

## Effect of Positive and Negative Religious Coping Styles on Perceived Stress of Teachers

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### Abstract



*The current study primarily aimed at investigating religious coping styles' effect on teachers' perceived stress. This article also enlightened the difference in scores of male and female educators in the use of positive religious coping styles. Correlational design was employed and data of (N=350) was taken through convenience sampling comprising both males (n=168) and females (n=182) around the Malakand division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. Collected data was then analyzed via statistical tools; Linear regression, correlation, and t-test, through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Firstly, Regression analysis revealed that religious coping led to reduced perceived stress in teachers. Pearson correlational analysis showed a positive significant association between negative religious coping and perceived stress among educators while positive religious coping has a negative relationship with perceived stress among them. The comparative analysis demonstrated that female educators scored higher on positive religious coping than male educators. Further data comparison disclosed that males showed higher negative religious coping than females. These findings proved to be helpful for teachers, policymakers, researchers, and mental health professionals better understand and cater to educators' religious coping styles and initiate a series of multiple workshops and projects focusing on their mental health in the Muslim world.*

**Keywords:** Religious Coping Styles, Negative and Positive Religious Coping, Teachers, Educators, Perceived Stress.

### Introduction

People usually face a lot of situations in which they may perceive stress and it can be from any domain of life for instance personal, social, or professional life. Teachers have the same case when it comes to life challenges and stressors. Teaching is one of the most demanding occupation and educators feel distressed due to the demands of the institution and their life responsibilities. Time strain, less control over extra workload, lack of support from institutions and homes, increased sense of competition and reduced ways towards career development, relentless performance evaluations, and recurrent struggles with pupils are found to be some of the job characteristics that led educators to stress (Smith & McCullough, 2003). Educators appear to a variety of stressors that can directly or circuitously impact their regular functioning. In addition, teachers have their issues, accountabilities, challenging work, difficult relationships, disagreements, and mental health issues. If such stressors remain chronically unmanaged, then it may lead to multiple psychological problems and issues. Moreover, teachers must cope with the challenges in their teaching life as well to perform better, by doing so their tuning towards life can be compromised and they start to perceive more stress in routine. Well, there are numerous ways to cope with the stress, and one strategy to handle perceived stress is religious coping.

Educators do perceive stress but it's mandatory to know their handling in this regard, especially in the Muslim community. In a Muslim environment, coping depends on the religious belief systems, spiritual values, meaning of life experiences, observational learning based on religious practices and, connectedness to the Almighty (Seybold & Hill, 2001). According to religious research, Wong and Wong (2006) discovered that many individuals strive to solve various difficulties in life by becoming closer to the Supreme Regulatory of Life, which is the God almighty who properly creates, makes, and controls the universe. A person has a new hope and believes that the situation will be solved by a self-approach to God Almighty. People handle the stress in multiple ways, one of which is

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religious coping (Sood et al., 2006). Religious coping is a term used to explain how a person might turn to a higher power to help them cope with hardships. It also includes the use of religious beliefs or rituals to cope with adversity in life (Pargament, 2005). According to researchers, performing Salah, reciting religious literature, worshipping, taking therapy from clergy and members of the church, spiritual healing, and meditation are all examples of religious coping, (Soothill et al., 2002). Most recent research views religious coping as having two separate dimensions—positive and negative (Pargament et al., 2013).

Positive religious coping mechanisms, comprised of productive and self-reflective ways to religion for help, seem to be helpful for individuals suffering from stressful life events (Dew et al., 2008). Positive religious coping involves tactics such as looking for the religious aid and creating compassionate religious re-evaluations (Hebert, et al., 2009). Positive religious coping strategies involve the Creator's blessings and love, re-evaluation of challenging events as prospects for wisdom, experience, and growth, during difficult times of hardship to search for strength and alleviation. Positive religious coping mechanisms are characterized by a secure relationship with Creator during distress and a belief that life has a bigger plan. Well, it has been found in a few studies that positive religious coping can work as a hurdle in growth whilst negative religious coping can direct the person toward positive transformation. In most cases, when individuals engaged in negative religious coping, appeared to become darker in perspective and face various psychological issues like alcoholism (McElroy-Heltzel et al., 2018).

Negative religious coping, which includes methods such as religious discontentment and retaliatory religious ideation, demonstrates an unsecured connection to God (Hebert et al., 2009). Negative religious coping, also known as religious or spiritual conflicts in recent literature, depicts conflict inside oneself, with God, and with others. Unfavourable religious coping in reaction to stress may cause an individual to reject God's love, interpret negative life occurrences as retribution, and feel rejection by God and the faith society. Negative religious coping strategies indicate a depressing side of life and a religious stagnation towards the search for and preserving meaning and a source of increased stress in educator's life (Pirutinsky et al., 2011).

Increase in perceived stress leads to imbalance meaning of life among teachers and it is described as a state of mind in which an individual sees an incoherence between the strains placed on them and the possessions available to meet those demands (Rautenbach, 2019). Perceived stress incorporates feelings of one's unpredictable life events and has no control over the coping. It was studied that people often deal with infuriating hassles, and perceived incapability in one's confidence to handle such problems or complications (Sawatzky, Ratner & Chiu, 2005). Literature showed that teachers perceive distress in routine and this feeling does not measure the rates of stressful events but based on their experience of it, stressful happenings always challenge the ability of the person in terms of its management successfully. Individuals often take such distress as terrible life events and may assess the effect or intensity of these events differently depending on their traits, resources available for coping, and social support. Hence, it indicates that perceived stress is the interface between a person and his/her environment (Doss, 2016). Previously done research showed that perceived stress is based on educator's vision and judgement of life as unpredictable, threatening and overflowing of pressure that has an adverse effect of their overall wellbeing and they become overwhelmed in such scenarios (Biggs et al, 2017).

According to studies, educators have extremely high levels of stress (Rautenbach, 2019) concluded that educators' stress levels are higher than those of most other occupational groups. Prior research has also linked increased stress perceptions to undesirable inferences like negative self-image, unhealthy behaviors, nervousness, and sadness (Hudd et al., 2000). Noteworthy reports of perceived stress reported to be linked with negative consequences like low performance, job leaves or shifts, enhanced chances of suicidal attempts, and major psychiatric problems, and (particularly female educators) carry a large portion of the family tasks (Collins & Parry-Jones, 2000). O. Harrison (2001) points out that each person's definition of religion is unique, and a wholistic conceptualization may be insufficient. Religion is frequently taken as religious actions in the literature, and it is characterized as both official, formal belief system and cluster of values as well as casual activities and behavioral religious engagement such as Salah, attending spiritual gatherings, and religious contemplation (Szaflarski et al., 2012).

Avants et al., (2001) mentioned that sacred devotion has an imperative role in the preclusion of mental and physical problems, as well as in the capability of teachers to cope well with psychological and somatic sickness, based on a meta-analysis of past data. Literature earlier explained that the perception of increased stress levels is linked with undesirable life outcomes in teachers (Stein, 2016). A higher number of reports depicted the strong bond between perceived stress and negative ways of religious handling (Pierceall & Keim et al., 2007). While people using positive religious strategies for stress coping are regarded to be more prepared for the adjustment in traumatic, stressful life situations. Such people also appear to possess a high degree of resilience when it comes to mood disorders and anxiousness (Min et al., 2013).

People having negative religious coping strategies, contrarily, appeared to be in despair. A negative association occurred among participants in spiritual wellbeing and perceived stress (Kucharska, 2020). Hence, positive religious coping is associated directly with a higher quality of life and lesser perceived stress, whereas negative religious coping has linked with lower quality of life and more stress (Gardner & Krägeloh et al., 2014). Furthermore, it has been seen that individuals could easily get benefit from establishing a profound faith in Almighty Creator via praying, understanding holy books, and attending inspiring events, as religious practices have been linked to reduced anxiety, tension, and increased hope (Koenig & health, 2020).

Spiritual beliefs, according to previous research, are protective factors for many people in stressful situations because they are linked to improved coping skills and psychological well-being. People who are involved in their religious communities and place a high value on their faith may be less likely to suffer from depression. Even if they do experience depression, religious people recover more quickly than non-religious persons. As a result, religious involvement plays a significant role in helping individuals in coping with the impacts of life's challenges (Agbaria & El-Garbia, 2014). As part of their daily life, teaching professionals encounter extremely demanding requirements and extremely upsetting working conditions (Schaufeli & Martinez et al., 2002). Likewise, some researchers believe that stress is one of the primary reasons for teachers leaving the field, which is considered a high-risk job (Salanova & Llorens et al., 2003). Sharma et al., (2008) investigated at the amount of occupational stress and its associated factors and found that the school's location, teaching experience, workload, and job performance all played a role in workplace stress.

### **Rationale of the study**

Numerous studies have been conducted on samples of different cultures and backgrounds. However, this study is conducted on Muslim educators of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (*KP*) Pakistan whose culture, language, and other ethnic backgrounds are different from that of other provinces of Pakistan. The aim of this study is to understand the relationship between positive religious coping styles, negative religious coping styles, and perceived stress among teachers and how educators can manage their stress by enhancing positive religious coping and reducing negative religious coping styles. This study would help in filling the gap of literature about this area of Pakistan and practically it would aid mental health practitioners in better understanding and providing religious coping techniques to educators, as well as initiating a series of workshops and projects focusing on educators' mental health in the Muslim world.

This article would provide further support in spreading awareness about the importance of religious coping and the distinction between positive and negative religious coping when catering to perceived stress. This study would generate a new thought in mental health practitioners during the process of assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of individuals. During initial interviews or assessments, religious/spiritual history is important to undertake because in Muslim communities' the major amount people go to faith healers for their stress management and treatment of mental disorders, through this study researcher is trying to meld the intake process by giving an insight on the impact of religious coping styles in reduction of perceived stress. It will be important for practitioners to listen carefully to themes of religious struggle when working with their patients/clients.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of the study are.

- To study the effect of religious coping on the perceived stress of teachers.
- To examine the relationship between perceived stress and positive/negative religious coping styles.

- To determine gender differentiation with regard to the use of religious coping styles in teachers.

### Hypotheses

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses have been formulated

1. Teachers' use of religious coping leads to less perceived stress.
2. Positive religious coping will have a negative correlation with perceived stress and negative religious coping among teachers.
3. Negative religious coping will have a positive correlation with the perceived stress of teachers.
4. Female teachers score higher in positive religious coping than male teachers.

### Methodology

#### Research Design & Sample

Correlational research design and convenience sampling technique was used in the current study. Through in person as well as online means, data was collected from the targeted population ( $N=350$ ) from 24 to 50 years of age including both males ( $n=168$ ) and females ( $n=182$ ). This study only comprised teachers of both public and private sectors of KP (Peshawar, Swat, Dir, Malakand, and surrounding areas) as participants.

#### Measures

**The Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE)** Pargament et. al., (1998) introduced this scale, it is a tool based on 14 items (seven positive religious copings (PRC) and seven negative religious copings (NRC)). The brief version has 4-point Likert type scoring which ranged from 0 (not at all) to 3 (a great deal) with the alpha for the PRC scale  $\alpha = .92$  and the alpha reported for the NRC scale  $\alpha = .81$ . And was used to assess the role religion has and how it contributes towards dealing efficiently with stressful situations.

**The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)** Cohen et al. (1983) introduced the scale, and it has 10 items. PSS is a five Likert scale, and it entertains the reverse scoring system for the positively stated items (4,5,7 & 8) (like 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0) and then the summation of all scale scores. The reliability alpha of the PSS is  $\alpha = .66$ . This scale was used in this research work to assess the stress level of teachers.

#### Procedure

Permission was obtained from Dir, Malakand, Peshawar and Swat, and surrounding institutions prior to undertaking the research. Participants informed consent was obtained, and the study's goal was given to those who agreed to participate. The goal was to see the effect of positive/negative religious coping styles on the perceived stress of teachers. Instructions were given to them that there will be no harm to the participants, and there is no right or wrong answers, the questionnaire included a demographic form, and at the end, participants gave it their full attention, and no one felt uncomfortable while filling it out.

#### Ethical consideration

The participants were provided with a consent form explaining the purpose of this research. Participants were ensured regarding the maintenance of confidentiality. After taking permission from the author and fulfilling all the ethical requirements of APA guidelines following tools were followed. No deception or psychological discomfort was given to participants.

#### Results

In the current study, collected data has been analysed via statistical tools; Linear regression, correlation, and t-test, through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, 23<sup>rd</sup> version.

**Table 1** Frequency and percentage of study participants ( $N=350$ )

Demographic variable	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	168	48.0
Female	182	52.0
Employment		
Public	158	45.1
Private	192	54.9

Table 1 indicated the percentage and frequency of teachers regarding gender, and employment in the public/private sector. Female teachers ( $f=182$ , 52%) were greater in number as

compared to male teachers ( $f=168$ , 48%). Private sector educators ( $f=192$ , 54.9%) were greater in number as compared to public sector educators ( $f=158$ , 45.1%).

**Table 2** Reliability analysis and Pearson correlation among study variables ( $N=350$ )

Variables	Scale Items	$\alpha$	1	2	3
1. Perceived stress	10	.66	--	-.149**	.139**
2. Positive Religious Coping	07	.92		--	-.207**
3. Negative Religious Coping	07	.81			--

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation among study variables. Results stated that perceived stress has a significant negative correlation with positive religious coping  $r(349) = -.149$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Perceived stress has a significant positive correlation with negative religious coping  $r(349) = .139$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . And positive religious coping has a significant negative correlation with negative religious coping  $r(349) = -.207$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 3** Linear regression is showing the impact of Religious Coping on the Perceived Stress of teachers ( $N=350$ )

Variable	$B$	$SE$	$\beta$	Perceived stress 95% CI	
				LL	UL
(Constant)	20.052***	1.103		17.90	22.19
Religious Coping	0.101*	.049	.110	.01	.19
$R^2$			.012		

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 indicated a linear form of regression analysis on religious coping and perceived stress among teachers. The  $R^2$  value of the predictor revealed that 1.2% variance is present in the outcome with  $F(1,348) = 4.40$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Similarly, the findings revealed that religious coping has a significant positive impact on the perceived stress of teachers ( $\beta = .110$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 4** Mean, standard deviation, and  $t$ -values for male and female educators on religious coping and perceived stress ( $N=350$ )

Variables	Male ( $n=168$ )		Females ( $n=182$ )		$t(349)$	$p$	95% CI		Cohen's d
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$			LL	UL	
Perceived Stress	22.24	5.05	22.41	4.92	-.31	.754	-1.22	.88	--
Positive Religious Coping	18.27	3.32	19.19	3.18	-2.61	.009	-1.06	-1.22	0.27
Negative Religious Coping	7.60	4.99	6.56	3.68	2.22	.027	.12	1.95	0.23

Table 4 shows the mean standard deviation and  $t$ -values for men and women on perceived stress, positive religious coping, and negative religious coping. Results indicate significant mean differences on positive religious coping with  $t(349) = -2.61$ ,  $p < .01$ . Results indicate significant mean differences on negative religious coping with  $t(349) = 2.22$ ,  $p < .05$ . statistical analysis indicated non-significant mean differences in perceived stress with  $t(349) = -.31$ ,  $p > .05$ . Thus, findings show that males ( $M = 18.27$ ,  $SD = 3.32$ ) scored lower on positive religious coping as compared to females ( $M = 19.19$ ,  $SD = 3.18$ ), and males ( $M = 7.60$ ,  $SD = 4.99$ ) scored higher on negative religious coping as compared to female teachers ( $M = 6.56$ ,  $SD = 3.68$ ).

## Discussion

The present research attempted to study the impact of positive and negative religious coping strategies on the perceived stress of teachers including the role of gender. The first hypothesis stated that educators' use of religious coping led to less perceived stress which is consistent with this study's results. This first hypothesis of the study is supported by previous studies. Religion in past years has become the center of attention in research because of its role in safeguarding peoples' mental health (Rogers Sirin, Yanar, Yüksekbaş, Senturk, & Sirin, 2017). Haynes (2018) intended to explain in one of the studies that there is a connection between religion and health, it was then suggested that psychological, behavioral, and social factors of religion can direct a person towards positive mental and somatic wellbeing. Abdel-Khalek, (2011) recently worked on exploring the role of religion in reducing perceived stress. It has been seen applicable that adaptation of religious coping ways may act as a preventive tool towards the reduction of perceived stress in Muslimah. Lee, (2014) further explained the negative association between spiritual wellbeing and a person's perception of stress.

Additionally, positive religious coping styles have a direct positive correlation with the quality of life and negative religious coping styles can enhance stress (Gardner et al., 2014). Abu-Raiya and colleagues (2019) observed that positive religious coping has been related to a minimal level of distress. Participants using positive religious coping techniques usually have less stress and higher self-esteem (Nooney, 2005).

The second hypothesis stated that positive religious coping will have a negative correlation with perceived stress among teachers. This hypothesis is supported by the results of the current study. Outcomes also indicated that positive religious coping has a negative correlation with the perceived stress of educators which is also supported by various evidence (Aydin, Fischer, & Frey, 2010). Statistical inference of a research study indicated a significant negative correlation between positive religious coping and perceived stress (Ai, Huang, Bjorck, & Appel, 2013). These study results are also supported by another study which indicated that positive religious coping has a negative and significant association with the perceived stress of educators. Furthermore, other study findings disclosed that being positively religious is linked to peace, which in turn is significantly associated with a reduced sense of stress (Fernandez, & Loukas, 2014). When people engage in positive religious coping strategies, they might start to feel stronger in their affiliation and love towards God. This can inspire them to believe in the positivity about distressing situations and support them cope with the negative effects of depressive symptoms (Abu-Raiya et al., 2019). If positive religious coping reduces the linkage between perceived stress and depressive symptoms then participants claimed that they felt safe from the suffering of chronic low mood and associated symptoms when faced with stressful situations when they used positive religious coping (Fernandez et al., 2014).

The result of this study shows that negative religious coping has a significant positive association with the perceived stress of teachers. A study indicated that in response to stressful and traumatic events in life people usually tend towards negative religious coping as compared to positive ones. Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) work highlighted that people use negative religious coping when they have problems in psychological adjustment toward distress and experience a series of mood disorders and anxiety symptoms. More studies in this domain showed that people do question the Creator's love and affection towards them whenever they encounter negative situations in life and use a negative religious style of coping and doubt whether they have been neglected by Him or not. It was stated that stress and negative situations often boost negative styles of religious coping, here person may re-evaluate his/her view of God (Pargament, Mahoney, & Shafranske, 2013).

A meta-analytical study endorsed the third hypothesis and reported that negative religious coping strategies have a direct association with stressful events and produce maladjustment to the environment psychologically. Moreover, individuals with depressing thoughts, generalized anxiety, and high-stress sensitivity are frequently found using negative forms of religious coping. One viable justification for such findings is that negative religious coping signifies an inconvenience in peoples' ongoing stressful situations. These results are consistent with an earlier longitudinal study on the harmful impact of negative religious coping. For instance, the aforementioned study on religious coping revealed via hierarchical regression analysis that negative religious coping has an association with global distress of individuals, especially in their follow up session reports (Baral, Ishwari, 2019).

In another longitudinal analysis of religious coping for the general population, rehabilitated patients, the negative style of religious coping was more used than the positive one (García-Alandete, Joaquín, & Gloria, 2013). Altogether it was evident from the literature that the findings of the current article are in accordance with the previously done analysis and negative religious coping directs to more perceived stress (Hebert et al., 2009). Negative coping especially in a religious context is more strongly connected with worry, despair, and poor psychological adjustment than positive religious coping (Thomas, Justin, & Mariapaola, 2020). It has been witnessed that experiencing religious struggle, often forms negative reconsiderations of the Almighty like He is punishing and abandoning them especially when they are experiencing struggle and obstacles in life and perceive more stress (Fatima, Shameem, Suera, & Iffat, 2018).

Finally, the inferences indicated that positive religious coping is more used by female educators than male educators. Which is also supported by various studies. Consequently, women scored higher in positive religious coping, although there was no substantial difference was observed between men and women in negative religious coping. A previous study wrote that females usually engage in religious activities more than male fellows (Moreira, Lotufo, & Koenig, 2006).

Park and Crystal (2013) studied that men's religiosity was attached to the way they identify themselves religiously even though it's different for women. It was suggested that females can relate spiritual and religious components of life with internal factors than specified actions associated with religion. Ladies and gentlemen also appear to have separate illustrations of God. The result finding is in accordance with that of prior studies (Taheri, Zahra, Hadi, Ali, & Azadeh, et. al., 2016.). Few articles report no gender differences in ideation of God, however, others narrated females' possession of a positive God image, highlighting a subjection perception of a loving God, and males hold a dominating and controlling idea and focus on the Almighty's power and conviction. Women used religion and spirituality more to cope with stress than men (Heidari, Fatemeh, Saeid, Mortaza, & Mahlegha, et. al., 2016).

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Teacher trainers/training programs, collaborating mentor teachers, and school administrators all can get benefit from the findings of this study. The findings would be useful to the present educators who are thinking about changing daily coping strategies to burn-out conditions and overwhelming working hours.

Through this study, educators of Malakand Division and allied areas particularly can assist upcoming educators in understanding the importance of religious coping. For example, the outcomes of the study will help teachers improve their positive religious coping style, which will lead to dwindled perceived stress in other life domains.

Future researchers can use the Urdu version of both scales to approach other populations as per their will. Experimental designs or longitudinal studies can be taken under consideration on this topic. Current findings can promisingly benefit Mental Health professionals to better understand the coping styles of educators and to provide pieces of training/workshops focusing on educators' positive religious coping styles in the Muslim world.

### **Limitations**

Some of the limitations are as follows.

- This study involved participants from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), so future researchers can take data from the other provinces as well.
- Comparative studies in various contexts might be carried out to improve external validity.
- Lastly, the current study's design was correlational. As a result, no causal inferences were made from the data in this study.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the overall findings of the research, it is assumed that positive religious coping leads to reduced perceived stress in educators, and it has a negative correlation with perceived stress and negative religious coping among educators.

Also, positive religious coping is more used by female teachers than males and females were more prone to participate in religious behaviours than men.

These findings would be helpful in the future for mental health professionals, educators, stress management trainers, educational psychologists, and students of psychology.

### **Conflict of Interest:**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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