



## COPING STRATEGIES OF STUDENT TEACHERS IN THE PRE PRACTICE TEACHING PERIOD AT SECONDARY LEVEL

**Dr. Suresh K. J.**

**Associate Professor, N.S.S. Training College, Changanacherry, Kerala.**

### ABSTRACT :

*This paper intends to study the level of Coping Strategies, student teachers of secondary level employ in managing their stress in the pre practice teaching period. It also compares the level of coping strategies employed by student teachers at secondary level prior to the teaching practice; based on the gender, region, type of management of the institution and qualification. The study revealed that about one fourth of the student teachers have low level of coping strategies. Also, the study showed that student teachers of aided colleges have better coping strategies than those of Government colleges, unaided colleges, and university teacher education colleges.*

**KEYWORDS :** Coping strategies, Stress, Student teachers, Pre practice teaching period, Secondary level

### INTRODUCTION

Stress and coping are arguably the most studied phenomena in psychology today (Hobfoll et al., 1996). According to Lazarus(1966) stress consists of three processes namely *Primary appraisal*, *Secondary appraisal* and *Coping*. Primary appraisal is the process of perceiving threat to oneself, Secondary appraisal is the process of formulating potential response to threat and Coping is the process of executing the response (Lazarus and Folkman , 1984).

Coping refers to efforts to overcome, diminish or endure the demands resulting from Stress. In other words coping refers to individual's reaction to a stressor. Coping Strategies are actions that people take to master, tolerate, reduce or minimize the effects of stressors. It is not a permanently fixed individual trait or disposition but a transactional process which is continually modified by experience. Coping is not a permanently fixed individual trait or disposition but a transactional process which is continually modified by experience. Moreover, coping is not only a reaction to stress, but it may be viewed as a preventive strategy, if a potential stressful situation is anticipated.

Lazarus and Folkman (1980) have proposed two types of coping Such as problem focused coping and emotion focused coping. Problem focused coping eliminates stressor or its impact through direct actions. It is a positive coping strategy. In emotion focused coping, people react emotionally to the stressor and try to change what they feel about the stressor and their emotional reactions to the stressor. Both these strategies are used together or separately by people to deal with stress. Thoits (1986) proposed a third type of coping namely perception focused strategy.

In perception focused coping, cognitive attempts are made to alter the meaning of the situation so that it is perceived as less threatening.

Coping strategies can be cognitive, emotional, behavioral or physical.

#### **1. Cognitive coping Strategies**

Cognitive coping strategies view stressors as challenges rather than threats. It does not eliminate threats but help people perceive them as less threatening and make them less disruptive.

## **2. Emotional Coping Strategies**

Seeking and obtaining social support help individuals to cope with stress effectively. The perception that emotional support, and is cared for and valued by others tends to be an effective buffer against the ill effect of many stressors (Taylor, 1995).

## **3. Behavioural Coping Strategies**

Behavioural coping strategies involve changing the behaviours to minimize the impact of stressors. For example, a time management plan helps one to manage the available time and plan for handling the stressors.

## **4. Physical Coping Strategies**

Physical Coping Strategies aim at changing or altering one's physical responses before, during or after the occurrence of the stressors.

Defense mechanisms proposed by Sigmund Freud in his psycho analytic theory such as denial, repression, rationalisation, projection, reaction formation, displacement, regression, identification, compensation(substitution), and sublimation are some sort of emotion focused coping strategies. Using humour, crying, ignoring problems etc are the other emotion focused coping strategies. Self regulation or self control of the physiological aspect of functioning along with relaxation continuum is one among the main coping skills (Matthews, 1988). Different people tend to use different coping strategies and the use of a particular strategy may also depend upon on the situation and the emotions aroused by it. (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

## **NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Teaching is considered to be one of the most stressful professions. Teachers have to deal with a number of academic, personal, emotional, disciplinary and social problems of students in classrooms which makes their profession stressful. Student teachers during their teaching practice, have to deal with all the above problems, which even a regular teacher finds stressful, in addition to the demands and challenges of their training programme, which makes their professional training period even more stressful. To deal with the stress generated out of these problems effectively, student teachers should have sound coping strategies. In addition to the heavy preparatory works for the teaching practice and anticipation of the potential stressful period during teaching practice which is an altogether new situation for them, student teachers generate stress in the pre teaching practice period itself.

Several researchers have conducted studies on the type of Coping Strategies adopted, effectiveness of Coping Strategies in managing Stress and the relationship between Stress and Coping Strategies of different samples of teachers and student teachers; and have reported the influence of Coping Strategies in managing Stress. All these studies show the importance of having sound Coping Strategies for student teachers to deal with the stress in the profession as well as in personal life.

Hence a study related to the extent and level of coping strategies employed by student teachers to deal with the stress during their pre teaching practice period, will be very helpful to rethink of the kind of guidance, supervision and training to be given to student teachers for coping with stress effectively and carry out their preparations efficiently.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To study the level of coping strategies employed by student teachers at secondary level prior to teaching practice.
2. To compare the level of coping strategies employed by student teachers at secondary level prior to the teaching practice based on the gender, region, type of management of the institution and qualification.

## HYPOTHESIS

1. There exists no significant difference in the level of coping strategies employed by student teachers at secondary level prior to teaching practice; based on gender, region, type of management of the institution and qualification.

## METHODOLOGY

Survey method was used for this study. The study was conducted among student teachers of Kerala at the secondary level. 795 student teachers from north and south regions of Kerala state were selected based on gender, region, qualification and the type of management of the institution.

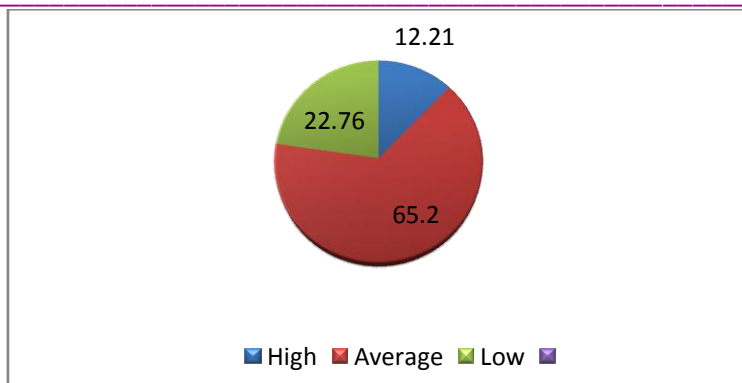
### Levels of Coping Strategies of Student Teachers

Levels of Coping Strategies of student teachers were identified by classifying them into High, Average and Low groups based on their scores obtained with respect to Coping Strategies. Assuming a normal distribution of Coping Strategies scores, the conventional procedure of using sigma distances for classifying the sample was used. Student teachers whose Coping Strategies scores fall between ( $M + \sigma$  and  $M - \sigma$ ) were classified as 'Average Coping Strategies Group' (ACSG), student teachers whose scores were below ( $M - \sigma$ ) were classified as 'Low Coping Strategies Group' (LCSG), and student teachers whose scores were above ( $M + \sigma$ ) were classified as 'High Coping Strategies Group' (HCSG). For the distribution of Coping Strategies scores, Mean was 176.22 and Standard Deviation was 34. Therefore, student teachers whose Coping Strategies scores were 210.99 or more (rounded value of  $M + \sigma$ ) were considered to possess 'High Coping Strategies', whose scores were less than 141.44 (rounded value of  $M - \sigma$ ) were considered to possess 'Low Coping Strategies', and the remaining were classified as of 'Average Coping Strategies'. The data and results of the classification done are shown in the Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Number and Percentage of Student Teachers with respect to the Levels of Coping Strategies**

Categories	High Coping Strategies Group (HCSG)	Average Coping Strategies Group (ACSG)	Low Coping Strategies Group (LCSG)
Norms	$M + \sigma$ and above	$M + \sigma$ to $M - \sigma$	$M - \sigma$ and below
Number	97	517	181
Percentage	12.21	65.2	22.76

Table 1 shows that the proportion of student teachers in the High, Average and Low Coping Strategies groups are 12.21% , 65.2% and 22.67% respectively. The result indicates that majority of the student teachers employ average level of Coping Strategies to cope with the Stress before the practice teaching period.



**Figure 1**  
**Comparison of the Levels of Coping Strategies of Student Teachers**

The data shows that around one in eight students have got high level of coping strategies where as one in four student teachers have got low level of coping strategies. This means that one in four student teachers possess less coping strategies to deal with stressful situations effectively. This fact is to be considered seriously in planning and implementing the teacher education curriculum as the student teachers have to be empowered with sufficient training in dealing with stress in profession as well s in life.

**Table 2**  
**Data and Results of Test of Significant Difference in the Mean Scores of Coping Strategy of Student Teachers on the Basis of Gender, Region, Type of management and Educational qualifications**

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio
Gender	Male	123	170.67	35.02	1.90
	Female	672	177.20	34.68	
Region	South Kerala	449	178.12	35.23	1.75
	North Kerala	346	173.75	34.07	
Educational Qualification	Basic Qualification	309	174.71	36.83	0.93
	Higher Qualification	486	177.08	33.46	

\*not Significant at 0.05 level

The critical ratio obtained for coping strategies on the basis of gender is 1.90 which is less than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. That means male and female student teachers do not differ significantly in their levels of Coping Strategies. Hence boys and girls employ almost the same level of coping strategies to deal with their stress during the pre teaching practice period.

The critical ratio obtained for the level of Coping Strategies on the basis of the regions of Kerala is 1.75 which is less than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. That means, there exists no significant difference between student teachers of south and north Kerala in their coping strategies. Hence, region is not a significant factor in the employment of coping strategies by student teachers dealing with their stress before the teaching practice period.

The critical ratio obtained for the level of Coping Strategies based on educational qualifications is 0.93 which also is less than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. That means the student

teachers with basic and higher qualifications do not significantly differ in their level of Coping Strategies in dealing with their stress before the teaching practice period.

**Table 3**  
**Data and Results of Test of Significant Difference between the Mean Scores of Coping Strategies of Student Teachers on the basis of Type of Management of the Institution**

Variables	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Coping Strategies	Between Groups	29670.33	3	9890.11	8.41*
	Within Groups	929224.66	791	1176.23	
	Total	958894.99	794	-	

The 'F' value obtained for Coping Strategies is 8.41 which is greater than the table value 4.63 at 0.01 level of significance. That means there exists significant difference in the Coping Strategies of student teachers based on the type of management of the institution.

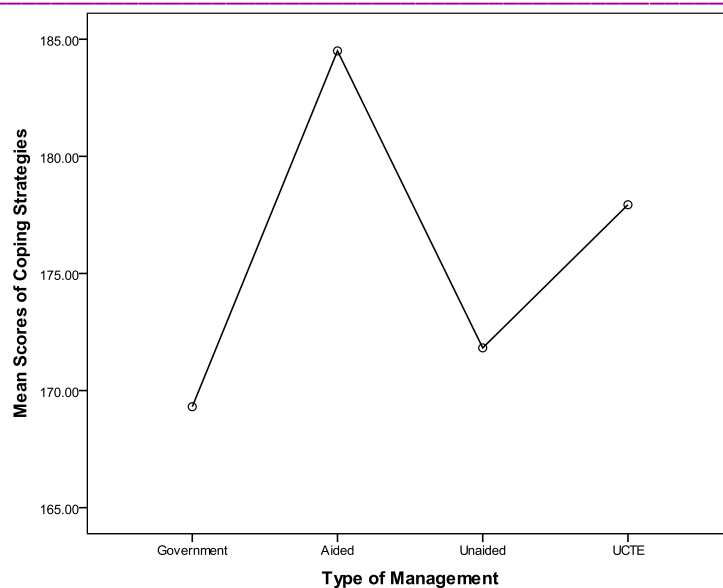
**Table 4**  
**Data and Result of Sheff Post Hoc Test for Coping Strategies of Student Teachers of Different Type of Institutions**

Type of Management	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Government	213	169.31	
Unaided	168	171.82	
UCTE	184	177.94	177.94
Aided	229		184.5

Mean scores of Coping Strategies of the student teachers studying in different types of teacher education institutions are given in the Table 4. The mean score for Coping Strategies of Aided college student teachers is 184.5, which is higher than that of the student teachers of Government colleges (169.31), Unaided colleges (177.82) and UCTEs (177.93).

Hence it is inferred that student teachers of aided colleges have better Coping Strategies compared to that of student teachers of government colleges, unaided colleges and UCTEs. Also student teachers of UCTEs have better Coping Strategies compared to that of student teachers of government colleges and unaided colleges.

Graphical representation of the mean scores of Coping Strategies of student teachers studying in different types of teacher education institutions are given below in the form of mean plot.



**Figure 2**  
**Mean Plot of Coping Strategies of Student Teachers with respect to**  
**Type of Management of the Institution**

## CONCLUSION

Post Hoc analysis of the data related to the type of management of the institution reveals that student teachers of aided colleges have better coping strategies when compared to the same of student teachers of government colleges, unaided colleges and university colleges of teacher education (UCTEs). This indicates that aided colleges of teacher education help student teachers to cope with stress more effectively than Government colleges of teacher education, unaided colleges of teacher education and university colleges of teacher education (UCTEs).

Student teachers of government colleges have poorer coping strategies when compared to student teacher of aided, unaided colleges and university colleges of teacher education (UCTEs). Student teachers of government colleges are admitted to the course purely on the basis of their merit in their qualifying examinations. The only other criterion followed in the admission procedure is the allotment of stipulated number of seats to the students in the reservation category. Since the student teachers are admitted to the course on the basis of the merit; they are supposed to possess better coping strategies to deal with stress. But in reality it was not found to be so. That means, academic merit alone will not enable a person in coping with stress related to the teaching practice. Hence the management of the college, interaction between the student teachers and supervising teachers, academic atmosphere prevailing in the institution etc are important factors in making a student teacher capable of dealing with stress.

## EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

1. Stress that originates out of the academic, personal and social aspects of the student teachers are usually little addressed by the teacher education curriculum, teacher educators and the teacher education institutions. Hence teacher educators as well as the teacher education institutions should take care of the academic as well as personal and social aspects of the student teachers more to help them deal with the stressors positively with confidence.
2. This study reveals that almost one fourth of the student teachers, that is, one among four student teachers are poor in their Coping Strategies for managing Stress. This is an important finding which needs attention. Because, lack of stress coping affects not only that person but a number of students



he/she is teaching. Hence, as a part of the teacher education curriculum, student teachers must be made aware of sound Coping Strategies, given training to develop them and practice them in their life to manage their Stress and help manage the Stress of students they are going to teach.

3. Stress management programmes like meditation, yoga, art of living etc. should be made a part of the curriculum and these intervention programmes should be given to student teachers before the teaching practice to help them deal with the Stress.
4. As one of the major causes for stress in the preparatory stage of teaching practice is time constraint teacher educators and institutional heads should try to arrange the teaching practice in such a way that student teachers get enough time for the preparation
5. Another major cause for stress for student teachers is the overload of work in the preparatory stage. Teacher educators should see that student teachers are not overloaded with work for a short duration. Rather the works are spread over a length of time.
6. The best way to deal with Stress is to have an action plan on the work to be done. All student teachers may not have such a Coping Strategy. Teacher educators can help them to chalk out a time bound action plan for the preparation for teaching practice.

### REFERENCES

1. Hobfoll, S. E., Freedy, J. R., Green, B. L., & Solomon, S. D. (1996). Coping in reaction to extreme stress: The roles of resource loss and resource availability. In M. Zeidner & N. S. Endler (Eds.), *Handbook of coping: Theory, research, applications* (pp. 322-349). Oxford, England: John Wiley & Sons.
2. Garret, Henry. (2005). *Statistics in Psychology and Education*. New Delhi: Paragon International Publishers
3. Lazarus, R. S. (1966). *Psychological stress and the coping process*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
4. Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
5. Folkman, S. & Moskowitz, J.T. (2004). Coping: Pitfalls and promise. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, 745-774
6. Matthews, D.B. (1988, July). *A study of the effects of a stress management programme on affective and cognitive measures of middle school children*. Orangeburg, SC: South Carolina State College, 1-74. (as cited in Credit and Garcia, 1999).
7. Thoits, P. A. (1986). Social Support as Coping Assistance. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 54(4), 416-423.



**Dr. Suresh K. J.**

**Associate Professor, N.S.S. Training College, Changanacherry, Kerala.**