns many ways to deal with the problems. After analyzing the above results, it can be inferred that secondary school teachers with less than 10 years of experience are young, new in the field of teaching and hence, they find ‘seeking social support’ as the best option to deal with the problems. As they gain experience, they keep using the seeking social support strategy but also start using ‘Accepting responsibility’ strategy most often as they find this strategy being the only option to resort all the problems in a peaceful manner. As they grow in experience and age, they

become more mature and change their way of dealing with problems and then they resort to other measures i.e. ‘planful problem solving’ strategy.

On the basis of above results and discussions, hypotheses 2 stating “there will be no significant relationship between nature of coping strategies used by less experienced and more experienced secondary school teachers of Punjab” does not stand accepted.

### 1.3 Coping strategies and Streams of teaching

In the relationship between coping strategies and streams of teaching, eight types of coping strategies (Table 1.1) and two types of streams of teaching (mathematics and science and others) were involved.

To study the relationship between coping strategies used by teachers from mathematics & science stream and others stream, chi- square test was applied.

**Table 1.5 value of chi-square showing relationship between various coping strategies and streams of teaching**

VALUE OF Chi- Square ( $\chi^2$ )	df	Level of significance
55.24	7	0.01

The value of chi- square is significant at 0.01 level. This shows that there exists significant relationship between the coping strategies used by secondary school teachers from mathematics & science stream and others stream.

Since, chi-square is statistically significant, cramer’s *V* was calculated. The value of cramer’s *V* i.e. 0.27 falls between 0.1 to 0.3 which shows that there is a low association (Cramer, 1999) between nature of coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers.

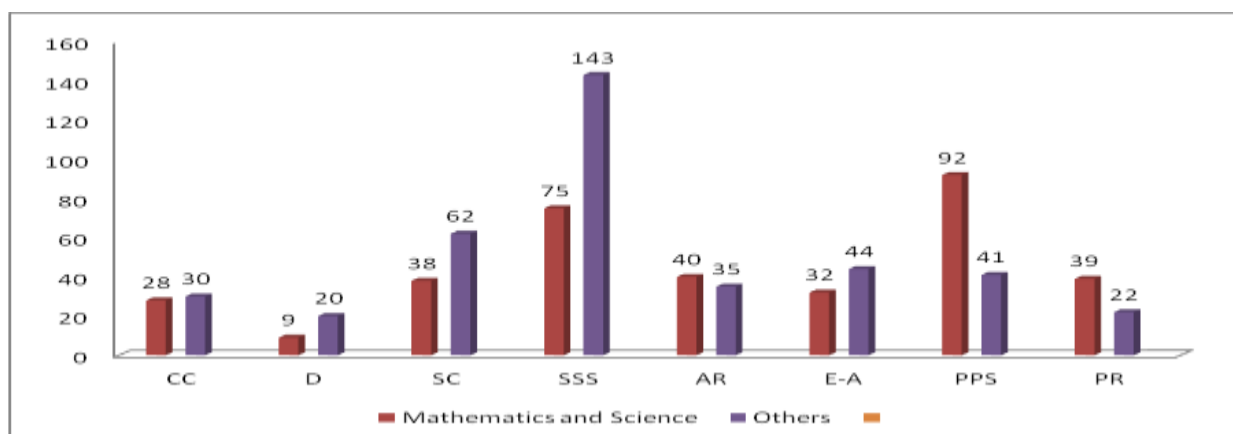
The frequency of coping strategies used by teachers from different streams of teaching is shown in Table 1.6.

**Table 1.6 Frequency of coping strategies used by teachers from different streams of teaching**

Coping Strategy ↓ Streams of teaching →	Coping Strategy								Total
	CC	D	SC	SSS	AR	E-A	PPS	PR	
<b>Mathematics and Science</b>	28	09	38	75	40	32	92	39	353
<b>Others</b>	30	20	62	143	35	44	41	22	397
<b>Total</b>	58	29	100	218	75	76	133	61	750

From Table 1.6 it can be inferred that teachers from mathematics and science stream prefer to use PPS i.e. planful problem solving strategy (92) as compared to teachers from other streams of teaching who use SSS i.e. seeking social support strategy (143) to combat stress.

The frequencies of various coping strategies used by teachers from different streams of teaching are also shown in figure 1.3.



**Fig 1.3 comparison of various coping strategies used by secondary school teachers from mathematics and science streams and others Stream**

An individual faces many problems in life and how he/she deals with the problem depends upon his/her approach towards life and problems. It is believed that teachers from mathematics and science streams have a scientific attitude and are more practical in life. An individual with scientific bent of mind will always engage in responsible action after weighing the possible consequences of alternative options and use rational arguments based on evidence. He/she distinguishes between scientific evidence and personal opinion and between reliable and unreliable information, remains open to new evidences and try to solve any problem in a planned way. So, the teachers from mathematics and science streams use planful problem solving strategy (PPS), while teachers from other streams of teaching prefer to use seeking social support strategy (SSS) to combat stress. But other than using planful problem solving strategy, teachers from mathematics and science streams also prefer to use seeking social support strategy to cope with stress. Man is social animal and is bound by the norms and values of the society in which he lives. He wants social approval for his actions and reactions. It is natural human tendency to confide in people one trusts and seek their support. So, seeking social support strategy is used by teachers to cope stress.

On the basis of above results and discussions, hypotheses 3 stating “there will be no significant relationship between nature of coping strategies used by secondary school teachers of Punjab from different streams of teaching (mathematics and science and others)” does not stand accepted.

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

- I. The relationship between coping strategies and gender was found to be significant at 0.01 level ( $\chi^2 = 81.67$ ). This shows that there existed significant relationship between the coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers of Punjab. The value of cramer’s *V* i.e. 0.32 shows that there was a moderate relationship between nature of coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers.



- Male teachers use maximum 'Planful problem solving' strategy for coping stress followed by 'seeking social support'.
- Approximately 40% of female teachers use 'Seeking social support' strategy for coping stress followed by 'Accepting responsibility' and 'self controlling' strategy which was used by 20% female teachers.

II. The relationship between coping strategies and experience was found to be significant at 0.01 level ( $\chi^2= 81.89$ ). This shows that there existed significant relationship between the coping strategies used by secondary school teachers of Punjab with different years of experience. The value of cramer's  $V$  i.e. 0.33 shows that there was a moderate relationship (Cramer, 1999) between nature of coping strategies used secondary school teachers of Punjab with different years of experience.

- Teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience use 'Seeking Social Support' as strategies for coping stress followed by 'Escape- Avoidance' and 'Self controlling' Strategy.
- Teachers with 11 to 20 years of teaching experience use 'Seeking Social Support' as strategies for coping stress. 'Accepting Responsibility' and 'Planful Problem Solving' are other preferred coping strategies.
- Teachers with more than 20 years of teaching experience prefer to use 'Planful problem solving' strategy for coping stress. The second most widely used coping strategy for teachers with more than 20 years of experience was 'Seeking Social Support'.

III. The relationship between coping strategies and streams of teaching was found to be significant at 0.01 level ( $\chi^2= 55.24$ ). This shows that there existed significant relationship between the coping strategies used by secondary school teachers of Punjab from different streams of teaching. The value of cramer's  $V$  i.e. 0.32 shows that there was a moderate relationship (Cramer, 1999) between nature of coping strategies used by male and female secondary school teachers.

- Teachers from mathematics and science streams use 'Planful problem solving' strategy for coping stress followed by 'Seeking Social support' strategy.

- Maximum teachers from other streams of teaching prefer to use ‘Seeking Social support’ strategy for coping stress followed by ‘Self Controlling’.

It can be concluded that ‘Seeking social support’ strategy to combat stress has been the most widely used strategy for teachers irrespective of gender, different years of experience and different streams of teaching. This finding is in congruence with the finding of Markham (1999) and Mathew (2005) who stated that ‘Seeking social support’ was the most favoured coping strategy used by the teachers.

### **EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of the present study can be of immense use by educational planners, thinkers, demographers, teachers, psychologists, administrators and policy makers. The major recommendations of the study were:

- i) Training sessions must be arranged for the female teachers irrespective of experience to develop among them coping skills. Various techniques like breathing, relaxing must be taught so that the stress level does not affect their efficiency in teaching.
- ii) Yoga classes and sessions should be organized for the teachers to help them cope better with stress.
- iii) Coping with the stress of teaching needs to be addressed at the pre- service stage of the teachers career so that they know where to draw a line to prevent their social and personal life from being absorbed by their professional life. The methods which can help a teacher to reduce these must be taught to the teachers.
- iv) ‘Seeking social support’ strategy is the most preferred coping strategy by all the teachers. They should also be provided with information about other coping strategies like ‘Planful problem solving’ and ‘self controlling’ and encouraged to use these coping strategies in different situations.

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